

Company overview

design games
the computer game is dead, long live the computer game

The problem

Before we get on to talking about **designgames** we should spend a few moments talking about the provocative nature of the title of this document.

The fact is that the computer game industry must soon reinvent itself if it is to avoid stagnation. There are only so many times that the same product can be repackaged and resold to the same customer. Undeniably, there are promising signs within certain companies, but the warning signs are there for all to see.

We have already seen an incredible number of very large companies fall on the sword – just look at the torturous histories of two of the industry's most notable outfits, Sega and Atari. And there have been and will be many more.

Success fuels growth which in turn demands further success. Unfortunately, you cannot stand over a team and demand that they create success for you. The ever increasing demands for growth can bring with them an unwelcome feeling of desperation, where companies' both large and small end up looking inwards and ultimately start feeding on themselves. They end up cutting corners and jeopardising the three things that help to make great games as opposed to mediocre ones;

“Good design, depth & quality”

For understandable reasons, companies are sometimes all too eager to start looking backwards instead of forwards and before you know it they have imploded, passing the baton to the next big-money hopeful. If only they had realised what it was that made them successful in the first place; delivering new and enjoyable computer games.

The other thing that ails the industry is its shocking inability to plan a product's completion and launch. There is a degree of truth in the statement 'it's ready when it's ready', but it really only covers up the industry's inadequacies in a vain attempt at making us feel that we are all artists and shouldn't be rushed. All of these problems come back to poor design or arguably worse, design-as-you-go.

The movie industry long ago went through the growing pains that the computer games industry is experiencing now, but with the speed of business today there is an increasing demand for the games industry to play catch-up. The good news is that it is not that difficult, it simply needs a renewed commitment to good design methods, improved quality and customer satisfaction.

The Solution

designgames is a company that has totally embraced the need for a new way to create computer games. Indeed, it is the very existence of this need for change that provided the catalyst for the company's formation. Its founders all share the same design ethics and beliefs.

Wherever you look in the industry, there are examples of either too little design being done, or too much design waffle being regurgitated by people that are more at home with prose and anecdote than they are with computer and concept.

designgames is focused on providing progressive companies with the opportunity for change. By offering, for the first time, a total game design solution, intellectual property owners now have another way to maximise the value of their IP.

design

They have even taken their design philosophy into the choice of name for the new company;

designgames

...it's clean, simple and devoid of ambiguity.

Having worked for and run some of the industry's largest publishers and developers, the founders of **designgames** have seen every side of product design and development, both here and in the US.

This gives them the background and authority to state that very few setups are properly equipped from the design perspective. Because the benefits of good design are largely hidden until the project draws near to completion, it is often the case that when compromise needs to be sought, it is inadvertently made to the design of the product, often proving to be a fatal error.

"Wherever I've been in the industry, I have always seen the need for the support of a company like **designgames**, but of course, until now, such a company hasn't existed" says company founder, Kevin Buckner.

Providing services that cover every aspect of computer game design and pre-development, **designgames** can be utilised as a complete design facility or as a complimentary service to a company's existing design resource. It is often the case that an experienced, independent evaluation of a design by somebody removed from the project's inception is closer to that of the all-important consumer.

When do you last remember a product being fully vetted for consistency and user-friendliness? Probably never, right? Well why not? No time? Can't afford to have the team sidetracked? Can't afford to make the changes that will come from such an exercise? Never thought there was a need to do it?

Whatever the reason, there is help at hand. You are probably investing a lot of money in the product and naturally, you want to protect that investment. Get it right and the product will sell more units, make you more money and create many more satisfied customers who will come back in the future hungry to buy more of your products.

designgames believe that it is design related problems that cause the computer games industry to continue to struggle financially. This perennial struggle is despite the fact that it turns over more money than the movie industry and the music industry. Something has got to be wrong!

"The reason I am so convinced that **designgames** will help to set a new benchmark in the industry is that I have experienced all of those head-in-the-sand problems at first hand, hating myself for putting up with it but being powerless to do anything about it" says Buckner. "Well now I can do something about it with the birth of **designgames**, by providing support to anyone that recognises that their own product or company is deserving of such quality"

The guys at **designgames** have worked with some serious IP from the worlds of board games and films. From Disney animated films to the board games Risk and Monopoly, they have all been given the special treatment in the past. **designgames** have an inherent understanding of the importance of sympathetic treatment of such valuable brands.

games

Creative services

It's time to introduce you to the services offered by **design games**. Practically every aspect of design and pre-production is covered. While we have tried to make the selection process as easy as possible, we also realise that every project is quite unique. Therefore, every job will be tailored precisely to your needs and budget.

1 Design Papers

Of course, the design process involves a lot of documentation of varying types. With **design games** you get documentation according to your wants and needs. Not everyone will want a 200 page extravaganza full of pop-up characters, so we are happy to cater for all wishes from a 3-page game concept up.

The Concept

You might choose this if you have a basic idea or a particular intellectual property that you want to develop into a game but you're not quite sure of the best direction to take it in. **design games** will create one or more concepts based on your outline brief. Each concept document is likely to be between 3 and 5 pages and will capture the essence of an idea. You can then expose the concepts to a wider audience within your organization to help determine the direction that you would like to move forward in.

The Game Design Overview

Having selected a preferred Concept Document, **design games** can work this up in to a Game Design Overview, which will be expanded to include more detail and depth. The overview will start to consider things like game genre, game structure and the scope of the project. A design overview will typically consist of between 10 and 20 pages.

The Full Game Design

The full game design document can go as far as you wish towards an all-singing game design, including every detail and nuance of the game's design. It will be written in multiple stages, with each stage representing a refinement over the previous version. The scope of the game design will be determined in an design planning meeting between **design games** and the commissioning company.

The more detail required, the larger the resultant document and the longer the document creation schedule.

Through experience of doing such documents many, many times in the past, **design games** will never claim to be able to present a 100% complete game design that is not going to change. The nature of the beast dictates that the design will continue to be modified throughout the development cycle. Games are not spread sheets; they require huge amounts of creative input and the team often need to try something and then modify it before it can be classified as 'implemented'.

The design of any one feature can easily be out by 50% or more. In a military action game for instance, the damage inflicted by a certain weapon is likely to be wrong on first implementation. When a humble pistol kills an enemy from a range of two miles you know you are going to have to tweak the stats for that weapon to make it more realistic and more believable. Many people will hold this up as a reason to adopt a design-as-you-go policy. While tweaking and balancing is a natural occurrence that will happen throughout the development of the project, design should be more considered.

Mid-Project Design Consultancy

design games don't design a game and simply hand it off and call that job-done. They offer an ongoing design consultancy and milestone review, ensuring that the design of the game keeps pace with the changes that happen as a consequence of the development process.



It's all about keeping control of the creation. Some times the mechanics of a game end up like a Heath Robinson machine; change one thing and two other things stop working. This is design that is out of control; nobody really has an understanding of what the code is doing.

2Reviews and Appraisals

In addition to the various game design options, **designgames** also offer services to appraise or review designs or projects that already exist.

Game Design Appraisal

If you have a complete or near-complete game design that you are about to put into production, and you want to get another opinion, **designgames** will review the game design, documenting comments and suggestions such that they can be cross-referenced against the original design document. This service is a useful check, to confirm that the design is as tight as it is thought to be.

It's often a case of not being able to see the wood for the trees. A fresh pair of eyes will see potential problems that might otherwise have been missed.

Preparing for Presentation

If you have a design proposal that you are about to present, either internally or to a potential investor or purchaser, **designgames** can help by reviewing all presentation materials and scripts. Aimed primarily at the small developer or independent IP owner, this service will help polish the presentation and improve the chances of success.

The Independent Game Review

This service offered by **designgames** is designed to eliminate all of those annoying little errors or inconsistencies that find themselves appearing in so many games. A recent chart-topping game has so many examples of this that the game rapidly becomes a frustration and a pleasure in equal measure. It would have been so easy to remove these 'spoilers', if only the publisher had an external resource like **designgames** to call on.

Competitive Study

With a brand new concept or a game design that's about to go into production you might be starting to get anxious about the competition. The Competitive Study gives you a cross-reference against all of those titles that your project is deemed to be competing against. It will highlight your product's perceived strengths and weaknesses and it will help you to steer the game towards a more unique status.

Global Suitability Review

The Global Suitability Review provides an appraisal of the design with particular focus on target audience and target markets, and how suitable the design is for release in those markets. Some territories demand that you avoid using red blood, some require you to avoid the use of such emotive symbols as the German swastika and there are countless examples of copyright infringement that need to be avoided; like avoiding the use of a red cross for field hospitals in a military sim; the red cross image has been copyrighted and protected by the Red Cross.

Game Progression & Game Difficulty

Game difficulty and balancing problems have damaged too many titles that would otherwise have gone on to be classics. This phenomenon is arguably bought about by the team themselves as they keep cranking up the difficulty of the game during development to match

games

their ever-improving skills and knowledge of the game. They understandably lose sight of the game from the perspective of someone that has just bought it.

This review will provide you with valuable feedback before the game gets into the crunch phase when all such changes are next to impossible.

3 Other Support Documents

There are other key areas where **designgames** can help your teams maximize the potential of the games they are working on.

Cross-platform Redesign

You might have a very successful product on one platform and want to broaden its revenue making potential by supporting other key platforms.

designgames can provide a Cross-platform Redesign which will outline how the game can be made to look and play at its best on the new platforms. There will also be a technical review that will highlight problems and propose solutions regarding the technical challenge that is presented by each new platform.

Similarly, you might have a game design that hasn't yet dealt with the complexities of each platform that you intend to support with it. This review will highlight all of the technology barriers and provide proposals to get around each of them. It will also suggest ideas for making the game feel unique to each platform.

The Instruction Manual

This is usually a very time consuming task that falls on the shoulders of the development team with assistance from the publisher; all the people that are most busy trying to complete the software. Let **designgames** relieve the pressure and take over the task of compilation. Obviously the team and publisher will need to add the final changes and updates, but 90% of the work can be handled by **designgames**, allowing the team to do what they do best; create and complete the game.

Project Scheduling

Another one of those tasks that seems to require a schedule all of its own. **designgames** will work closely with the team leader and the game's producer to create the master schedule for the upcoming project development cycle. It will often be of benefit to get an external perspective on the viability of the original proposed dates, which in turn will help to avoid signing up to a schedule that simply cannot be met. Most people learn scheduling the hard way. The over-optimistic 'of course we can do it' approach ends up burning people out and increasing the actual duration of the project along with the likelihood of bug generation through stress and pressure.

design

4 Other Support Functions

These additional functions round off the core services offered by **designgames**.

Interface Prototyping & Styling

The design of the front-end and wrapper screens is often demoted down the priority list and rather hurriedly bolted on at the end of the project. By getting the style and functionality of these screens designed and implemented early in the project makes the project feel real, much sooner. This has the effect of giving a morale boost to the team and helps to create a 'look & feel' for the game; something to hook everything else on to.

Character Creation and Story Development

If you have a need for character development and/or story development, **designgames** offer both services. Perhaps they are needed to complete the picture on a new game design. **designgames** are well versed in both disciplines and will provide creative content perfectly aimed at the chosen target audience.

Style Guide

A Style Guide is often an overlooked tool in product development. It is something that everyone involved in the project should have to hand, for reference and inspiration. The guide will include details of colour treatments and art styles, along with background information on each of the main characters and how they relate to the plot.

Game Logo Designs

designgames are very well equipped to create that all important logo for the game. Having taken the brief from the client, the usual policy is to develop a number of ideas which cover many styles and techniques. A process of reduction will then lead to the preferred selection being worked up for use in all situations, such that it works well on screen and in print.

give your IP the  treatment

We put the design in games

designgames are pleased to offer these top quality services to the computer games industry. With decades of combined industry experience and design skills that are second to none, we are convinced that you will come back to **designgames** with all of your future projects.

More information

We will be pleased to provide you with any further information that you may require.

Please call Kevin Buckner on 01438 227 949
or send an email to kevinb@designgames.co.uk
or visit our web site at designgames.co.uk

games