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Lecture 19

Festivals & Promotion

Today's Lecture

- Based on John's experience with *Gathering Sky* and Gabe's experience with *Family Style* and *Smile For Me*

- Primarily covers ***promotion & marketing***
  - How do you get people to learn about your game?
  - How do you get people to download/buy it?

- But also talks about the nature of ***festivals***

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Marketing Essentials

- **Website**
  - Shows off your gameplay (trailer or demo)
  - Gives people a way to contact you
  - Must make it *mobile friendly*

- **Gifs and Screenshots**
  - Want to convey the essence of your game

- **Trailer**
  - Shows off your gameplay and narrative
  - May want to have *professionally* done

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The Press Kit

- All of these items plus a **press release**
  - All of your game information in one place
  - Contains everything a journalist needs for an article

- Make use of **presskit()**
  - Tool for quickly making standardized press kits
  - http://dopresskit.com

- **Example**: Ridiculous Fishing
  - http://vlambeer.com/press/sheet.php?p=Ridiculous_Fishing

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Two Schools of Thought

- **Closed Development**
  - Great for AAA, but not advisable for indie
  - Depend on putting out consecutive high-quality games
  - Build hype through mystery, little leaks of information
  - Requires a dedicated PR staff

- **Open Development**
  - Practiced by many independent developers.
  - Build hype through information, **community involvement**
  - Every engaged community member becomes an evangelist
  - **Example:** *Crowfall* (Bill Dalton's visit in 2019)

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The Press Release

- Treat "everything as news"
  - Upcoming release?
  - Public beta?
  - Entering Early Access?
  - Won an award?

- Key requirements for the release
  - Should be about a page (no more)
  - Should have news content, plus screenshots
  - You are writing their article for them

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Corporate vs Game Press Release

- Many resources online for press releases
  - Everything is in third person
  - Sounds very detatched

- This is not how to write your release
  - You want to get your game "voice" across
  - Not quite ad copy, but close
  - Writing for journalists *and* for players

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Factsheet

Developer:
LimboLane
Based in Ithaca, NY and Burbank, CA

Release date:
Steam - May 31 2019
Itch.io - May 31 2019

Platforms:
Windows
MacOS (10.14 and earlier)

Website:
smileformegame.com

Regular Price:
USD 12.99

Request Press Copy

Description

Smile For Me is an unconventional first-person Point-and-Click Adventure about making people happy! Immerse yourself in a captivating multi-media world, and be the Silent Savior of the Habitat's residents. Nod and Shake your head to chat with new friends - or hunt for clues to cheer them up. As "The Big Event" draws near, you must help the troubled residents of the Habitat and de-mask the mysterious Doctor Habit... before it's too late.

History

Smile For Me began when the two members of LimboLane first met on Tumblr in April of 2018. After seeing Yugo's art for the first time, Gabe reached out to propose a short first-person experiment, inspired by the likes of Bernband. Within a week, a concept had solidified and the two began prototyping mechanics and sketching a menagerie of characters and environments. Yugo's love for multimedia materialized into the game's collage-art and live-action puppetry, while Gabe's desire to create immersive, nontraditional mechanics resulted in the game's nod-and-shake controls. All content was created remotely - with Gabe located in New York, and Yugo in Michigan, later California. Long phone calls were spent dreaming up the crazy, surreal aura that is Smile For Me. The first playable demo was finally crystalized in October of 2018, pumping the two up to see the project through like never before. Progress sailed through the winter, and into the next year, with a beta launching in early March. The game was released on May 31, 2019 on Steam and itch.io, for macOS and Windows.

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http://limbolane.com/presskit/SmileForMe/index.html

2019 on Steam and itch.io, for macOS and Windows.

Press Releases

- Everything can be news (within reason)
  - Want to keep your game from being forgotten

- Keep track of who you have contacted
  - And better yet, who has actually replied to you

- Personalize your emails when you can
  - An exclusive press relationship can go a long way

- Make "cold calls"
  - Always be trying to make new contacts

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Pitching Your Game

- For pitching your game, create a "brandbook"
  - Elevator pitch (1 sentence)
  - Narrative Pitch (1-2 sentences)
  - Gameplay pitch (2-3 sentences)

- Meredith Hall is an excellent resource (https://medium.com/@merryh/how-to-build-a-brand-handbook-brandbook-876f9c8644eb)

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Elevator Pitch

- *One sentence, short and snappy, easy to recall*
  - Quickly communicates the themes and piques interest

- Don't rely on genre ("Story-driven","puzzle game")
  - Won't tell the audience how it feels.

- Audience should understand the demographic and similar games without you saying it.
  - "Ohhhh, so it's sort of like __ but with __."

Narrative Pitch

- *2–3 sentences, expands elevator pitch, emphasizes feelings*
  - Conveys the **experience** of the game

- Not necessarily the story - convey the sequence of emotions of a player who picks up your game

- **Focus on word choice** - use words and phrases that evoke the target emotions

- Example from *Crypt of the Necrodancer*:
  Move to the music and deliver beatdowns to the beat! Groove to the epic Danny Baranowsky soundtrack, or select songs from your own MP3 collection!

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Gameplay Pitch

- *2–3 sentences or bullets, highlights gameplay experience*
  - Say how the user interacts with the world
  - Also how that impacts gameplay

- Again, don't rely on **naming your genre**. You don't want to make your game sound generic
  - AAA studios can get away with this because they have a reputation
  - If an indie says "I'm making a tactical team-based shooter!" won't immediately get the same respect as Blizzard or Riot

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Putting it Together

Elevator Pitch

Narrative Pitch

ABOUT THIS GAME

Baba Is You is an award-winning puzzle game where you can change the rules by which you play. In every level, the rules themselves are present as blocks you can interact with; by manipulating them, you can change how the level works and cause surprising, unexpected interactions! With some simple block-pushing you can turn yourself into a rock, turn patches of grass into dangerously hot obstacles, and even change the goal you need to reach to something entirely different.

Gameplay Pitch

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Videos and Streaming

- Streams have a wide reach; sometimes have more impact than a games journalism website

- Research smaller channels or streamers (not just celebrities) who play indie games that are similar to yours.
  - A small audience is better than no audience, or a huge audience that won't buy your game!

- **Not all games** are right for streaming.

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Social Media

- **Twitter** *was* the **most** important platform for the past few years.
  - Critical to getting discovered
  - Industry is desperately looking for a replacement

- **Tumblr** is useful if you are making something art / narrative / character design focused
  - Audience is much smaller, but higher attention span

- **Instagram** and **Facebook** are inhospitable to game development. It has been done, but *rarely*.

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GIFs

- On social media, important to quickly and effectively get the audience's attention

- The GIF or short video has become the key tool for marketing indie games
  - Allows information to spread + share quickly, and reach a wide audience

- Success of Fez (2012) widely attributed to gif-ibility

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Making a GIF (@wombatstuff)

1. **Introduce your world**, let the audience take it in

2. Introduce a **simple challenge** that the audience knows how to overcome

3. **Subvert expectations** by failing the challenge at first; show the player not using game systems effectively

4. **Complete the challenge** to satisfy the audience

5. Add a **pause** at the end of the gif so the audience knows they have witnessed something complete

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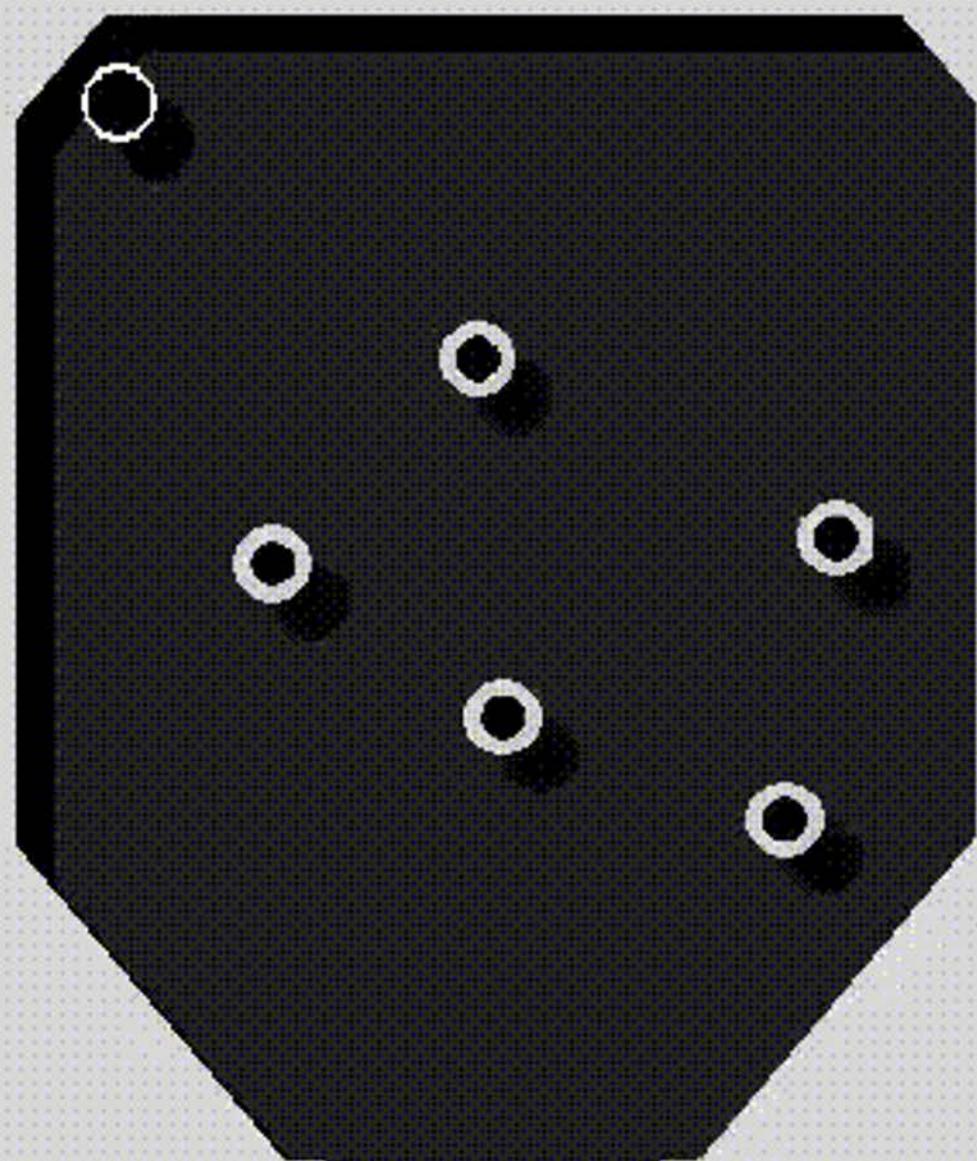
1. Introduce your world

Making a GIF

- You can create a level specifically for your gifs/videos that is more condensed than the levels present in the final game.
  - This isn't "cheating"; it's a great way to show off your game without making a viewer witness a tutorial.
  - Allows you to show off mechanics quickly

- **Most of all:**
  - *Experiment*, and discover what types of posts your audience engages with

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Hiring Someone Else

Unnamed Marketing/PR Company

Marketing - 6 Months Minimum - £4,000

PR - 3 Months Minimum - £3,000

Influencer Marketing - 2 Months Minimum - £3,000

Community Management - 3 Months Minimum - £3,000

Steam Optimisation - One-off Cost - £2,000

Hourly Consulting - £200/hr

Community Management (Hourly) - £200/hr

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Game Festivals

- Excellent way to get initial press
  - Getting past selection marks you as notable
  - Can meet many journalists in person
  - Have a good conversation; send follow-up emails.

- Popular festivals in increasing *selectiveness*
  - Boston Festival of Indie Games (BFIG)
  - CasualConnect (IndiePrize)
  - IndieCade
  - Independent Games Festival (IGF)
  - *There are many lists of other festivals online*

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Event: March 2025
Deadline: Fall TBA

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Event: Typically October
Deadline: April 15 – June 1

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Event: Defunct since 2022
Deadline: N/A

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Event: Fall BACK IN PERSON!
Deadline: ????

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Game Summits and Meet-Ups

- **IGDA** (Independent Game Developers Association)
  - Join them and look for meetings
  - Have long thought about having a student chapter

- **GDC** (Game Developers Conference)
  - Not player facing (like PAX), but other developers
  - An excellent place to make connections

- **Meetup.com**
  - Find active developers in your local area
  - Game development cities have a large indie scene

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Purpose: Networking

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Publishers

Provide **business services** and **funding** in exchange for **revenue share**.

Examples:
- Devolver
- Annapurna
- Kowloon Knights

Very easy to get screwed over, but can definitely be worth it.

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Platform Partnerships

- NVidia
- Sony
- Microsoft

- Apple
- Google

- .. Netflix?

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Venture Capital

Provide **funding** and **networking** in exchange for **company ownership**.

Examples:
- A16Z
- YCombinator
- 1up Ventures
- Tencent (kinda)

Requires you to sell/IPO your studio ~7-10 years in the future.

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Planning for the Long Term

- All-in on one game.

- Multiple games at once (pipelined).

- One for them, one for us.

- Games as a service.

- Wealthy patron (?)

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Case Study: Gathering Sky

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Case Study: The Last Clockwinder

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Useful Tools

- presskit() (http://dopresskit.com)
  - Used to create your initial press kit

- Promoter (http://www.promoterapp.com/)
  - Used to track your press coverage
  - Also great for sending out promo codes

- MailChimp/MadMimi (http://mailchimp.com)
  - For e-mail marketing to press and early players
  - But personalize the important contacts

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