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DEMAN Live: Inside the Metaverse (Gaming, XR & Interactive Media)
with StudioDuke

00:00 DAVE KARGER

Welcome to DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, Duke alum and host on Turner Classic Movies. DEMAN is the Duke Entertainment, Media and Arts Network. And it's the University's hub for the creative industries. On this show, you'll hear a past episodes of DEMAN live, which includes panels and one on one chats with alumni. Thanks so much for listening and enjoy.

04:41 STUDENT

Yeah, thank you all so much, again, for being here. It's super exciting. And my first question is, what does management look like in the studios you work in? I know that some of you have management experience at some point in your career, so I'd love to hear that.

05:01 ABHI

I'll point to you know, Vincent and Madden. Yeah, as kind of two people. I've been embedded in studios. If that's cool, what throw it like kind of your direction first. And then Leslie, of course, as well. Yeah. If you have anything, that's cool.

05:17 VINCENT

Madden, you wanna kick us off? Since you're directly at Studio currently? Yeah, yeah, sure.

05:22 MADDEN

Yeah, of course. Um, so was management look like in the studio? I work in. That That means a lot of different things. I guess, I think around products and brands, the biggest part of management's kind of focus on the franchise. So I think we see gaming, just as a, as an industry getting more and more into like live service games, games, live forever, you know, think about Fortnite, think about Apex and any other games out right now. So management and brand management, product management, a lot of that focus around how to keep things alive, right, how to keep engaging with our content with our users, with our pipelines. I guess it's kind of like professional sense management. And I guess, like, personal sense, and management tell us the develop, develop all over the place, is a lot of our leaders lead with a lot of empathy and passion, right, I think it's one of the things that we're probably here a lot in this panel, where everyone that we work with is just like rapidly crazy about the game industry, which is good and bad. But a lot of decisions are made with what will be the best experience for players and customers are like leading with customer obsession, and laying that fuel the products that we make, and hopefully, you know, keep people engaged in our franchise. Yeah, hopefully that helps answer, and Vincent I'll pop over to you.

06:54 VINCENT

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Yeah, I mean, in terms of like, response, typically, every single game will have a game director. So you know, Jedi Fallen Order has its own game director, Apex has its own game director, I don't meet that game director, you'll have kind of different verticals. So you'll have products, which essentially supports everything from building out features to in game store monetization, to, you know, tuning, level leveling, and all those type of areas, you'll have production, you'll have narrative, you'll have obviously, you know, coding, and all these other just different elements of the team. So it's pretty matrix under the game director. And then within each team, like, obviously, there's different elements to it, I'd say product of each person could be working on different aspects of the product, whether that means a new feature around in game store functionality to in game messaging, to the way the game recognizes entitlements, and all those type of things. And they'll work cross functionally with different coders or engineers. To get that work done.

Under narrative, you'll have essentially a lead narrative writer, or Narrative Designer, and then a couple different writers under that person, which then depending on the type game, Apex, for example, is heavily character based. So you'll have you know, a lot of writers working on a lot of backstory, designing feature characters, you know, six to 12 months ahead. So a lot of work goes into that. In terms of production, producers essentially handle a lot of different elements across the studio. So you'll have a producer for just the coding aspect, producers for just the our aspect, producers for environment, all those different areas. So they're basically just making sure that you know, content scope is basically being handled appropriately, timelines, all those type of things. And then, you know, across brand is interesting. So some studios will have brand embedded, others will essentially be brand underneath the publisher, but may support from a centralized kind of stance. So that's kind of the way in general, a studio is basically laid out, and then all those game directors will essentially report to like the studio head. So in response case, like Vincent Pella, this is a kinda a really quick kind of like high level view of how a studio might be structured.

09:22 LESLIE

I think there's also to Vincent kind of touched upon it a nuance between product management and brand management, I have never been a product manager. But when I was at Microsoft, I was a product marketing manager. So we can say it's a little bit closer to the product side. But you know, I think when you're on the product side, you are you're, you're literally close to the product, right? So when I was in that role, I was talking to my executive producer, I was talking to my producer Aton to understand a lot of features, right? What were the improvements they were making? Where could we see friction was very closely tied to the product. Once I moved into brand management. We took a step away from that, right so I don't really talk to the creative director at all unless it's usually to be like, Hey, this is something Really important, like, I need you to commit to that, you know, commit to

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this, like, I don't have as much input on the product, but what we are doing there is sort of taking the insights from the product team to be for them to be like, Hey, these are what we think are the super cool features, these are what we think are going to be really important. And as a brand manager, my role is to be like, Okay, I get that you think that this is really important, but actually, what's going to really reach the consumers is this thing instead.

So, for example, if we're talking about a game that I worked on before, which was the division two, it was, you know, the second of a massive success, and the creative director was like, this is all about, you know, the city coming back together, it's really all about, like, the people coming together and rebuilding the cities, and, you know, coming together to these plots of land and building them. And this is like, a key part of what we're doing, like, and it was something that he was very, very passionate about, and was really, you know, speaking to all the innovations that they were doing with the product in game, right, creating a living world, having people feel like they're contributing to something. And as a brand manager, I was like, That sounds amazing. I cannot convince millions of people to come and play a living world game when I want to sell, you know, millions of games, you know, all across the world. So instead, what we talked was about, okay, so what you're trying to get into is that it's really like, people can really see their progress, they can really have a visceral reaction to the actions, you know, to what they're doing in game, which, of course, every person that plays games wants to make it feel like you're having an impact that all the progress you're doing is making a difference.

So we kind of took that insight from the product side, and we're kind of like, how do we package this in a way that lets us market this and lets us appeal, you know, to a more mainstream audience. And once they're like, oh, cool, I always love, you know, knowing that I can make a difference and make an impact when I'm playing games. And then once they get into the game, then they get to, you know, experience this amazing feature, and this amazing vision that the creative director has. So I think there can sometimes be some push and pull between there. Because obviously, developers are very passionate about their project, they spent a long time working on them. And you know, you never want to be like the business person coming in, and then be like, Hey, I don't think that that's such a, you know, a great idea that you've just spent three years focusing on. But there's a lot of kind of communication and negotiation that comes into being like, hey, there's something really powerful and special about the game, that you're building the product that you're building, as a brand manager, my job is to bring people to this product, so that then from there, the world that you've built, the experience you've built, have, you know, can make them come in and spend hours and hours in there. So I think it's it's shifts a little bit as you move along kind of the funnel, shall we say, when you move from product as you go to kind of more the outward marketing for brand management. And I think there's a lot of value for kind of wherever you go into the lifecycle, but they are kind of different angles that you would look at a particular product or at a particular game.

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12:55 ABHI

Zsofia, yeah, do I want to just call it you as well, like any? Yeah, I know you work on at Mehta on on horizon, and any kind of comments from a VR AR perspective on, you know, content creation or management, how things are structured.

13:10 ZSOFIA

Yeah, it's really similar to what Leslie outlined, I think that some of the differences are that we also have a discipline called product design, partnered with art, which may take the kind of creative director role and split it into different kind of zones. And so my I'm a, I'm in the brand marketing manager reign. And so a lot of my partners will actually be PMM product marketing managers who do a lot of that distilling of this is really the core of what we want to communicate and then brief and my team to talk about how do we tell this information to the world in a way that is really compelling to our audiences? So that's a lot of the work that I do. But I think one of the differences might be that upper product is actually defined by product design, product management and art as kind of a trio since we aren't necessarily a traditional game studio are organized in that way either.

Um, and then I think the other cool thing I'm think about gaming and and tech in general, is that when it comes to quote, unquote, management, I don't know I'm speaking for all of you, but but I feel like we are in a creative space. And so a lot of ideas like, come up, and if it's a good idea, I think people go with it and get excited about it. I heard a lot of you talk about like people that are passionate about this space. It's kind of like a weird Crickey space if you think about it. And so I love the fact that really anyone can be a manager like you don't need to have people underneath you. You can manage by influence managed by the ideas that you generate better backed by data are backed by insights that are that are driven by what the consumer really needs. So think that's another way to look at management as you grow your career.

15:16 STUDENT

I can ask the next question. So with the growth of virtual worlds, we're starting to see the lines blur between interactive gaming and virtual reality. And recently, game engines, like Unreal Engine have been used for even motion picture production, like in the Mandalorian, for example. So do you see other companies in the interactive entertainment space potentially also entering like virtual production for movies and television and whatnot?

15:48 MADDEN

I can I can briefly touch on in mid passes, whoever, whoever else? Um, yeah, I mean, that's a that's a great question. And I tell you break up like Mandalorian and stuff ILM is doing over there. So I just try to answer yes. I think it's so it could be look at myself in general in Turn 10 Studios, if there's less of a, you know, Sony Pictures or Disney let's let's contribute technology to you. But I think we're starting to

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see entertainment as a medium kind of intersect. Right. And I guess we can talk about the metaverse and stuff like around that, but And when we think about entertainment, interactive entertainment, you see a lot of people just learning across industry. So for example, a lot of the lighting techniques that we use enforcer for our games are directly taken from the film industry. The way that we render artifacts with our animators work with our artists work like a lot of those same tools and pipelines are taking from other entertainment industry. So I would say yes, but more. So it's like a back and forth where it's more of like a shared set of competencies and skills, we'll have people use like photogrammetry to, you know, record like Mexican skies and put that in the movie, but then also put that in our game, right and render in real time. So I think you're seeing a lot of those things interact more and come blurring the lines between what technology is clickable for like a motion picture versus, versus a video game. And I think in the future, you'll see a lot more of that. But yeah, passing it to whoever else wants to pop in.

17:32 ABHI

yeah, I can just jump in from grow big picture point of view. I think Madden was touching on it. Entertainment, it's less you can talk about the size of the gaming industry, you can talk about the size of music, film, you know, TV, right. But I think, oh, yeah, if you ask Reed Hastings, CEO of Netflix, like what he's most worried about, I think he said in the past that he's most concerned about fortnight, right? And you see Netflix getting into gaming? It really like its share of time, you know, how are your consumers? Are the people that you're going after spending their time? Are they spending, you know, their hours playing games, or they spend their hours watching TV or the you know, her doing their hours listening to podcasts? And I think, you know, you could start to see the lines blur and the investments blur. You know, you see game studios like riot making the claim series like arcane on Netflix, if you haven't seen that. Yeah, and you can see other, you know, Disney licensing its IP out, you know, to, to be made into games. It's super familiar with that. So, I think I think you'll see, you know, a strategy of like, hey, how do we capture people's time? And that's something that can be achieved with IP at the center, right? Like, do you have great characters, great IP at the center? And then how do you build that out into different businesses and different verticals? But I don't know if I answered your question. That's just the kind of a big picture response to like, hey, what's the strategy? And kind of how are companies thinking about the customer? Maybe Zsofia, or Vincent or Leslie can kind of talk about more of the specifics, if they have any other commentary there?

19:21 ZSOFIA

No, the only thing I'd add is there are definitely examples of this like weird merging happening. In addition to what Madden was saying, we have seen, like the first ever short film produced at all in horizon worlds within our community, so like people are exploring with virtual reality as a medium for storytelling, as well. So that's an example there are other apps in the quest portfolio that are directly used for this Quill is an animation tool that really makes it easy With just like a flick of a hand of actually creating animations, which take a really long time for, if you're in the production of creating

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that, so can be a huge game changer for different people. And we've seen partners like Disney using some of it as well on some of their productions for in VR content. So there's definitely like a communication channel. There's conferences and events where a lot of the same people are trying to explore how to take this further. So it's a great question, and we see it often.

20:41 STUDENT

Hi, so this is actually kind of connected to a lot of your answers to this former question. But I was wondering kind of how you decide what for when you think of a story, how you decide what format is best for telling that story, be it like, Oh, this is a film that should this somebody should be film, this is something that should be a game, this is something it should be in VR. And then kind of with that, how do you balance the story you're trying to tell with also allowing there to be some creativity for if there's a player involved or interactivity for the audience?

21:22 ABHI

I'm happy to kick things off with a high level framework. I again would love for ya matted or minted Leslie, like, again, Sophia like to chime in? I'd say like, one of the most important things to consider is, you know, who's your audience? Who do you expect? Or who do you want to reach right with your story? And who are you trying to appeal to? Where do they live? Where do they consume kind of understanding who your audience is. And being customer obsessed, as we call it at Microsoft, I'm rolling my eyes at the corporate speak. But like, you know, I do think there is a lot of value and knowing as much as you can about who you're trying to reach in it. And that will inform a lot of your decisions and how you decide to tell your story. There's also the tactical things of like, you know, what, what are the avenues available? To tell the story, right, maybe it's nonfiction, and that lends itself to documentary or, you know, if you are thinking gaming path, like, yeah, yeah. Anyway, I'll stop there. I'll just stop the framework and just say, hey, think about your audience. First. We'll pass it on to anyone else that wants to add to it.

22:35 LESLIE

I think it's a great question. And I wish I had honestly more experience in this I you know, since being on the marketing side, I feel like it's a little tried and true. Were like, here's your commercial. Here's your trailer, you know, we don't have a ton of diversity there. Sometimes. Sometimes we you know, create some different content. But I think obvious point is right is I think, you know, knowing who your audience is, and knowing kind of where you can play in certain boundaries. So for example, you know, I have Ubisoft, Assassin's Creed is one of our tentpole brands, or it's all about history. It's about it's literally called Assassin's Creed. Right. It's like a very hardcore title. You're assassinating people. But as we were doing some consumer research, the team found out that there was actually this like, great interest in comedic content, which like you would never, like, right? If you're just in your own silo, you would never think, hey, let's take this like, very violent game and play with comedy, right? But it's

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about finding, you know, looking at consumer insights, right? Is there some morsels here? Is there something that you can play with that you can do. And so one of like the most successful more, it's a marketing campaign. So it's not like a true story in that sense, but it's still something that you know, appealed in its form.

When the team was working on Assassin's Creed origins, which was based in ancient Egypt, they basically made like a comedic series that animated like the hieroglyphics and basically was like, trying to create this humorous story about, you know, what the what those folks were saying, and very much bringing in key marketing pillars, because it was a marketing asset for us. So we wanted to make sure that people knew that this was, you know, taking place in Egypt, you could, you know, play as these key characters and all of that, but it was an insight, right, it's based on an insight of like, hey, humor might be something to figure out here. And I think being in gaming affords us the ability to kind of test and learn a little bit, try a little bit of things. You know, it's we're not, we're not a feature film that's going to like throw everything in disarray if we try something. So we're able to kind of test out these little things. And the response on that was, like, amazing, like, people just really liked the content. They thought it was funny, but it was also like, surprising. It's like, you're taking this brand that has been in existence for many years that everybody was like, we know what they're gonna do. We know what they're gonna say. And then all of a sudden, people were like, What the heck, I wasn't expecting this.

So it's a way for you as you're kind of looking at insights trying to figure out like, are there ways that we can play and maybe some unexpected ways that can, you know, reinvigorate? I think interests reinvigorate a franchise for that? So I think kind of knowing, doing the research talking to people, you know, doing kind of all that, like groundwork actually can pay off in terms of the flexibility that the story is that you can tell, but also the types of content that you can. And you know, once you've got that under your belt, then people you know, might be willing to, you know, if you have another great idea, another insight that you want to play upon, it's also a great use case for you to be like, Hey, you might be scared about this. But remember, when we've tried that, and you know, it doesn't always work, sometimes you kind of you're like, oh, that missed the mark. But you can only figure that out if you are willing to take those risks and try those different, you know, ways that you want to tell your stories.

25:40 VINCENT

Yeah, I think the only other thing I'll add to this is just like, thinking about, like, the goals for your franchise. And I think a common theme you'll see throughout the gaming industry now, nowadays, at least from my perspective is a lot of publishers and studios are heavily investing into world building. And so obviously, you know, right, it's probably one of the first ones out there in terms of like, showing true value in terms of, you know, what it means to build a world around, you know, Liga legends and how its extended to different mediums across the gaming industry in terms of genres like CCGs, and

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auto paddlers to now, you know, for media. I know, on apex, you know, one of the things that we think quite a bit about is, you know, how do we, you know, every single new character that we build, takes, you know, potentially up to a year even more, and a lot of that is around making sure that the character makes sense in the universe, and that it's someone that we feel players will fall in love with.

And after players play your game, and you collect, you know, a lot of that data and insights, you start to get a sense of, you know, what characters players like, or like, what they like about your game. And when you invest heavily into characters, you'll find oftentimes that players naturally just get invested in your characters, whether that's because of the play style, you know, who they mean, in, you know, teams, all those type of things. And, you know, over time you start to earn that, call it I guess, right? To explore different mediums, and especially as you start to kind of take risks and try different things like maybe doing shorts interest, your characters, you kind of see where audiences engage quite heavily with. And, you know, naturally as you build your franchise, you want to think about, you know, to Abhi's point earlier, like, we're, you know, where there are, where your audience is, and what they like, and, you know, obviously, adjacent the gaming, right is media entertainment. You know, we saw in our audience data, a lot of people were into sci fi, fantasy anime. And so, you know, things like what arcane did cooking come naturally through just basically the amount of investment that they put into building out that world. And so, yeah, it's interesting to see kind of how you're starting to see a lot of different publishers, and studios come kind of get into that call it long term strategy.

28:09 MADDEN

The last thing that I'll add, I think everyone hit the nail on the head. I think the tactical limitation point is, the act of actually building this media is requires a very different skill set, obviously, but I think even as a game director as a narrative lead, you know, when you ask the question, how you say what formats best to tell the story, your story is going to change depending on what format it's you're publishing in, right? And from a, even with a game plan perspective, like, where are you putting the camera over your characters? Does your game have characters? How do you get those emotional beats? How are you okay with that? How do you set the story in which the players can be self directed, where they can take multiple paths throughout it? Like leaning into that interactive part of entertainment? Versus like, you know, you're watching a movie? So even like, you know, like, let's talk about like Star Wars, right? Like a Star Wars movie is very different from like, Jedi Fallen Order, right, which Vincent's team does and, and how you have to tell those stories and structure the stories around the the actual entertainment product that you're building, taking into account while you're building it out. So yeah, it's obviously different skill sets, different disciplines, but sort of similar.

29:29 ABHI

I think, I just wanna say, Madden, what I think is super unique to gaming versus like film or podcasting. It's, it's no, no, unless you're like in a franchise, no two games are the same. Like film filmmaking is

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standardized. There's like a gaffer and Best Boy like they're a director and everyone has their role on set. They know what they're doing. See, we would like podcasting like you have, you know, there's kind of a standardized process in gaming we like aren't even aligned on some some of the terms that you use and like, do you call the gray box? The black? Like, you know what, what is a producer? What do they do? Right? Like it's still so like called early in the industry and no one game is made the same way you're using different technology, different engines. So gaming is like totally call it unique in the in the production sense. If you are making a game, it is truly a, a lot of things have to go right for it all to congeal until like beautiful art, and, you know, a great gameplay experience. I didn't want to just double touch on that, like that's something to know about the industry.

30:44 STUDENT

I'll ask my question next to thank, first of all, thank you all so much for for coming to talk to us, really appreciate it, and to continue some of the conversations that have been had about marketing, how does the marketing for video games differ from the marketing for other industries? Are there particular aspects that are more challenging, or on the other sort of side of the coin aspects that are particularly engaging?

31:13 LESLIE

I'll start with an easy an easy answer. And then I'll let everybody else chime in all the hard parts. Pros and cons, you have a very, very passionate consumer base, who will tell you very quickly whether they like what you're doing, or whether they are not liking what you're doing. So, you know, I think it's one of the joys honestly, of working in consumer marketing that I think is truly consumer marketing, right? Because I think you hear about like CPGs and all that, but that you're selling to the retail retailers and other people here, you know, I put out a trailer, I can tell immediately if the you know, community is in favor or if they're like, We want your heads we hate the marketing, you know, team for this. So I think one of that's one of the two differentiators because of course, yes, you have fans of like passionate franchise, you know, Star Wars fans, of course, Star Trek fans, you have these passionate fandoms. But I think for a lot of people gaming is truly an extension of their identity. You know, it's not only how they spend their free time, but it's really who they are their social relationships, right, so many people are like friends with their, you know, online, teammates or kind of all those elements. So I think that's one of the most exciting elements about it. I will also out myself here that I'm not a huge gamer. So I it's, it's the not the dirty secret because I would say at Ubisoft we do have a wide range of people that have different all different interests. But I think that's been one of the joys to have of discovering kind of, you need to know the research, you need to know what they're saying what they're, you know, concerns are, what are you doing that's going to address those things, while still, you know, ultimately getting to your end goal, which is usually in our case, unfortunately, selling more, you know, selling more units, you know, getting people to buy more things, getting people engaged in our ecosystem and to stay there.

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So I think that's truly one of the most elements were like, I know when I first started honestly, it gave me I was like, Why do they call them communities and not fans? I was like, you know, they're just fans of our games. And then once you start working in there, you realize no, no, these aren't just fans that are, you know, passively consuming or doing whatever, they are deeply invested in the product, the experience, they want the best for the game, their experience, but also for other people that you know, they want to join in and, and start playing with and experiencing the game. So I think honestly, that's one of the biggest differentiators that I felt I worked in TV before. And I think it's very different in terms of how closely this community is and how attuned you need to be because it can, it can go south very quick. And obviously, once you break trust with your community, it's very hard to build that back.

33:52 ZSOFIA

Yeah, I'll add something similar, Leslie. I think the other thing to know about this audience is it oftentimes, you know, they're very attuned to this space to the industry, which means they're highly allergic to marketing hype or anything that presents the game in a way that isn't realistic, or applicable for usage like right now. And so a lot of the things we explore are around elevating, like the best of the content in a way that is truly aligned with what you can experience today. Versus in other spaces. I've actually worked on the hardware side of the marketing too. It's often kind of really showcasing the beauty of the hardware and how you can bring it to life in an emotionally compelling story that isn't necessarily just directly the image of the headset itself. And so it's really grounding yourself in like, how is this real? How can we showcase like what it's actually like to use this thing and then tell that in a way that's compelling to the audience. So super similar to what Leslie says.

35:12 VINCENT

Yeah, I'd say the one other thing is just on the community side, just actively managing communities and getting people to put put down their pitchforks on Reddit can be quite challenging. And especially since you know, gamers aren't, you know, gamers are very smart, they're very savvy, they will abuse your system, they will break your game, they will find the smallest things that you can find in QA, and they will basically rip it to shreds. And that news will spread like wildfire across you know, Reddit, Twitter, Instagram, etc. And it is interesting to see how something that's small can blow up quite quickly. And people who haven't even experienced that bug will still crucify you for it, because that's what they're reading on Reddit. So it's a, it's always a fun problem to solve. But yes, it's kind of a balance balancing act.

36:08 MADDEN

Yeah, I mean, I have to do a huge plus one for Vincent. Um, yeah, I think especially during launch years, you deal with a lot of social media shenanigans and stuff. So I mean, that's probably the part that's like, the hardest. I at the same time, when you get a gamer to say they like your game, it's like one of the

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biggest compliment you could ever get in your life because it's it's hard fought. And it's it's it's and you know that that person is someone who's going to really engage your community from then on. So it's like Vincent said, I think a lot of the work that we do, when we're talking to our communities is really management, in the sense of how do we get feedback from them in constructive ways, you know, how do we when we know that we've fallen below the bar that we set for ourselves, they start first, how do we effectively communicate that back out, and those are all the kind of tense time it's just, you know, we have a bug we didn't find, you know, everyone dreads like how that could not find this. And you have to be really honest and open about that. But I think in on the flip side, I think the industry as a whole and mediums, wishful thinking is becoming more sympathetic to developers. And almost like, kind of what Leslie was saying, Once you gain that trust, there's a lot that your committee can let you go or get away with in the sense of, you know, shipping things that you thought were ready or aren't ready yet. You know, they'll give you time and space to get those things fixed. But yeah, but yeah, I guess kind of amalgamation of everyone said, but it's, it's, it's rewarding and hard, just because if people care a lot, I guess it's been if they didn't care at all.

37:49 ABHI

I'll add one last thing. Just the opportunities for marketing are like very diverse in the space. There's so many different audiences. It's a, you know, \$150 to \$200 billion industry, you have mobile gamer, people play on different platforms, PC gamers, console gamers, mobile gamers, different types of genres that we touched upon. You know, VR AR, with Zsofia is working, there's just so many different audiences. And again, just knowing who your customer is such a unique challenge in the space. And yeah, there's stuff, right, if you want to pursue marketing, this space, there's a lot of different kind of avenues to go through.

38:32 LESLIE

I will just plus one, that it's also just fun, we're in that we're in the business of fun, right? We're in the business of bringing entertainment, joy, like literally all of our missions is to make people's lives happier and better. Right. So I think there's a nice undercurrent to, along with all the business stuff, like one of the projects that I worked on when I was at Ubi, when I first started was like literally building a life sized woolly mammoth. Because I worked on a game that was called Far Cry Primal, and I was like, what it what did I just walk into, like, what is this and it's that reminder of like, we're in the business of fun. And that's, that's a fun part of the marketing, you know, that we're doing as well. It's always supported by insights, like so much of those insights, research data, you know, to prop it up, but you do get to have, I think, a wider window to kind of play in and have fun with because it's really about ultimately, like bringing joy to people and enriching their experiences.

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39:27 STUDENT

Hi, good evening. Thank you for coming. My name is Ivy. Taking a more sentimental route, was there a defining moment or experience during your time at Duke or during your career to lead you to your current career path?

39:47 ZSOFIA

I can start I had like no idea what any of the things we were talking about was like literally not like all these words would I just wouldn't be sitting here and I wouldn't understand anything that was being said. So I think for me, the biggest, it's, it's not a regret, but I'm so glad that you guys are like exploring this and understanding that it's not you, you don't have to go into like, a standard career and, and, and, like, and to me when I was in college that was like consulting, finance, like, you know, Doctor lawyer, but I kind of felt like that was the set and I didn't really understand there was anything else out there. Um, so I guess that's my lesson. For me this moment of like, wow, I want to do this was when I was in San Francisco and like trying to understand like, what technologies are out there to get involved in?

Actually fun, funny story. I remember at Duke, I had to fulfill a quantitative science course requirement. And I said to myself, Okay, I can take Intro to comp psi, or intro to game theory. And I thought to myself, like, why would I ever need to learn how to talk to a computer? Like, that's ridiculous. I'm gonna go take Intro to game theory. So like, that's how bad it was. So then, I was in Silicon Valley. And I was like, wow, there's all these like, robots and self-driving cars, like, wow, like, what should I do, and I put on a VR headset. And I actually felt like, you know, everyone, when they first put on a headset, if you haven't done it before, the first thing you do is you like, look down, and you see your hands. And usually they're like, animated. Like, in this case, I was a skeleton, it looked down, and my whole body was like, a skeleton, I was like, I actually feel like I'm in this game in this experience. And that blew my mind. And I just like research, research, research, and I want to be involved and kind of got lucky. But I would say the hard work definitely helped. So my pivotal point is hard work and passion, I think, is my tip.

42:10 VINCENT

I say for me, you know, going to business school at Duke. Everyone, a lot of interesting personalities, I wouldn't, I don't know if this is necessarily like a one defining moment. But I think, you know, you go to business school, you meet a lot of different folks who are, you know, into a bunch of different things. And I think gaming is not too common, you know, people like tend not to play in stereotypes too much. But, you know, a lot of people are into like golf, and drinking and, you know, sports and just all these type of different type of things. And then I remember meeting one of my classmates, like, this was like, way after it started, and then finding out that he was a big World of Warcraft player. And, like, I remember just like literally sitting in, like one of the classrooms, and then we just like talked about it for like hours. And I know, it's just one of those realizations, like, yeah, you know, like, games pretty

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dope, like, I'm a huge gamer, myself. And so, you know, for me, it's like, I always just gravitated towards like the one person that happened to play the same game that I was playing versus, you know, trying to fit in with other things that I wasn't as interested in. So that basically just solidified the fact that like, yeah, maybe I should try this gaming thing out. And I also worked at EA before business school anyway, so I kind of had that going. But yeah.

43:34 ABHI

Yeah, plus one, just like, I don't, I don't think there was a defining moment, I kind of agree with what Zsofia has said, like, Duke is known for pumping out like engineers, doctors, lawyers, you know, finance, consultants. And it's like, if any kind of arts exposure existed, it wasn't gaming. It was more so Film TV, like news. And so like, gaming is kind of slept on. Candidly. And it's even though like this, yes. CEO, Epic Games is like literally in your backyard. The people that make Fortnite are a 20 minute drive away from you all. And yeah, it's just it's crazy, kind of how mitigated and not present gaming was like when I was there, and I don't know what it's like today on your campus, and what the presence is like, but yeah, I'd say like, if you're interested, there's definitely a ton of opportunity. And yeah, don't be afraid to go for that kind of go for that path, whether it's a publisher developer, a company like Microsoft, more a platform, so to speak. Yeah, go knock on Tim Sweeney's door. While you're there. Take advantage of the of the opportunities. Don't tell him I said that, no, I'm kidding.

45:00 LESLIE

Go ahead, Madden. Oh, no. Yeah, I was actually picking up on something kind of you said, when you first got to Microsoft, you're working something different. I think the other angle to that I would say is kind of like, it sounds way easier to do this. I can say this because I'm not in school right now. But like, try not to stress about the things too. It's like, I am fully aware of how like, yes, like, as a person that's been out of school for a while, but, you know, I, if somebody asked me 10 years ago, like, Hey, are you gonna work in video games marketing? I'd be like, that's a no, you know, I never saw this in my path. And I don't know how, like recruiting works. At Duke. As mentioned, I went to a liberal arts college like, so we didn't have any kind of thing like that. But at Fuqua companies came on, and you could basically submit your resume to be selected for an interview, and I've submitted my resume for Microsoft, I didn't get picked. So I was like, that's okay. You know, whatever. And at the time, at business school, there was basically like a raffle that you could enter. So if you'd gone to enough like company presentations, you basically accumulated points almost. And then you could put those points and be like, hey, I want to, you know, add these points in and essentially raffle for a spot. And so I did that. And I got an interview with Microsoft. So like, everyone, I know, when I was like, recruiting everyone was like, how to get an interview, how to get in, I was like, literally pure, like, 1,000% pure luck, like, it was just pure luck.

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And, you know, when I first interned at Microsoft, I was in the Microsoft Office Division, like something completely unrelated. So a lot of things I think, can happen through happenstance, I would definitely echo kind of just hard work. Like, if you're like the fact that even you guys are like, on this, you know, taking advantage of these resources, like listening to these panels, talking to people, I think makes a huge difference. Because those inroads can really like show people like, Yes, I'm interested, yes, I want to learn more. And a lot of it is, you know, sometimes it's it's chance, and it's luck, like, again, a random raffle. But it's also to like, to having the conversations with people learning as much as you can, so that, you know, if someone's like, Hey, what are you interested, you kind of like, have a sense of what you know, you want to pursue or what you're interested in. And then I would say on top of that, like, don't feel like you need to figure it all out right now, too. And, you know, I think every person feels like that when you're coming out of college, you definitely feel like that coming out of business school, you definitely feel like that, like, people change jobs all the time. Like, I'm sure you guys are seeing it, you know, everywhere.

So just really try to focus on like, Okay, is there something that you want to learn? Is there something that you want to get interested in? Yes. Okay. Now, you're like, I tried this not really my thing. I want to now try brand. And then you know, you can pivot and do that. So I think it's also to being kind to yourselves, too, and not feeling like you've got to figure it all out now. Because this industry is constantly evolving. It's constantly changing. I mean, even the fact that like, everybody's talking about the metaverse right now, and like nobody was talking about the metaverse five years ago, like this, right? So just be willing to adapt and be kind to yourselves, too, because there's already a lot that you guys are dealing with, with school and everything like that.

48:08 MADDEN

Yeah, it's huge echo everything Leslie said, I think you spread here, everything I was going to. I mean, I, like I said, went to normal parts of Microsoft, like normal, less fun parts of Microsoft and completely, unintentionally fell into gaming. I just happened to me, a few folks from the gaming org, and they're like, oh, you know, that job you're doing at normal Microsoft, you can do the same thing in video games, and it kind of blew my mind. You know, when you think about gaming, it kind of seems like a weird thing that can't legit be a job. And the fact that you guys are all here talking to people who are working in the gaming industry, like I would love something like this, when I went to Duke, but kind of going down the same path. Like there's a lot of opportunity in the gaming industry. And likewise, you're saying I wouldn't stress about, you know, trying to find the right set of skills or if everything figured out right now, but just leaning into that passion, knowing that you want to be a part of it. Networking, you know, immensely helped. I think like, like we're saying like the industry is exploding. So the last space for a lot of people. It's just getting out there doing the hard work meeting, folks, and I'm sure I'm sure you'll you'll get in.

Transcript

49:26 STUDENT

Hi, thank you all so much for coming. Speaking you know, you know, adaptability and just getting ready for the opportunities that come your way. I was just wondering how you would say that, like backgrounds and stem have led to entertainment and just being prepared for what comes?

49:50 MADDEN

Yeah, no, I think I think it's been huge. It's kind of goes hand started just saying. My only like qualifications for working in gaming was literally nothing just like I knew tech in being a PM in another work and kind of using that to leverage into my role now. So I think maybe taking a step back, like, get interactive entertainment is inherently a tech, a tech, an exercise in technology and art. But the tech is laden, everything that you do there. So the, How did to help me get it, I think it was the only qualification I had to take to be in those rooms. So if that's something that you're interested in, like a stem perspective, like, I would definitely lean into that. I think it opens a lot of doors in the gaming industry, whether you it doesn't even lead to just like you know, for example, if you're taking ComSci and you don't have to do a level architecture right and those of those my worse ComSci class why I went to do cuz I was scared. I was all the tech though there wasn't gaming industry, but, you know, engineers who work on artists, pipelines and rendering on graphics on flowers, grass sky, like you know, there's there's so much spaces in which you can leverage that technology to kind of look into what we're building is audio, you know, the list goes on and on and on. So I think the background stem was was really pivotal. I think it's the only reason that I was able to work here. So definitely lean into that.

51:28 ABHI

Good to hear from you know, other folks that are like, Leslie, mentioned degrees, kind of in non-stem, I'll just say like, you can break into gaming, it just depends which part you want to be in. But you can also break into it if you are non-stem as well. Yeah. Particularly on the marketing, branding and kind of product like producer side, I think it's, it's still pretty, like your project management and organizing teams, and coordinating and leading people is like, not something you necessarily need a specific degree to do. It's just something that you could get leadership and experience with over time. So yeah, the path there could be not straightforward, I think as folks invention, but yeah, you can also totally work in the gaming industry with that non-stem as well.

52:26 ZSOFIA

Yeah, the only thing I'd add to this is Alyssa kind of opposite of your question. But I'll take a lead on this. I was very focused in like a finance track when I first graduated. And I was a history major, but I kind of balanced it with econ. And I spent the first few years of my career really focused on economics,

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financial analysis, and all these things. But I quickly realized that no matter what I was looking at, these numbers, like weren't doing it for me, like I wanted to tell the stories behind the numbers, I want to really understand what is with this defaulted RV loan that I was analogizing, analyzing. And so I went back to my roots, which is in history, and I went to like the New York Public Library to figure out what the hell I want to do, because I was so attuned to like books at the time, I don't know if you guys still read books. But that's what I was doing when I was in college. And so I found this space of marketing. And I found performance marketing, which is all about numbers, and brand marketing, which is all about how do you exude this ethos, and this feeling and everything that we do. And so I kind of self taught myself in that space, I read all these books, again, looked up all these articles online, online networks, which was huge thanks to the Duke network, and then landed in brand marketing overall. So I think it's like, easy to think when you're in college, you have to like pick this one path. But it's really not the case, especially when you're like two years out of school, you can kind of like, move around and like figure out what you want to do. So if anything, I might just leave you with that, as well.

55:19 STUDENT

Hi. Um, so my question is, for those of you who have, like, have MBAs, kind of what was the most valuable thing that experience gave you or kind of the most valuable thing from your time studying for the studying for your MBA? Yeah,

55:42 VINCENT

I think for my, like, the MBA. And I mean, I'm sure this is the same for undergrad as well, for you all, but the MBA you have a lot of really interesting people with different personalities who basically come in from the top of the industries. And so, you know, at least for me, like when working in marketing and brand, it is very cross functional, especially when you work at a highly matrix company like Microsoft. And so, you know, and especially as you start, you know, as you work in gaming, you'll start to realize, like, every studio has its own kind of personality or culture and different ways of doing things. And so I think the benefit from the MBA side was really about learning to collaborate and work, cross functionally, or work with different personalities, and be pretty agile, and just open to back and forth. And so there's a lot of soft skills, I think, involved that really helped me out. And then for me, I think, you know, transitioning to marketing, through my MBA was important. So I think when you work a lot, oftentimes, like, I think about strategic projects and whatnot. I think just having that framework and structure that the MBA taught me in terms of like how to think and approach problems, was really helpful. Especially, you know, I think when you work with folks who've spent their entire time basically, you know, working on a specific like feature or coding problem or things like that, like, it helps to have someone who can kind of make sense of the different pieces and pull it together. That addresses the, or basically presents a solution to what you're trying to solve for to begin with. So yeah, I think a lot of soft skills really helped me out from from that perspective. And I'm sure Leslie has a lot more to add to that.

Transcript

57:41 LESLIE

Yeah, I would, I would echo that, you know, I think when I went to B-school, I was like, I'm gonna learn all the business things because as I mentioned, I was an English major in college as an English and psych major, I did work in marketing after college, but I was like, I'm gonna learn, I'm gonna learn about accounting and finance and all those things. And I did and I'm, you know, I don't know, any of that stuff, or remember any of that stuff. But I, you know, I can hold my own there. But I echo definitely what Vincent said, I really wanted to go to business school, because I felt like I was good at the details. I was good at the execution. I was, you know, good with that. But I noticed that when I was looking at the leaders at my company, at the time, when they were, you know, in those more leadership roles and thinking more strategically, they all had MBAs, I was like, okay, that's gonna be a great way to learn those. And I think the thing is, is that I went to business school with the intention of like learning these hard skills, what I truly came away with, was understanding my own personal leadership style. And I think that that's something that isn't necessarily spoken about a lot. There are so many different types of leaders, I think I've traditionally have thought, oh, maybe I'm not a leader, because I'm not the loudest person in the room. I'm not the person that comes in and is like, listen to me, like, you know, and is that take charge kind of person.

And my experience in business school, completely changed the way that I view myself as a leader that I'm proud to call myself a leader. I know I'm a leader. And that leadership takes its form in many different ways. You can be a great and strong leader by being collaborative by not being open to communication, but still being very strategic, very decisive, when you need to be an earning people's respect in a way that doesn't have to be maybe kind of like the stereotypical, you know, way that people show leaders and movies are kind of popular culture, which is the way that I was shaping it a lot around that. And I think that at business school, you're giving so many opportunities, particularly at Duke at Fuqua, it's a very student led Business School Program, kind of like if you want something to happen, like go make it happen, because, you know, it's up to you. And I think the soft skills that are about you know, collaboration, working with different partners are absolutely there, but I think there's a lot of personal benefit that you can also get and that's honestly the thing that I'm most grateful for out of my B school experience.

1:00:04 STUDENT

Thank you. Um, I really loved Madden, I think you said, learning across the industry, I thought that was a really great statement. And I wondered, many of you have been talking about your communication style and communicating creatively through branding and marketing. Could one of you touch on how a writer would make kind of an inroad into the gaming industry, from that from a creative perspective?

1:00:39 ZSOFIA

Transcript

I can start with a few ideas. So I work with two kinds of writers. The first is a marketing style copywriter. And so that would be one path. And these folks usually do things like write interesting headlines or body copy for an email or social posts, or even come with a an idea of how we might bring a whole campaign to life creatively with language. So that's one path. And the other type of writer that I work with is at Meta called content designers. And so these folks are more involved in the product, they figure out like literally what every word in the product in the experience should be called, and how we should communicate to our players about where to go, what to do, what to see how to use things in the actual experience. And so usually I work with them to figure out like, how, what is the most easy way for us to communicate about specific feature in the actual game. And so those are the two types of writers I work with, I really value writers would really encourage you to explore those paths. Because they are very varied and very useful in this space.

1:02:17 VINCENT

I'd say any writing job that you would get potentially, like, in the traditional sense of like film and TV is also quite helpful, especially as a lot of, you know, game studios who are looking to really build their narrative muscle are probably, you know, probably in their long term map roadmap have plans to expand to non gaming mediums or avenues. And so, you know, for example, like when I worked on apex, our narrative lead his background, he basically was a writer in WWE, and some soap operas, I think he even like one me on something like totally random. And so just know that writing experience doesn't have to be just in gaming, it could be across other different avenues or mediums, whether that be as a copywriter on a specific, you know, any specific industry. But if you blend that with like your passion for gaming, there are a lot of ways to enter the industry from that perspective. So I think in general, just getting good experience in terms of demonstrating your strength in storytelling, and then also just bringing that passion for games is will go a long way.

1:03:35 STUDENT

Hey, I do have a question. So I know, I mentioned a lot about the development of like, the metaphors and all like the gaming and stuff. So with the rise of like NF Ts, and with the rise of investment in this field, where do you guys ultimately seeing? What do you what do you guys ultimately see gaming like developing into something like Ready Player One was like, everyone's kind of like, tune into it of 24/7, or like every second of their, I guess, like entertainment life, or is that going to be is that not like realistic?

1:04:08 ZSOFIA

So I can't answer this question, because I didn't clear all of this with our comms team. But this morning, I did listen to a podcast. The Daily from The New York Times, and last week actually, during the Activision acquisition, they did a whole walkthrough of like, What the hell is the metaverse and what is it going to look like? And I thought it was really useful because if you haven't listened to it, in it,

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they basically outline two paths. One is a very utopian vision of the metaverse where, you know, in the morning, you're walking around and you stop and have a coffee, a virtual coffee in quote unquote Paris, in the afternoon you meet up with your friends in, quote, unquote, Japan, and it's this like lovely experience where you can do anything from just the comfort of your home. And then they outlined a very dystopian path where, like, we're kind of all forced to enter into this one space and large companies kind of manage our experience and bombard us with a bunch of advertisements. And it's all about kind of being without agency in this space, and nothing that we ourselves can do independently. And so the conclusion of this podcast was that, probably it'll be like, somewhere in the middle, right? We're like, and that's usually where Tech High Tech kind of involves, like, there's these two extremes, and then kind of like something ends up with this route in the middle. And I don't know, but I think that feels like a useful resolve of like, what it would actually look like. But for anyone interested, I think I felt that podcast was super helpful and would definitely dive into that if you're interested in this space.

1:06:11 VINCENT

Yeah, Metaverse is interesting is just seeing gaming, I don't necessarily know if there's like a ubiquitous definition or universal definition of like what a Metaverse actually is, I mean, thinking about games, like, I mean, they've been around for a while, right, you know, back to like, Second Life and all that. But in terms of gaming, it's interesting, because if you think about a lot of like, MMO RPG is right, like Ultima Online, World of Warcraft, Eve Online, like, they all have kind of elements of, I guess what you'd see in metaphors, right? Whether it be you know, a 3d avatar and 3d world, you know, some even have developed their own political systems, in their own in game economies. And then, you know, think about, like, the motivations behind why people look to engage with meta versus whether that be, you know, escape real life or to, you know, spend it elsewhere where they feel that they can, you know, develop things like friendships or, you know, kind of build a legacy or whatever it is you want to do in the metaverse. It is interesting. It's still I think, kind of early to say. I mean, you start to see a lot of gaming companies think about their NFT strategy. And I think, in general, so far, like they've, some of the ones I've been publicly announced, have been met with, I'd say MCs responses, at least from what I've seen. So I think from a gaming perspective, there's still a lot of figuring out of like, how NFT's work in that space. You know, what does it mean to actually have a metaverse? So yeah, I don't know if there's like, I know, that's not really directly answering your question. But I think from, you know, just my personal standpoint, like there's quite a ways to go on the gaming front, until we start to see, you know, potential interest or widespread interest amongst our industry in terms of, you know, desiring to have some sort of like metaverse.

1:08:13 ZSOFIA

The only thing I'd add, and again, this is from that podcast, is that I think we kind of, we might disregard how much of the metaverse we are in right now already. Like we're connecting virtually online. Here. I think Leslie, you mentioned like, a bunch of people have true and real friendships in

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games, but have never met in person. And then on the other extreme, like people who ride their peloton are connecting with friends that they've never met, but they're doing this shared experience together. And like, all of those could be examples of, quote, unquote, the metaverse. And, and I think it'll potentially be like, more gradual. And not just from gaming, but but from all of the collective experiences of our, I guess, day to day use of the internet. So that's another way to think about it. And yeah, it was outlined in that podcast today. So yeah.

1:09:32 MADDEN

Yeah, I agree with Zsofia. And I think the maybe if you can kind of whittling it down, because what we do now is that the metaverse is gonna be centered around community. And anything past is kind of up in the air. And I think that that goes from whether you know, it's fully integrated avatars in the virtual world or if it's AR technology, with lots of companies announcing wearables coming out or you know, anything in between. But I think it's more so the push you already seen from gaming. I think games already kind of had their teeth in the metaverse for a while, where it's growing communities that are based around interactions and on the internet, keeping those folks engaged with each other. And yeah, I personally don't think it'll be as dystopian as, as some people think. But I think it just it just more and more ways to continue engaging with the folks that you want to whether or not you know them in, in real life or not.

1:10:33 STUDENT

Hi, I'm Taylor, thank you all for joining, I will definitely come out as someone who has, I think, a lot of weariness and hesitancy about how quickly technologies are advancing interactive media is advancing, and the difficulty of oversight, you know, and regulation to kind of like, keep the pace. So my question is how, how do ethics play into the development of interactive media? Especially virtual reality? Are the regulations in this industry to protect users are those inside of your companies or the outside of your companies? And then just to give you the chance to make the sort of other side of the case, you know, could some interactive media be tools for positive change? Could these you know, be tools to create a better world?

1:11:31 ZSOFIA

Hey, Taylor, um, I can't answer this question, again, because I'm not an official meta spokesperson on this topic. But you can definitely Google a lot of things that we're working on. Our team works on a lot of responsible innovation techniques and tactics to take this serious responsibility to heart. It's a lot of the work that I'm involved in as well. So we can, you can definitely reach out and I can send you some links to read about, but just because your question was framed about VR, I wanted to take the opportunity to, to acknowledge that, but I can't answer it right now.

1:12:17 LESLIE

Transcript

I'll chime in from kind of like, the overarching perspective, as someone who's not I worked on some VR stuff, but not definitely not to that level, I think a few things. One, I think for as much as people think maybe there's not regulation around just like gaming, let's say gaming in particular, there is actually a lot and I would say goes even from on the marketing side, like ESRB, which is basically, you know, like the ratings board for us, like they are very stringent about what you can put in your marketing trailers, you know, what it where it can go. So like, when you're on Twitter, right, it has to be completely safe for if like, not a child, obviously. But you know, it doesn't have to be, you know, a certain way. So like, there are parameters in place that are trying to keep in mind about like, how are people getting exposed to content? What are they exposed to? Of course, there are things just like movie ratings, right? Like, our movies are supposed to only be for 17 and up like 13 year old kids, like get in there all the time. So with gaming, of course, there's always that risk, right? Like, you can put an M rating on it. And for whatever reason, you know, somebody who's younger than the intended audience can get that, but there are definitely regulations and rules. I think also, too, you know, we were all speaking about how gaming is now just like, kind of part of the general entertainment set. So of course, there are going to be a lot of parties that are very interested in making sure that, you know, things are being having kept an eye on and doing all of that. I will say also, you know, for your other side of the question where it's like, you know, are things being used for good? Or is there a positive side to this, I'll speak to one game that I worked on when I was at Xbox, it ultimately got sunsetted basically, it ultimately ceased production, but it was kind of similar to Minecraft where people were building, you know, creating their own games.

And it was really used as a way for people to be like, hey, if you've always wanted to be like a games creator, here's, you know, a platform for you to do that. And once we decided that it was, you know, no longer going to be like a business venture. We actually worked with the Microsoft education group. And they, you know, I don't I that happened after I left. I'm not sure exactly how far it went. But it was basically, the conversations were like, Hey, can we use this as a teaching tool, right? So bring this takeaway, kind of the commercialization aspect of it. But what if we bring this tool to students, let them get you know, computer programming skills, let them you know, express their creativity, find different ways for them to use this. So I think there are a lot of ways that gaming and kind of interactive media can be used for good maybe it's kind of a pivot to what its original intention is but I think you do see a lot of organizations that are also branching out into maybe like sub you know, sub projects, too, that are focused on you know, certain initiatives. Throughout that, so I think it's definitely an evolving probably part of the industry. But I, I would be remiss if people and companies aren't aware of kind of the impact that gaming has on all sorts of different consumers and wanting to be mindful of being just like good positive stewards of people in the universe and in this world.

1:15:23 MADDEN

Transcript

Yeah, no, plus one. I think the I mean, to take that back, I think there's definitely a lot more work needs to be done. I think it's kind of the it's an open secret in the videogame industry that, you know, there was definitely some stuff that was that was able to fly back in the day that, you know, won't fly now. So I think there's a lot of work being done across the industry. And with government regulations, you know, a lot, we see a lot folks catching up more so to how we regulate content, and video games and enforcing some of those things. So yeah, I mean, I think the, the the short answer is more so that it's a big work in progress, right? I think gaming back in the day, you spec a rebellious little entertainment medium, and now that it's becoming as large as it is, you know, we see things like for example, we're shipping forward to you know, Australia had a recently before we shipped our game, they had like an anti tobacco law come out. So we have an in the game, you can like have your car and people can like draw whatever they want in their car. So we have like people like putting like Marlboro logos, or like cigarettes on their cars while they're driving. And it's like a huge issue we have to deal with where, you know, it's exercising, moderating content, happy monitoring for you which region, there's a lot of policies from the Chinese government that we have to adhere to when we're chipping games in that region stuff. So I mean, maybe it's not the best answer, but like people, it's all like all we think about these days, like I think it's it's, it's getting more and more to the forefront of thought. When it comes to like, video game development, I think before it was more so ship the game and then afterwards, make sure it's compliant. Now, it's a great end, like the DNA, the game, the writing the game design, like, is this going to fly in this world? Is this a good product for, you know, a child who might see this, even if it's, you know, red one way or the other. And then also investing in pipelines to all sorts of moderate communities themselves? I think it's kind of what you were talking about. But I am more concerned with less of like, you know, like large corporation takeover and more conservative, just like individual actors in gaming communities, just like being shitty humans. So we're investing a lot and just like monitoring content, folks, and making sure it's a positive environment when you when you enter those places, those spaces, but yeah, I mean, that's a good question. It's like all we saw we talked about these days. Yeah.

1:17:56 ZSOFIA

I'll add just one thing. Really quick, just because it came to me as you were talking Madden. On the positive change front, I think one of the interest like less directly answering your question, Taylor. But one of the interesting things with VR is that like, and with gaming is you can you can kind of be whoever you want to be, right? Like, I can make my avatar and certain what look a certain way, standard for certain way which Madden could totally be abused and be used wrongly, or it can be used to kind of experiment for your own self to explore different ways of trying new things that maybe you aren't so comfortable with, in the real world. And one of these examples, is using VR for fitness. So there's an app called supernatural that is all about using VR as a way to get in shape. And one of the woman who was an avid user of this app like, never felt comfortable in the gym, totally always felt like she was unable to get her groove on and therefore led kind of an unhealthy lifestyle, but ultimately

Transcript

found VR and this app and kind of grew her fitness regime through there, became very comfortable in the experience and now is actually a trainer. So she is a trainer in VR training other people to go on the same path. So I'm just like a really cool story of how this technology can be used for good that I wanted to, to raise and Madden and you brought up that point, as well.

1:19:46 STUDENT

Hi, thank you all so much for being here. Um, my question kind of relates to the sense of community and identity you have through virtual gaming spaces. And I was kind of wondering, in what ways do you guys kind of build the sense of identity in virtual gaming spaces? And what that looks like currently, and where you think that might look like what that might look like in the future?

1:20:09

Yeah, I mean, I think in terms of like, the current day, I think commonly, right, any, and I'm not assuming that what you mean by virtual gaming spaces, I'm just gonna think of it as like a social hub. So anything like a, you know, World of Warcraft town, or like Destiny's Tower, if any of you played any of those things, games, but I think right now, I mean, most of it right is around the cosmetics. Obviously, I think Fortnite is a great example of one that has just a range of, you know, different things that a player can equip or, you know, buy to Nxg express themselves in different ways. I know, you know, there's been a bunch of other different kind of initiatives, like when Microsoft redid kind of their Xbox avatar system, and they offered not just, you know, your typical, you know, profiles, but also offered ways to customize your characters so that they could have, like, an artificial limb, or wheelchair or just better representation in the space. And so, you know, I think, today and as exists today, a lot of that is centered around just different cosmetic categories. And whether or not you know, it chooses to be something grounded in reality versus, you know, within the games universe. I think there are kind of direct and indirect ways that companies are handling it. Not sure where it'll go in the future, especially as you know, this whole idea of a Metaverse potentially develops, but by no, you know, a lot more companies, gaming companies are trying to think about, like, sort of that next evolution of it. So, yeah, I know, that doesn't really directly answer your question. But at least, you know, I think that's kind of how I see it handled in today's kind of gaming space, but...

1:22:07 ZSOFIA

yeah, and just like, the cool thing about identity in VR is, you can actually see it, feel it, experience it. And so you'll hear a lot about the word presence, which is kind of like a fancier word of just feeling like you're there if you can't be there. And I think that kind of changes your lens on your identity, it means that you can, sorry, la helicopters. It means that you can like have different clothes, you can experiment with different body shapes and, and really kind of put that on and go from there. So I think that's just another layer to your identity that we can explore in Metaverse and in gaming overall.

Transcript

1:23:14 STUDENT

Hi, everyone, thank you so much for talking with us. My question is, how do you think the gaming industry was impacted by the pandemic? And how do you think it might change after the pandemic?

1:23:43 ABHI

Yeah, pandemic hit, people were inside. What do you do when you're stuck inside? There's only a certain number of options, right? So a lot of people you know, you probably, if you're following Media Entertainment, a lot of digital entertainment options saw pretty significant growth over the pandemic, because just by nature, globally, people were inside spending more time together their families, and you know, they weren't commuting to work they had a little bit more time on their hands, right. And so yeah, gaming, TV, any all sectors pretty much have if you were if you weren't a if you didn't experience digital, like growth as a digital entertainment product during the pandemic, it was odd. That's probably odd. That's like a weird thing. It's like because it's like you don't want to say oh, man, like we grew because of the pandemic right like that's not you know, pandemic games are not like something people. Really. Yeah, talk like that's just that that's never the the way to look at it. I think the way that we we try to think about it is like, hey, yeah, this tough these tough times when people are like Staying inside and like, need to connect with one another.

And yeah, they can turn to something like gaming and play with their friends. Right and, and maintain social connections when they can meet in person. And so actually that's like, why gaming is growing? Why you're hearing about things like potentially like the metaverse, right? It's like the idea of virtual worlds and kind of having social connections through games. And you know, why these kinds of zoom meetings and teams yeah, whatever, like, all this stuff is kind of experience a call it an acceleration, I think you're always on this path. I think the pandemic kind of accelerated growth, I think post pandemic. You know, the, the current macro trends are more people, more countries, more geographies are experiencing cloud digital transformation. They're getting access to smart devices, like your phones, or computers to gain access to internet where people are connected, more audiences are looking to connect via the internet. So you're going to see I think, yeah, gaming, and called Digital Entertainment. Continue to grow post pandemic, I just think, yeah, growth was accelerated by it might take macro tech, good to hear from others.

1:26:18 LESLIE

Yeah, no, I definitely agree with you. I mean, that was kind of what I was going to touch on too. So we're on the same wavelength. I think it also in addition to just seeing the growth, I think it just expanded the people who would consider themselves gamers, I think, you know, some people might have thought that a gamer is, you know, the male, the stereotypical male 18 to 34, who plays shooters. And I think a lot of people who maybe wouldn't have considered themselves gamers before jumped

Transcript

into that ecosystem. I mean, like, it was impossible to buy a switch. Everybody was talking about animal crossing all the time, right. Like, even if you weren't in gaming, I had a friend who like literally had no interest, but she's very pop culture savvy. And she was like, everybody is talking about Animal Crossing. I need to be part of this conversation. Like what's going on? Yeah, exactly. Wordle is like taking over everything. So I think it's really expanded, you know, who considers himself air quotes a gamer. And once you kind of have that gateway experience, like not to make the sound like gateway drug or something, but you know, once you kind of take that moment, and you're like, hey, I enjoy playing games, what other games? Are there different things, right, you start with one, then you start doing all these other things. And I think it can really just unlock a new set of hobbies for people, right. And for us, on the business side, it's great, because now we have more diverse players, new players that are just coming to gaming for the first time. So you know, taking a pure business lens to is like now I'm like, ooh, now you have a console, like, let me tell you all these games that you didn't pay attention to before, but then I want to make sure that you know, that you might enjoy and you might want to play now. So it also gives us kind of new life to some of the games that were maybe a little bit older, that are now experiencing kind of like a second revival. So I think it's been a lot helping to shift and adapt who our audiences are. And post pandemic, I think it's great, because once you kind of overcome maybe that mental hurdle of like, oh, no, I'm not a gamer, oh, that's not my thing to now be like, Oh, I enjoy that, then that just opens, you know, a lot of different areas for us to talk to these consumers, you know, reach out to them and have them engage with us in different ways too.

1:28:23 VINCENT

yeah, basically make gaming mainstream. I'm not sure if everyone else knows this, but like, I feel like nerd culture is basically at the forefront these days. Twitch has constantly said how much their viewership has risen. And you start to see like, during the pandemic, a lot of called the celebrities of the gaming world, were basically, you know, tripling their follower account. And so it's definitely, I'd say, changed a lot of, I'd say, the marketing strategy in the gaming space, too. Whereas the before, you might experiment yourself with, like, out of home, but now you see a lot of campaigns are handled very much from a digital standpoint. And obviously, you know, with influencers as a heavy component of that, you see, obviously, you know, people aren't going out and paying overprice you know, I guess, prices for drinks and whatnot. So there's a little bit more share of wallet. So you actually see, you know, microtransaction spend going up. So instead of buying, you know, \$15 old fashion, you can buy a \$15 fortnight pick if you choose to, but you start to see a lot of that. And I think, you know, to Leslie's point, like once people have, you know, essentially gotten hooked onto different, you know, titles and whatnot, they're more likely to stick around and you saw a lot of gaming companies use a lot of play at home initiatives where they're actually giving out a port, you know, a plethora of games for free. And so and so yeah, I think it's definitely put gaming on the forefront, and we were getting an Uncharted movie with Tom Holland. Right so I'm granted that was probably the worst For a while now, but anyways, it's cool to see it so mainstream.

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1:30:06 ZSOFIA

I completely agree, Vincent. Yeah, I joined Facebook now. Yeah, I don't Facebook like three and a half years ago, always in the quote unquote reality labs division, which works on new hardware. And I feel like we were like, talking about this, but to see it be to see like the word Metaverse everywhere. I kind of can't believe it. I can't believe that this is this is happening. Um, and I, I think it's because we we are, you know, in some ways the pandemic reminded us that we, we crave being connected to one another. And I think Matt and you were saying like, at the end of the day, the metaverse is all about communities. Like I think this is just like another outlet for connection when we can't get there. And it's something perhaps we're all hungry to unlock, just in case or, you know, hopefully just as a way to add to what we already have. So I can't believe it. It's been a crazy ride to be on.

1:31:29 MADDEN

I think one of the interesting things that also on Earth, right, like, as he was talking about how hard it was a guest switch, and I think like Oculus is just flying off the shelves like nearly everything, you can't get it kickin, Xbox or Playstation like to this day. We're seeing like these crazy, just demand for, like hardware devices. And we also the same time bunch of companies start investing in cloud capability, right? Being able to expand that player base and connect with people as long as they have device to the internet. So I think through the pandemic, and hopefully we'll see during the pandemic or after the pandemic a lot. The continued but a lot more emphasis on cloud technology, being able to stream a game just like a Netflix app, or Hulu app to any device that you own. I think it's probably pretty critical for how we expense like other regions like Africa, India, who don't really have that much engagement gaming yet, but I have a bunch of gamers like raring to go, basically just replace Wordle games with, you know, for Assassin's Creed or Fortnite or Apex. Yeah.

1:32:52

Amazing. thank you all so very much. Round of applause, virtual applause. Really incredible.

50:37 KEELY

Thanks for having me and good luck to everybody. And yay Go Blue Devils.

57:28 DAVE KARGER

That's it for this episode of DEMAN Live. I'm DAVE KARGER, DEMAN is a signature program of Duke Arts and Duke Alumni Engagement and Development. Follow DEMAN on social and stay updated at DukeDEMAN.com, that's d e m a n.com where you can find our full archive of episodes. Thanks so much for joining us. See you next time.

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This episode was produced by me, Lilly Clark, in collaboration with Hear at Duke, Duke's student run podcast hub. Our theme song is "Carolina" by Cameron Tompkins.

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