
Mainstream Disobedience: How and Why Indie Developments (video games) Bend the Rules

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Abstract

Independent video game development is the novel process of developing indie games. In recent years, the development of these games is becoming a source of various obvious transformation and disobediences in terms of design goal, participants and complexity. On one hand have these games supported the increased distribution of gaming platforms, on the other hand, these are also leading to alteration of the traditional game rules and going beyond the current possibilities in order to have more exploration and variety.

Author Keywords

Indie, mainstream, video games, game design, tools, intellectual property, marketing transformation, community, ethics, values, rules

Introduction

Independent video game development is termed as the process of developing indie games; these are basically the games that are usually developed by individuals or small teams having little financial backing by the video game publisher or some outside source. These games might take many years to be developed from the scratch or can be completed in just couple of days or even hours, based on their design, participants and complexity level.

Originated via digital distribution, the idea of indie development has been derived from an indie movement. The increased popularity of these games has enabled increased distribution on the famous gaming platforms like Nintendo eShop, PlayStation Network, Steam, Gog, Humble, and Xbox Live.

As per dictionary, the term "indie" refers to an informal version of the word "independent". However, the word implies more and it is lined with certain attitudes. On a general level, it reflects forward thinking and originality, in particular, in design and music. The term indie is commonly referred to a person who thinks and is concerned about the issues that are not usually found in the mind of most people.

According to key players in the community, the Indies must have these two major characteristics [1]:

- Motivated by passion and not money. Though money is also the factor, but it's an incidental logistical issue for indie developers (It means that the project cannot be carried on if we starve to death).
- Designed from trenches. The developers that are bearing the project's directions are also those doing grunt work like creating artwork and programming.

Apart from the Mainstream Gaming industry

Indie game developers usually avoid big investors, having big loans and following the route of mainstream game development. These developers desire to make their own rules without following the commands and orders from the above; neither have they wanted to follow the trends.

Some might dare to forecast the "renaissance" of the computer gaming in the future resulted due to Indie game developers. A specific rebellious guerilla attitude opposed to the mainstream game business is highly popular among Indie developers, which eventually result in mainstream disobedience and bending of the rules.

The concept of every individual's birthright to live their life the way they want without any reliance on mass media agendas and capitalistic dogmas are highly focused for Indies. It implies that over materialistic gain, human dignity is emphasized. This is not mainstream culture usually works like.

However, the mainstream gaming industry still desires to be the part of this present indie hype. Electronic Arts (EA) has issued its own indie Bundle [2]. Since last few years, EA has turned out to be infamous of being the polar counter part of the indie scene. EA has traditionally followed all questionable methods of taking care of the employees. A number of sources compel that EA is actually on the way to rip off the developers and take huge benefit of them via inhumane crunches and ethically doubtful working practices [3].

Actions like the indie Bundle of EA make the fine line between the indie and mainstream even more blur. When people get more liberal regarding what they accept as the indie, the word indie itself started to lose its meaning. The same progression has taken place before in other shapes of indie business like indie music [4]. It is the contemporary colonization; where rather than rifles and cannons, more sophisticated means are used to conquer.

The Active Indie Community

The indie community or Indie game scene is totally based on Internet, organized as portals, web pages, blogs, forums, Twitter, and IRC channels. The community embraces events called "developers night". These nights and events can differ from a few developers having beer in a bar to massive professional gatherings of the indie developers.

The indie game community is usually lined to the Demo Scene and Open-Source communities. These factions work in the supportive symbioses giving each other the ideal technology possible with the dignity. The novel technological innovations in the graphics programming and other relevant fields usually derived from the Demo Scene [5]. This technical knowhow finally reached the mainstream game development.

They are considered to me modern and eye catchers. The boom of graphics in gaming is becoming bigger. Games like Mafia, Crysis, Far Cry, play on their league and on their respective platform. Responsible for the visually impressive appearance of these, are the people of the Demo Scene. Those people have got talent and a good command over visuals and design, along with having the required technical knowledge [6].

Meanwhile, the Open-Source community is also doing some important work developing cheap choices of software and tools for the developers. These factions give important possibilities and support to the indie game developer community.

The present community who desire to witness the flourishing scene is a huge benefit of being an indie game developer. For indie developers, it is very beneficial to maintain close ties with the local community and to develop a solid fan base for their business [7]. Considering the fans' opinions and their wishes is the worst type of mistake you can ever commit. An indie game developer should consider the fact that fans commit invaluable promoting, marketing and various other efforts for free, so you are able to make your living. In addition, they would always purchase your games; hence the power of real should never be underestimate [8].

Indie developers get benefit mainly from the support of the community in terms of word of mouth marketing, feedback, game play testing, fan bases, reviews and finding new developers [9]. Indies, naturally, should always maintain their community as active and identify their fans; it is still vital to recognize that organizing community might be challenging [7].

Indie - Democratizing the Game Development

Small but independent studios are boldly bringing on the blockbusters in the gaming world that is being revolutionized through smartphones, social media, tablets and online access to games. Thousand of game developers, many belonging to studios with just couple of persons, and in some cases, a one man shop, attended a Game Developers Conference in San Francisco in March this year, to share their insights into a continual quest to get much better at their craft [10].

Veterans of famous studios behind Triple A console games, which are developed by teams of hundreds with millions of cost, were there, however the independent game developers were being seemed as the people actually shaking up the entire industry with novel approaches to the play. The indie game developers are democratizing game development and is one of the most interesting things seen in the industry in a long time. It is a form of revolution that is bending the traditional rules. At the core of this resolution lies the fact that tools for creating video games are easily available and usually free, meaning people would have a go at it the same way they could get a paper and pencil and try writing a book.

Distribution of indie games is equally available through online services like Steam, or virtual shops like Apple's App Store [10] or Google Play. Independent studios are inclined to take more creative risks than huge operations behind the titles of Triple A, since if the huge names introduce a dud of a game, it would cost many hundreds of employees their jobs and lose millions of dollars as production costs.

The indie scene is actually this proliferation of unique, interesting and possibly total failure concepts. Since the independent is just risking their own earning, we have these unique, zany, and off the wall ideas.

Examples in this regard that came to consideration here includes the critically praised puzzle game Monument Valley that has given a style inspired from minimalist sculpture and challenges players with the optical illusions. Console maker Microsoft and Sony have both been approaching the independent game makers, tempting them for developing on Xbox One and PlayStation 4 [10].

When the new consoles were launched, it was an evident sign from the largest players in the industry that some of the most amazing innovations at this moment of time in terms of content of a game is coming from the indies. Big publishers also want to be the part of that, i.e. to get that really amazing content. Independent games increased the diversity of the console play, giving quirkier, lighter choices to big budget blockbusters like Halo, Skyrim and Destiny. There would always be somebody who desires that really huge massive game; it is just like watching film in IMAX 3-D [10]. However, then there are going to be those people who are perfectly happy playing a game on their Smartphone. There is a room for all of them.

Another Mainstream Disobedience - The Tools

In the mainstream video game industry, C++ is the most popular choice for language, mainly because of its low level efficient nature, however most of the popular 3D game engines have been written in C++. Indie video games have been seen using a range of other languages. Notably, C#, the language for XNA (Microsoft's toolkit which facilitates the development of video game on Windows Phone 7, Xbox 360 and Windows OCS) and Objective-C, the language for iPhone's Cocoa touch API, the fame of which has increased greatly after 2008, because of the accessibility of the App store to the independent developers. Indie games that are written in Java are also there, due to the broad compatibility for most of the web browsers and operating systems. Other dynamic languages have also been seen, like Ruby, Action Script, Python, Lua etc, lowering the entry barriers to game development industry.

The Ethics & Values

The indie game developers borrow a number of their values and ethics from Open-Source development and also from Hacker ethics. The belief that the information sharing is a strong positive good and that it is an ethical responsibility of the hackers to share their skills by writing the open source and facilitating an information access and to computing resources wherever it is possible [11].

This radiates within the indie game scene in ways of the active knowledge sharing communities, open-source attitudes and a certain degree of transparency between developers, customers and fans, via blogs and other social network services.

On the contrary, the hacker ethics can be seen from a different outlook. The Finnish Philosopher Pekka Himanen hold another viewpoint, which imply work ethics is like an opposing power to society's present work ethics. Hacker work ethics are turning out to be more significant among the information professionals. Rather than current ethic values and features such as work, money, stability, flexibility and result accountability, the hacker ethics consider seven different values like freedom, passion, openness, social worth, caring, activity and creativity [12].

The biggest problem in present work ethics seems to be built in concept of guilt of being worthless and lazy. This also supports the puritan attitude that gauges responsibility and liability as a worker, not on how much one can really achieve within a day, but instead how hard people are being on themselves and how guilty they feel continuously. The ethics support of the compromise off physical, spiritual and mental health on the altar of the capitalism is expected to end soon as more human ideas would win the ground.

As per P. Himanen, most of the hackers don't consider money as value in itself and are ready to develop something valuable and beneficial to the community. Serious indie developers sometimes share similar concepts and thoughts and consent with the values declared by Himanen [12]. It can reasonably be stated that the Indie game developers also try to reach higher virtues in life than a typical or traditional work ethics can provide.

As studies in 1990s, the decadence is also affecting the Hacker ethics that reflects naturally all over the Open-Source community also into this indie culture. Values and ethics have to be redefined and Indies would need to beat the constant pressure arising from the modern society and mainstream corporate world. If Indies doesn't stay true to their principles and vision, the entire culture would be endangered and the self-humiliating would gain footing.

Emphasis on the Creativity

When you have independence you can have the ability to do something different. The most loved and best indie games are often the ones that have a completely new experience to give. By providing a novel idea and design it serves as a new experience. For indie games developers it is quite important to be able to think something creative. As an Indie developer, they question all traditional solutions and rather than copying an old idea, they develop game of their own. Since they see their game as one of the art forms, this leap for them is easier to take.

However, this doesn't imply that they couldn't develop a game that can fit in some present genre. It just means to develop their game in an innovative and fresh way. Perspective is an ideal example of how creativity of Indies works. This game is a platform game having 2D and 3D working in a very interesting manner. Rather than running from right to left and revolving around, the player has to make path with the help of both 2D and 3D dimensions. This brings much special puzzle part into the game [15].

In a number of cases, indie developers invest novel types of game mechanics, just like in the Perspective, since they are unable to compete with technical areas like high detail real time rendered graphics. This essentially among some aspects related to the game design is often termed as a renaissance of the game development. The gist of the games was originally based on new game mechanics and presently the trend appears to be that game developers are coming back to their roots.

The creative thinking could also be applied to developing designs. Indies should think of developing designs that are less time taking to develop but still interesting in their own special ways. Many Indies aim to develop their own graphics and style that contain a personal touch within them. Personal vision and touch are highly important in indie development. These results in new innovations that are usually re-used for developing AAA game, if appear to be profitable.

In addition, the fans need to be aware that there are basically the real human beings behind the games they adore. The fans want authentic and trust worthy game development heroes to love and support. Rather than watching people who love what you are doing from your ivory tower, you should talk to them in an open and utilize social media like Twitter in order to share your life as a game developer with them. This natural approach for dealing with the fans is usually adopted in big mainstream game studios also.

This creative approach would be expanded to all the other development areas also. Indies are using their imagination to develop low cost and effective marketing campaigns, means to promote they're developed games and methods to cut down their development expenses. It is worth mentioning that an indie game company developed their entire project from a third world country, so as to reduce their living costs to a bare minimum. Decisions like mentioned above, are though quite rare and extreme, however, it is still a great example of creative thinking [13]. Even the most awkward idea can prove to be the perfect for the requirements or situation of the company.

One of the major differences between AAA games and Indie games is creative freedom. Since huge sums of money are usually not present in indie game development, the developers like to make more radical choices in the areas of graphics, game design and sounds. In mainstream business where each decision is made for maximizing the profits, various compromises are adopted and the same famous concepts are repeated again. AAA studios often design games to fit into mainstream consumers' needs and once a concept is sold millions, the concept is repeated as long as it keeps selling. The outcome is that mostly games are more or less similar with minor differences in

mechanics, graphics and features [13]. As the emphasis is on making huge profits, risks including via creative freedom are usually avoided.

The creative cage is completely overlooked in Indie game development. In fact, the best and ideal indie games are those that break traditional boundaries and old concepts; games that have really invested something innovative and novel. When it's not obligatory to have typical clichés in storylines and designs, something more vivid, meaningful and beautiful can be developed. Also because there is a lack of resources and manpower, interesting innovations in shape of simpler game mechanics and designs are born.

Indies possesses control over intellectual property and as there are neither publishers nor investors, who are making restrictions and guidelines, a real creative freedom in true sense is possible. This is the foundation for all the gaming paradigm innovations and shifts [14]. Indie games are more personal. Every little detail in the game gives a feel of the person who created it, and that's just something fans don't get in a game that is made by a huge group of people.

Indie Developers Establish their Own Rules

Being an indie developer, the artist is responsible just to himself and his team. They possess full control on their work practices, development mechanism and how they operate the company. This enables employees to control the ways they work with and adapting themselves when practices are not favorable or felt incorrect. There is a no game design virtually that they could not create as an indie, however it is still required to keep their scope small enough and to avoid the feature creep [16].

On the opposite side, there is also the negative side of all freedom provided to Indies. Often when things are loosely scheduled or not at all, launch deadlines can be delayed, possibly several times. This huge freedom towards working might sometimes lead to much unwanted stress as the small indie workgroup tries to struggle with no great project management [17].

Indie doesn't invest millions of dollar on marketing, sine it's mandatory for the developers to be low cost. There are a number of things they consider when determining their market plan. Whenever developing a game for a specific platform, they make a brief research regarding how the online market for that specific platform works efficiently. Certain actions are avoided when using services like Android market, App store etc [18].

Conclusion

Indie development is definitely on its way to bend the present video game development industry's rules and bring a new shift to the industry in numerous ways. Indie game development is taken as the blend of creativity, ethics and technical skills. For making a good living out of Indie game development, one must have multiple skills and possess an open mind to various aspects of life. In addition to game mechanics, design, graphics and features, the funding, marketing and making the fans by providing something unique and interesting is the gist of the indie development, which is even being followed by the large scale studios nowadays. Indie development is not just surpassing the conventional industry norms, but also leaving some great footnotes to be followed by others.

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