NZ GDC 2013 PROGRAMME

9:00	Registration Open at WG Building, AUT University		
10:00	Opening by Stephen Knightly, NZGDA		
10:20	The Next Big Thing, Alex St John, Founder Wild Tangent		
10:40	The Future of Gaming, Jason Harwood, Producer, Halfbrick		
	Room WG 403	Room WG 404	Room WG 126
11:00	Path of Exile Open Beta Post Mortem	Animate Technologies	Cross Platform Indie Tools of the Trade
11:30	Bloons Monkey City - The Evolution of IP	RPG item design for Different player types	Windows Phone 8
12:00	Lunch (thanks IGEA)		
1:00	Panel: Best Practices in Mobile Customer Acquisition and Monetisation	Practical Motion Capture for Gaming (Room WG212)	Month of Hell: Launching Path of Exile
1:30			Gamified Beta Testing
2:00	Panel: The Future of Flash	Jane Austen Post-Mortem	Defining the post-modern mobile game producer
2:30	Film & TV Franchise Games	MacGuffin's Curse Post-Mortem	Becoming an Agile Producer
3:00	Afternoon Tea		
3:30	Evolve or Die: free2play is free2innovate	Bee Leader Post Mortem	Data Driven Backgrounds for ScooterBoy
4:00	Major Mayhem Post-Mortem	It's Alive!: Creating a World Worth Caring About	Game Design Elements
4:30	Going Android	Traditional Art: A Game Developer's Perspective	Puzzle Design Tools
5:00	Panel: Is a mobile publishing deal for me?	Forging the Rainbow: Trials and Tribulations of Robot Unicorn 2's Art	Panel: Analyse This. Playing Games as a Designer
5:30	Close (Room WG 403)		
6:00	Serato After Party at Rakinos		

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The Next Big Thing
Alex St John, Co-creator Direct-X, Founder of Wild Tangent.com, Former GM Entertainment for Microsoft, Former President of Hi5.com

Alex St. John (AKA The Saint) was the Microsoft executive responsible for leading the effort to create the DirectX gaming APIs and Windows Media platforms which lead to the introduction of the 'DirectXBox'. St. John went on to found WildTangent which became the largest online game network in the US and the third largest in the world through 2011. He went on to become CTO of Hi5.com the world's third largest social network and by cloning Facebooks API's was able to publish hundreds of Facebook compatible social games before selling the company in late 2012. Alex has over 23 patents in online game publishing, DRM, streaming, compression and online business models.

No matter who the big players are in the market or how tightly they seem to have the platforms and gaming audiences sewn up, there is always an upstart out there that completely disintermediates them and succeeds wildly in spite of the barriers. RuneScape, Minecraft, Miniclip, Zynga, id Software, Valve, to name a few are all amazing examples of game studios that made it on their own without venture capital, publishers, consoles or mobile devices. These are the companies Alex loves to study, the stories he loves to tell and the new opportunities we are all searching for.

The Future of Gaming
Jason Harwood, Producer, Halfbrick

Jason Harwood is a Producer at Halfbrick Studios who produced the smash hit iOS titles Fruit Ninja & Jetpack Joyride. He has worked on numerous titles in his time at Halfbrick across a gamut of handheld platforms from the DS, PSP to virtually every smartphone and tablet available today. When not developing games Jason can be found tearing/hacking up the golf course or at home with the family (playing games).

Focusing on his expertise in mobile game development, Jason will deliver his keynote presentation that will reflect on changes that the industry has seen over the past five years and where he anticipates it will be heading in the future. This promises to be an exciting presentation that examines the shift from paid to freemium, game design that appeals to casual audiences, breaking down barriers of entry and keeping your studio stable in turbulent times.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

In Alphabetical Order

Analyse This: Playing Games as a Designer Panel
Fawzi Mesmar, Principal Designer, Gameloft New Zealand
Maru Nihoniho, Metia Interactive

Game designers often play video games for reasons other than recreation such as following the market trends and development, seek inspiration and benchmarking. As designers grow their understanding of video games as they're making them so does their conception and appreciation of the craft as a whole. In this panel, we'll go through what designers see when they play other games, and how that can be beneficial to creating their own - often drastically different - games.

Animate Technologies
Mark Sagar, Director of the Laboratory for Animate Technologies, University of Auckland.

Double Academy Award winner Mark Sagar was previously Special Projects Supervisor at Weta Digital, where he created digital characters for blockbusters such Avatar, King Kong, and Spiderman 2.

The talk will give an overview of the Laboratory for Animate Technologies which is combining interactive models of the face with models of the brain to create autonomous animation.
- Digital faces and animation
- Computer vision
- Artificial intelligence and emotion

Becoming an Agile Producer
Gustave Seymore, Producer, Gameloft New Zealand

An honest and casual talk on the importance of the word "agile" in development and how this *really* applies to the production of video games.
- My transition from an unpublished game designer to a successful producer
- How a design background helps be an agile game developer
- Examples from my hit iPhone games "My Little Pony" and "Littlest Pet Shop"

Bee Leader Post-Mortem
John O'Reilly and Greg Harding, Flightless

Mt. Maunganui-based interactive design and games developer Flightless' Bee Leader was featured as Editors' Choice and selected for inclusion in the App Store Best of 2012 by Apple. Hear about how the indie game was made and the impact of exposure by Apple.
- An insight into their design and games dev approach
- Our experiences working with Apple on a Featured App and the App store
- Behind the scenes look at the game

Best Practices in Mobile Customer Acquisition and Monetization Panel (1 hour long)
Christine Lee, Director of Business Development, Chartboost
Andy Satterthwaite, PikPok
David Frampton, Majic Jungle (Chopper, The Blockheads)
Tim Nixon, Runaway Play (Flutter)
Background: Best Practices in Mobile Monetization and Discovery: In a competitive landscape of thousands of game developers and various mobile platforms, discoverability and monetization are hot topics. In this panel, you can hear from three top game developers on how they monetize their mobile games and drive user acquisition.
- As prices rise, how do you run successful paid user acquisition campaigns without breaking the bank?
- Best practices on driving sales of in-game purchases and in-game advertising.
- How do you track quality of users and life time value? How do you determine the right platforms for your games based on the types of users you want?

Bloons Monkey City - The Evolution of IP
Stephen Harris (Co-Founder and Chief Game Designer) and Lee Grey (Lead Engineer, Monkey City), NinjaKiwi

Multiple iterations, spinoffs and sequels has seen the Bloons series of games develop a huge and varied following. Come to this talk to hear how Ninja Kiwi has managed their flagship IP and where it's going next.
- The evolution from a small simple flash game in 2007 to a hugely successful Tower Defense IP on mobile
- Get a world first sneak peek of the latest evolution in this IP: Bloons Monkey City.

Cross Platform Indie Tools of the trade
Michael Tandecki, Six Foot Three Foot

We'll explore tools that help developers target multiple platforms with as little rewriting as possible. Today these tools are more mature, and are used throughout the industry. Michael Tandecki, a member of Apples' original iPhone team, will discuss "magic code" converters, and why writing code is a better option. The two tools I'll discuss for cross platform are Unity3D and cocos2d-x (and its variants). I'll cover professional use cases for when / why I chose Unity3D over cocos2d-x, and visa versa.
- Why writing native code is better than code converters
- Key planning points when developing cross platform
- Why these tools and their communities make us stronger developers

Data Driven Backgrounds for ScooterBoy
Chris Blackbourn, Modka Games

Follow former console developer Chris Blackbourn as he complete over-engineers the graphics programming to make the backgrounds really pop in upcoming mobile game, ScooterBoy! Working with two constraints: for input a bespoke background editor to position, scale and rotate each element, and for output one 2048x2048 texture, and one OpenGL vertex array.
- finding convex hulls, packing rectangles into squares, building a texture atlas
- advanced bitmap compression
- seamlessly supporting different screen sizes

Defining the post-modern mobile game producer
Dewi Tanner, PikPok
In the post console landscape, many mobile studios have rebranded Producers as "Product Managers".
- Discover the evolving suite of responsibilities assigned to PikPok PMs
- How various Producers have adapted to them
- Techniques to get the most out of over-allocated Producers

Evolve or Die: free2play is free2innovate
Fawzi Mesmar, Principal Designer, Gameloft New Zealand

The Free 2 Play model has been a topic of debate for some time, but there's no doubt that its a lucrative business or that it's here to stay. In the rush of riding the wave many companies have taken to the habit of copying existing mechanics and count them as genre standards.
- Consumers have changed the way they play games and interact with technology, free2play games have to catch up or die trying.
- Explore the origins of the popularity of social games
- How should social games evolve to match the rapidly changing demands of players?

Forging the Rainbow: Trials and Tribulations of Robot Unicorn 2's Art Production
Sarah Dixey and Peter Freer, PikPok

Every journey has its challenges, some are obvious and others nebulous – Join us on a rapid, horn-to-tail post-mortem dash through the art production of Robot Unicorn Attack 2, the Kiwi-made sequel to the hit casual game. Glimpse the hoops and dangerous cliffs that were traversed to get this challenging visual style onto iOS.
- 2.5D art generation and animation
- Manes breakdown – creating interesting motion through a layered approach
- The 50MB challenge - crunching art assets and the methods used

The Future of Flash: Panel

Moderator: Mitch Olson, Co-Founder, Smallworlds
Chris Harris, NinjaKiwi
Jon Brown, Minimonos
Steve Linton, Cerebral Fix

Platforms rise and fall. Is Flash fading or just evolving? How has the rise of smartphone and tablets affected the player base of Flash and web games, especially children and casual gamers? Is there a cross-over in the audiences and how can you evolve your business in line with the fortunes of various platforms.

Game Design Elements

Andy Satterthwaite, PikPok

There is a tendency to think of Game Design as a single discipline. This talk discusses a different way to think about Game Design; breaking it down into distinct elements, to allow you to sculpt your ideas to your team's skills and the whims of the market.

- An overview of the distinct, complementary elements that make up "Game Design"
- A subjective look at the most important elements in today's most successful games.
- Using this to sculpt your game to your team (or to highlight where you need to bolster your team to make your game)

Gamification in Software Testing and QA

Caswal Parker, Camshaft Software, Melbourne

Early milestone-build release models are becoming ever more popular, and community engagement during game development itself a potentially very valuable developer resource. This talk focuses on a new, innovative community-based testing/QA method that uses elements of gamification to maximize the productivity of community based testing.

- Systemic Gamification
- Semi-Agile dev structure framework
- Guidance system for beta testers

Going Android

Ben Britten, Technical Director, Tin Man Games, Melbourne

Creators of the critically acclaimed Gamebook Adventures series, Tin Man Games will be five years old this year. Eighteen months ago we released our first game to Google Play and have since ported 90% of our titles over to Android. If you are currently selling on the App store and thinking of adding Android to your build process or you are just starting out and wondering if it is worth it, this talk will help answer your questions. Before working at Tin Man Games, Ben came from the visual effects industry where he won an Academy Award for Engineering for 'advancing the art of three dimensional volumetric camera control.'

- The good and the bad of the Android marketplace, including Google Play, Amazon, Nook and Samsung Apps.
- Piracy rates, porting woes
- A comparison of sales figures and specifics with the Apple App Store

Is a mobile publishing deal for me? Panel

Tim Nixon, Runaway Play
Ben Dellaca, Cerebral Fix
Antony Blackett, RocketJump Games

In this crazy app economy, developers need to do everything they can to rise above the noise, get users, and monetize them. In this panel you'll hear from developers who have shipped product with US mobile publishing partners and get their opinions on whether publishers can give you the edge you need.

- What are the pros and cons of having your title published by one of the big names?
- What deals are being offered to mobile developers?
- What are the key metrics for success?

It's Alive!: Creating a World Worth Caring About
Tim Nixon, Managing Director, Runaway Play

Emotional engagement is the key to convincing a player that they should spend their time (and money) in your game. From theme, to character, mechanics and community, all of these elements contribute to a growing emotional investment. When these elements sing in harmony, they can produce a magnetic pull that keeps players returning to your game, making it a place where they love to spend their time.

- The design methodology and mechanics for the ongoing production of their mobile title "Flutter"
- High level concepts of player psychology and human needs, applied to practical game design decisions
- The impact on player retention and monetisation.

Jane Austen for Facebook Post-Mortem
Nadia Thorne, Cerebral Fix

A look back over 18 months of the highs and lows of developing and supporting a Facebook based flash game. From engine re-writes and major design changes to sustaining growth in your user base and revenue, learn from our triumphs and how you can avoid our failures.

- Pre-production: What we didn't do and why we should've done it
- Processes: Avoiding crunch and allowing for rapid iterative releases in a live product
- Growing userbase: The importance of marketing and engaging with your community
- Revenue: Why it didn't just happen for us, and what we did about it

MacGuffin's Curse Post-Mortem
Ben Kosmina, Director, Green Stripe Snake, Melbourne

Join Ben Kosmina of Green Stripe Snake as he takes you on an exciting adventure of the development of the award-winning MacGuffin's Curse.

- Discover how backstory can help you fill in the blanks for your characters and shape your world
- Learn when to identify your Molyneux moment and whether it's a good idea to pursue it, and of course
- Switching gears from 'designer' to 'producer' and acknowledging when to chop and change for the good of the project, and ultimately, your sanity

Major Mayhem - a not so 'Post'-Mortem
Antony Blackett, Rocket Jump

A post-mortem on Top 10 iPhone hit Major Mayhem's development through to its initial release on the App Store for a dollar. Follow the realisation that it was not going to make back its development costs and finally the decision and process of turning a failing paid App Store game into a successful freemium game.

- Monetisation decisions and mistakes
- Lessons from Rocket Jump's multi-platform (iOS, Android, PC, Mac) development process
- Sticking with a product you believe in, and how to turn into a successful product with a bit of hard work and a good monetisation strategy
- A glimpse at where we might take it next

Making Film & TV Games Work
Jeremy Taylor, ex-THQ, Disney and Electronic Arts

How to effectively manage a relationship between large overseas studios and publishers such as MGM, Disney, EA, Paramount, etc. and local game development teams.

- Gaining marketing awareness/support and cross-promotions for your game from multiple business units within a large studio, publisher or U.S. licensor
- How to make the overall IP presence and popularity work for you to increase your sales
- Original IP - Designing a marketing and launch plan from an IP perspective - not just a single game launch.

Month of Hell: Launching Path of Exile
Jonathan Rogers, Technical Director, Grinding Gear Games

Jonathan Rogers from Grinding Gear Games will be talking about the trials and tribulations of launching their Online Action RPG, Path of Exile. With 2.7 million registered users, peak server load of 70,000 concurrent players and days with 700,000 website visits, handling the success of the Open Beta launch was an ongoing challenge for Grinding Gear Games.

- Server crashes, DDoS attacks, hackers, spam and bots.
- Learn about the dark sides of online game development and solutions for getting them under control.

Path of Exile Open Beta - a Postmortem
Chris Wilson, Managing Director, Grinding Gear Games

Path of Exile is Grinding Gear Games' dark fantasy Action RPG that entered Open Beta in January. With six years of development, deciding the scope of Open Beta and managing the final push towards its release over the Christmas period was a difficult challenge.

- Path of Exile's Open Beta was a huge success, but how much of that was due to luck and how much due to careful planning?
- What could Grinding Gear Games have done differently to solve problems that came up?
- Given the results of the Open Beta so far, what future direction is being adopted for Path of Exile?

Practical Motion Capture for Gaming

An introduction to, and practical demonstration of, using Motion Capture in AUT's new Motion Capture studio, with a special emphasis on its use for Gaming and Game Characters. Session includes a live demonstration of the Motion Analysis Motion capture system using two performers and tracked props, and an overview of the technical pipeline from Motion Builder to Maya to Unity.

- Overview and practical demonstration of a live motion capture session
- Single and multi-performer and prop tracking
- Overview of technical pipeline from mocap data capture to its application to a Unity game character

Puzzle Design Tools

Sam Wong, Team Lead, The Voxel Agents, Melbourne

By attending this session, you will gain insight about the need for Puzzle Retreat's tools to evolve during development. This session is NOT a tech talk! If you have a keen interest in logical puzzles, be sure to come along to this one!

- The benefits and pitfalls of procedural generation, automated solvers, CAD editors
- Pen and paper prototypes and content pacing tools to assist designers to iterate faster and get content out of the door quicker.

RPG item design for different player types

Erik Olofsson, Art Director, Grinding Gear Games

This talk will help identify how different people "win" when playing a game, and how to design item and game systems around that. Many concepts are from Magic: The Gathering and the concepts used should be usable to any dueling or multiplayer game.

- "Timmy": Timmy cares about the quality of "wins". Winning big in a crushing manner is more important than winning often.
- "Johnny": Johnny is a creative gamer that wants to "win" in a unique way that no-one has used before.
- "Spike": Spike is the competitive player that cares about quantity of "wins" rather than quality.

Traditional Art: A Game Developer's Perspective.

Mike Porter, Media Design School, ex-Microsoft Studios and Sierra Entertainment

Traditional art informs all aspects of digital art production in game development. Mike Porter will demonstrate rapid 2D art game production and how those quick illustrations are developed into more professional 3D game assets. Using the concepts of form, light, weight and colour, Mike will transform a 2D idea into a 3D sculpture and show how light plays an important role in how we see the world around us.

Windows 8 and Windows Phone game development

Danushka Abeysuriya, Managing Director, Rush Digital

Using DirectX 11 and C++/C# including tips for porting from iOS and OpenGL ES.

- Different Approaches
- Key OpenGL ES & D3D and non graphics API Differences
- Maintaining portability across Android, iOS, Win 8 and everything else