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The Importance of Knowing Your Players in Order to Design Effective Serious Games
– Lessons Learned from Monetization Models of Free to Play Games –

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1. Introduction

Monetization is one of the most important parts of making a free to play game. Of course you want to make the game fun, but unfortunately a developer has bills to pay. This is why you should think about monetization from the start, to build your game on a strong foundation.

In order to do this, you first need to know your user, and what they like. Do they like to explore? Or are they more socially involved?

These are important questions to know the answer to, not just to monetize your game, but also to keep your player coming back to your game and keeping them engaged.

2. Different kind of players

There are many different kind of players, but for this research we will be talking about the 4 different kind of main players from "Bartle taxonomy of player types[2)]". It is important to know which one(s) of the players you will be focusing on, as this will influence your designing sessions a lot

2.1 Hearts

These are the social gamers. They play a game for the human interaction through the internet. Good examples of games for these kind of people are MMO's (Massive Multiplayer Online game) & MOBA's (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena). Both kind of games encourage the player to form party's with other players.

The Best way to market to hearths is through character customization. Think about ingame cosmetics. These show the player's dedication and appreciation for a certain look or character. Another advantage of this is that it normalizes the buying behavior of other players. As in reality, you don't buy anything concrete, but just "pixels". This makes many players doubt about buying it. But if they see many other players walking around with bought cosmetics, they'll think it's more normal to spent money on it.

2.2 Clubs

These are also known as the killers. They thrive on competition with other players, and prefer fighting them to scripted computer-controlled opponents. Most killers player for the quick thrill of the game, or to dominate the other kind of players. In order that a killer to spend money on your game, he has to get enough "instant satisfaction", or he'll just leave to play another game. It's very hard to earn from this audience in a free to play setting. One way is to give them a competitive advantage. But be careful, as this can damage the experience for the rest of the players. A better way is to give killers a way to speed up the process of getting stronger. A good example for this is "Clash Royale". In this game, you can level up your characters if you have enough "cards". Cards will be dropped randomly, but sometimes you can buy specific cards in a shop. This way you can get stronger faster, and climb the ladder more easily.

2.3 Diamonds

This kind of players are also referred to as "Achievers". They want to gain as much points, equipment, levels and other concrete measurements of succeeding in a game. They will usually go to great lengths to achieve this, even if often the things gained will give you almost no benefit in the game. Summarized, this kind player wants to be the best. A good way to monetize achievers is to set a soft limit on the amount of time the player can play. The player would then have to pay a small amount to remove the restriction. Another way would be to offer limited time deals, in which the player can acquire some items only in a certain period of time.

2.4 Spades

These are the explorers of the game world. They like to know the world in which the game is held, including its lore and hidden areas. The best way to earn from this kind of player is to offer DLC's. Give them more things to explore, more areas to scan, more places to discover. Another way is to let them buy unlocks, like characters or items. Rewarded ads work the best on this kind of player, as they are already more curious by nature.

3. Best practices

There are some small design tips that can help you retain users more easily. These are very simple, but it's good to know them.

3.1 Cycles

Cycles is about the loops the user goes through while playing your game, there are 3 different loops

- Minute to minute cycles, this is about the "repetitive" loop the user does during the game. It often looks something like this: Action > Reward > Upgrade > Action. This is the most straight forward cycle, and every game has this.
- Hour to Hour cycles are slightly more complicated. This is about keeping your player coming back,

and most importantly, the reason he comes back. How are you planning to keep the player coming back every few hours? Good examples are timed chests in f2p mobile games.

- Day to Day cycles is the last one. How will you motivate the player to come back tomorrow? A good motivation here are rewards for which the player has to do certain tasks during 24h or 7 days.

3.2 Triggers

Triggers are ways you make the user aware of your game. There are many different, here are some examples:

- Appointment trigger. An example is "chest unlocks in 8 hours". You set an appointment for your player to come back and play your game.
- Competitive trigger. An example is a clan in which you can be the at the top, or leaderboards.
- Social trigger. This is one of the strongest triggers, because the player set's some kind of appointment with other real people. You wouldn't want to disappoint a real life friend!
- Event triggers. Things like sales or special events in which the player can do things he normally wouldn't be able to do.
- Nudge trigger. This is simply a push notification. Not very effective, but if it works on some people it might already be worth it.

3.3 Break the Barrier

It's very important to make the first payment for the user as painless as possible. Let the process be quick and cheap. A onetime first sale would be great to get the user more used to paying for your game.

3.4 Never only paid

If possible, you should try to not make in app purchases which cannot be obtained by playing the game. You can of course make something very rare, or purchasable. But you should have a failsafe, so the player is sure to get some rare items.

3.5 Ingame hard currencies

A common thing to do is to have a different currencies in the game. Like a more common gold, and a less common gems/diamonds/etc…. The less common currency would be used for IAP's (In App Purchases). By doing this spending the hard currency feels less harsh on the user, as he will not be purchasing something with real money.

3.6 Have expansive items in your shop

Have some "fake" overpriced items in your shop to make the rest seem more reasonable. Table 1 shows an example of different subscriptions and their prices. The % is amount of people that choose the option.

Table 1 Example of having a "fake" item in your shop

web:	59$	68%
print & web:	125$	32%
web:	59$	16%
print:	125$	0%
print & web:	125$	84%

3.7 Tutorial

On average, less than 40% of players comes back after their first session. This makes it very important to make the first experience a good one. Don't make the tutorial too slow, but don't bombard the player with information either. The first session should give a clear impression of what the player should expect from your game. A good practice is to skip the main menu on the first session.

4. Serious Games

So how does this apply to serious games? Most of the above tips are general game design tips. But users are different for serious games. When someone starts with a serious game, he already has a goal in mind. He wants to learn something. The real question now is, should you:

1. Focus as much as possible on the learning part, so the user can do what he got the application for.
2. Or should you focus on making the game as much fun as possible, to keep the user interested for longer periods of time?

4. Conclusion

As a follow up of this study, I will experiment with different games. In the Table 2, characteristics of 3 different kind of games are shown. Some are more like a game, and others are more serious. You can see that the player will learn more from the more serious game, but will the player also play this more? I want to experiment if a more game-y game will be played for a longer amount of time.

Table 2 Games and their estimated characteristics

Name	% serious	% game	(+/-) words per minute	Total playtime
FF	80%	20%	10	???
WAM	60%	40%	7	???
Project D	30%	70%	4	???

The result will be very interesting for serious game designers, as it will change design patterns for serious games.

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