

Improving the Quality of New Hires in the Game Industry by Expanding the Pipeline

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ABSTRACT

The demographics of video game consumers are clearly changing. Once created by and for primarily white males, all forms of digital games are now finding increasing consumption by females, minorities, and other historically underrepresented groups. Interestingly, this comes at a time when the game industry is noticing major changes in development and production, with the indie game market growing and an increasing awareness of opportunities to design and develop games that appeal to a broader market share. The focus of this panel is to consider this changing market trend, how it affects industry, and thus how it should be impacting the pipeline from academia. The speakers for this panel include a cross-section of academics and industry representatives. All six bring expertise and understanding to this topic from their various perspectives, with the focus on how and why to increase and retain the number of incoming students to university to increase the quality of recruits and hires for industry.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

• Social and professional topics~Project staffing • Social and professional topics~Computing education programs • Social and professional topics~Employment issues • Social and professional topics~Economic impact • Social and professional topics~User characteristics

General Terms

Design, Economics, Human Factors.

Keywords

Game industry, pipeline, demographics, consumers, broadening market share.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recognition of diverse demographics of consumers of video games is clearly increasing. Formerly created mostly by and for straight white males, all forms of digital games have found significant consumption by females, minorities, and other historically underrepresented groups. Interestingly, this comes at a time when the game industry is noticing major changes in development and production, with the indie game market growing and an increasing awareness of opportunities to design and develop games that appeal to a broader market share [3][7].

Current game industry trends show a level of frustration in being able to reach these new players as well as players that still have not entered the folds of digital game consumerism. There is a growing

awareness in the industry that in order to bring this potential broader market share to fruition, games need to be designed and developed with a broader consumer group in mind [1][2][6][7].

Opening the game industry to a broader set of employees is one proposed solution that hiring managers are actively pursuing. However, recent research indicates that the newest pipeline for the game industry, game degree programs at universities and colleges, is nearly as narrow as the industry was in 2005 [4][5]. Based on hot topics in the industry, one potential problem that contributes to this narrow pipeline is the culture within and around the game industry. Professional game venues like the 2013 E3 and PAX conferences as well as multiple forums, blogs, and industry webzines exposes a culture that is ripe with prejudices that may keep this pipeline narrow [6][7].

Many in the industry as well as in academia recognize the economic impact this culture may be having on the types of games being produced and consumed [2][6][7]. Creating a strong pipeline from academia to meet the increasing need for qualified employees will not only benefit the game industry, but also benefit academic institutions who want to ensure their programs are filling this important industry need. The first step to any such changes begins with dialogue and informing the community about the current void, the barriers that hinder change, and steps for making positive changes.

2. FOCUS OF THE PANEL

Hiring and retaining a broad range of game industry employees can be challenging, particularly as the number of game consumers increases and their demographics broaden. The purpose of this panel will be to present issues that affect the ability for recruiters and game developers to hire qualified employees and steps that can be taken to improve recruiting methods at universities and colleges. The focus will be on why and how to meet the needs of the game industry designing and developing for a changing market. Additionally, we will actively seek researchers to evaluate their own programs, propose changes that their program actively makes, then reevaluate the program to determine the effects of these changes on their student population. The speakers for this panel include a cross-section of academics and industry representatives.

3. CONFIRMED SPEAKERS

Four speakers are confirmed for this panel. One is the game branch of Microsoft. Two speakers are from academia, while one is an independent developer, game consultant, and author who also teaches at the post-secondary level. All four bring expertise and understanding to this topic from their various perspectives,

including producing games for entertainment and serious games. Speakers are presented in alphabetical order below.

3.1 Adrienne Decker, RIT

Adrienne Decker, PhD is an assistant professor at Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Interactive Games and Media and a member of the RIT Laboratory for Media, Arts, Games, Interaction and Creativity (MAGIC). Her research interests involve using games and other motivating examples for teaching computing concepts as well as development of better tools and methodologies for teaching computing. She is also interested in efforts to broaden participation in computing, gaming, and other related disciplines. She is focused on development and assessment of interventions in the educational process, including the development and assessment of educational and learning games..

3.2 Monica M. McGill, Bradley University.

Monica McGill is an Assistant Professor at Bradley University in the Department of Interactive Media, where she serves as the Game Design Lead. She holds degrees in computer science and mathematics, and an Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and has previously worked in industry and for the Department of Defense. Her research area includes serious games, particularly games for health and motivational design. Additional research areas include diversity in the game industry, skills required by the game industry, and educational research in computer science. She facilitates the design and development of games by integrated teams of undergraduate students and is the producer for two upcoming serious games, a social, mobile game for Type II Diabetic patients and an environmental game for wastewater treatment.

3.3 Ian Schreiber, Independent.

Ian Schreiber has taught game design and development courses at a variety of community colleges and four-year institutions, both online and in the classroom. He has co-authored a book on game design and another on career advice, and has created two free online courses on game design. He has been active in the game industry since the year 2000, first as a programmer and then as a game designer, and has worked on six published entertainment games and two serious game projects. He holds an M.F.A. in interaction design and game development. His areas of interest include game balance, serious games, and finding better ways to teach game design.

3.4 Olga Zinoveva, Microsoft.

Olga is a producer at 343 Industries, a studio that develops the award-winning Halo franchise, where she has worked with a large variety of teams for the last six months. Olga studied computer science at Harvard University, and joined Microsoft Studios in

2012. Prior to joining the 343i team, Olga was a part of the Microsoft Studios University rotation program, which places recent college graduates on various game teams within the company during the first year of their game careers. As someone who was recently directly involved in the game development recruitment pipeline, she can offer perspective on the issues of recruitment from the perspective of a recent college student.

4. CONCLUSION

The panelists are able to provide valuable insight and promote discussion among the attendees regarding current industry practices and the need for effective changes to capture a broader demographic of designers and developers. The panel will encourage academics to consider their recruiting practices and ways in which they can consider creating a broader pipeline.

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