Web Presence Analysis

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Summary

I want to be a video game designer, which requires a variety of skills including the use of game engines, 3D modeling, use of scripting languages, and strong technical writing skills. Game designers must also work in teams and collaborate with other teams to ship a quality product on time.

I looked at several job listings and LinkedIn profiles related to video game design, and analyzed a few in more depth. Comparing these job listings and profiles to an analysis of my own online professional identity, I have concluded that my current online identity is very much inadequate. To correct this problem, I should commit to at least one complete game development project and see it through to a small but finished product, in order to develop some necessary skills and produce material to start building a portfolio in order to make myself a more attractive applicant.

Contents

The Future Me

After I graduate, I eventually want to be a video game designer. It's a career I'm interested in despite the fact that it is very competitive and usually very stressful. It's a hard field to get into professionally (though there are many independent game developers out there), but I want to do it because much of my childhood revolved around video games, and I want to help create for other people the kinds of experiences that shaped my life and brought me so much joy and excitement.

As a career, it involves a great deal of writing and, depending on the studio and the scope of the project (among other things) it often involves the use of different software for things like level design or worldbuilding. At the heart of game design is the game design document, which is essentially a detailed description of the intended product, which can be accessed by any other department (art and modeling, programming, sound recording, etc.) and give them enough information to do their job. A lead game designer or design team builds and updates this document, working with the producers and the other departments to keep the project coherent, though some designers also take on other roles like 3D modeling or level design in addition to working on the design document.

Studios these days are looking for different things depending on the level of the design position and the kind of games they make, and the lack of a clear industry-wide naming system for design positions complicates things somewhat.

Lead designer positions, for example, usually require multiple shipped AAA games, as a lead designer needs a great deal of experience in the industry. Junior design positions require less experience and focus on demonstrating writing, scripting, and modeling skills as well as an understanding of game design. The job listings for design positions often list a Bachelor's degree and industry experience as requirements, and the specific kind of degree isn't terribly important as long as an applicant has the relevant skills. Possibly more important is a portfolio, including samples of design documents, small prototype games, and modifications to existing games (mods). This also includes a list of shipped titles if the applicant has worked on any.

People and Positions

I looked at four open design positions and three design professionals (see Appendix I). The people and positions I analyzed are a bit focused around Bethesda Softworks, both because I have been playing their games recently and because they seem to be a little more organized in this area. Their jobs page is well designed and easy to understand, and the employees' LinkedIn profiles are the most descriptive I found in about two hours of searching.

One of the biggest things required for a designer is experience using game engine or modding software. The most popular seems to be the Unreal Editor, though Bethesda prefers experience with their own software kits, The Elder Scrolls Construction Set and the GECK, tools used for their biggest properties. Game

designers are also frequently level designers in some capacity, so 3D modeling software skills are important—the industry standard is Maya, but many studios also accept 3D Studio Max. Level design positions and those game design positions that focus on level design or worldbuilding also prefer applicants with experience using scripting software like Lua or JavaScript. Less tangible skills like understanding design or game flow can be demonstrated with a good portfolio including design documentation, video and stills from designed environments, and even downloadable samples such as levels or quests for popular games. Even better, of course, is a list of shipped games, which carry a reputation of their own.

The professional profiles I looked at all list scripting as one of their specialties, as well as things like level design or the more generic "game development." Creative writing is also important (especially considering the games they worked on), especially character and story development and dialogue. Level design is a valuable skill as well. Game design is a very valuable skill but is a bit difficult to define.

To evaluate people for a game design position, I would look for scripting skills; experience using game engines, especially Unreal Editor; sample documentation showing good technical writing skills and design sense; experience working with a team, preferably liaising with other teams as well; and sample games or mods showing level and quest/mission design and writing skills.

The Current Me

Currently, my searchable professional online identity does not extend beyond my Facebook and LinkedIn pages. There are other things out there with my name associated with them (such as the blog for this class), but they are difficult to find. Furthermore, my Facebook page is private, so the information one could get from it without being my friend is extremely limited and I do not fulfill my criteria.

Scripting experience: My online identity shows none; the closest it gets is a few mentions of a C++ programming class on Facebook.

Experience using game engines: Though I do have some limited experience with the Unity3D engine, my online identity does not show this, except for a brief mention on Facebook, buried somewhere in my timeline.

Sample documentation: None. I have written a relatively small game design document before, but it cannot be found online.

Experience working with a team: Fortunately, this is one thing I do have reflected on my LinkedIn page, as this semester I collaborated with my classmates on a public relations campaign. However, this is the only such experience an employer might find.

Sample games or mods: None. As previously mentioned, I have dabbled in using Unity3D, but that work is not of the quality I would seek in a potential employee and is not available online.

Conclusions

I have a long way to go in building my online professional identity. It is, at the very least, not damaging, but it also does almost nothing to help me enter the video game industry. The one strength I have is a history of working in teams, and I can build upon this by collaborating with other people on projects in the future. The other four criteria I listed are my weaknesses, and fortunately I can tackle more than one of them at a time, even in the same project. Since Unreal Editor is free for non-commercial use, I can use it to build a portfolio of sample games and mods and at the same time learn at least one scripting language.

In a single project, I could write an entire game design document, build the game in Unreal Editor, gain some experience with scripting, and update the design documentation as I work. It might be difficult, but I could potentially even recruit others to work on it with me, building my team experience as well. Although I wouldn't be able to sell the final product without paying a licensing fee, I could use stills and video from it in my portfolio.

Appendix I: URLs

LinkedIn profiles:

Joel Burgess:
http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=3010736&authType=name&authToken=izW9&trk=skills

Jon Paul Duvall:
http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=59083968&authType=name&authToken=ZvEt&goback=.npv_3010736_*1_*1_name_izW9_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1&trk=prof-proj-cc-name

Alan Nanes:
http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=53649594&authType=name&authToken=0bAB&goback=.npv_3010736_*1_*1_name_izW9_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1_*1&trk=prof-proj-cc-name

Job listings:

Zenimax: Quest Designer: http://jobs.zenimax.com/requisitions/view/75?source=Indeed.com

Zenimax: Level Designer: http://jobs.zenimax.com/requisitions/view/74

Gearbox: Game Designer:
http://www.indeed.com/viewjob?jk=539968860ea26660&q=Game+Designer&tk=17dpor8gf0k1239j&from=web

Naughty Dog: Game Designer: http://www.naughtydog.com/site/careers/game_designer1/

My online identities:

LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=218060229&trk=tab_pro

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ryan.schneider.545

Class blog: http://rschn009.students.digitalodu.com/

Appendix II: Reflection

Since my main formatting goal for this document was readability, I kept my formatting very simple. I used bolded 18pt Calibri font for the section headings to make them stand out sufficiently from the 12pt Cambria body text that the different sections were clearly divided. I double-spaced the text for readability in the longer sections and for consistency in the shorter ones. The subheadings in the "Current Me" section and Appendix I are bolded 12pt Cambria because they needed to be subordinate to the section headings but still stand out from the body text. In the "Current Me" section, the text associated with this subheadings has a hanging indent for readability, because it is a list accompanied by enough body text that each item cannot fit on one line.

The table of contents was the biggest pain to format. Microsoft Word's tool didn't allow me to alter the heading to be consistent with my other section headings, so instead I wrote it manually. I would rather have used periods across the page to the numbers than underlining, but I didn't want to deal with the autoformatting issues that would arise from it.