

TEAM PLACEHOLDER



Executive Summary

UCSC Business Design Competition 2011

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5/15/2011

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Introduction

In September of 2010, six computer science game design majors united around the central idea of creating a team based puzzle adventure game. The six banded together and Team Placeholder was formed.

Team Placeholder is an independent game developer that creates videogames targeted for Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade. The team's first game, *Journey to the Sun*, is a three player puzzle adventure game in which players must utilize teamwork and cooperation skills in order to solve puzzles and overcome obstacles.

Having expanded to twenty two members and established solid development practices while working on *Journey to the Sun*. Team Placeholder is ready to move production onto the next level.

Team Placeholder

Business Team

Christopher Vossen: Product Manager & Developer

Jesse Diep: Business Development (consultant)

Development Team

Tim Lindval: Scrum Master, Website Administrator & User Interface programmer

Hugh Katzenbach: Lead programmer

Elias Carrillo: Engine developer & programmer

Alex Lagarias: Gameplay programmer & Audio Manager

Jordan Galdo: Creative director & AI programmer

Christopher Vossen: Product Manager & effects programmer

Sound Team

Alex Lagarias: Sound Manager & Gameplay programmer

Thomas Anderson: Sound effects (consultant)

Peter Hunter: Sound effects (consultant)

David Schwartz: Music composer (consultant)

Art Team

Omar Alvero: Art Lead

Tina Chang: Associate Art lead

Jessica O’Handley: Associate Art lead

Sami Kiyono: Sprite Artist

Ryan Beck: Enemy Artist

Bela Messex: UI Artist

Amanda Lee: Artist (consultant)

Kirsten Anderson: Artist (consultant)

Michelle Tsang: Artist (consultant)

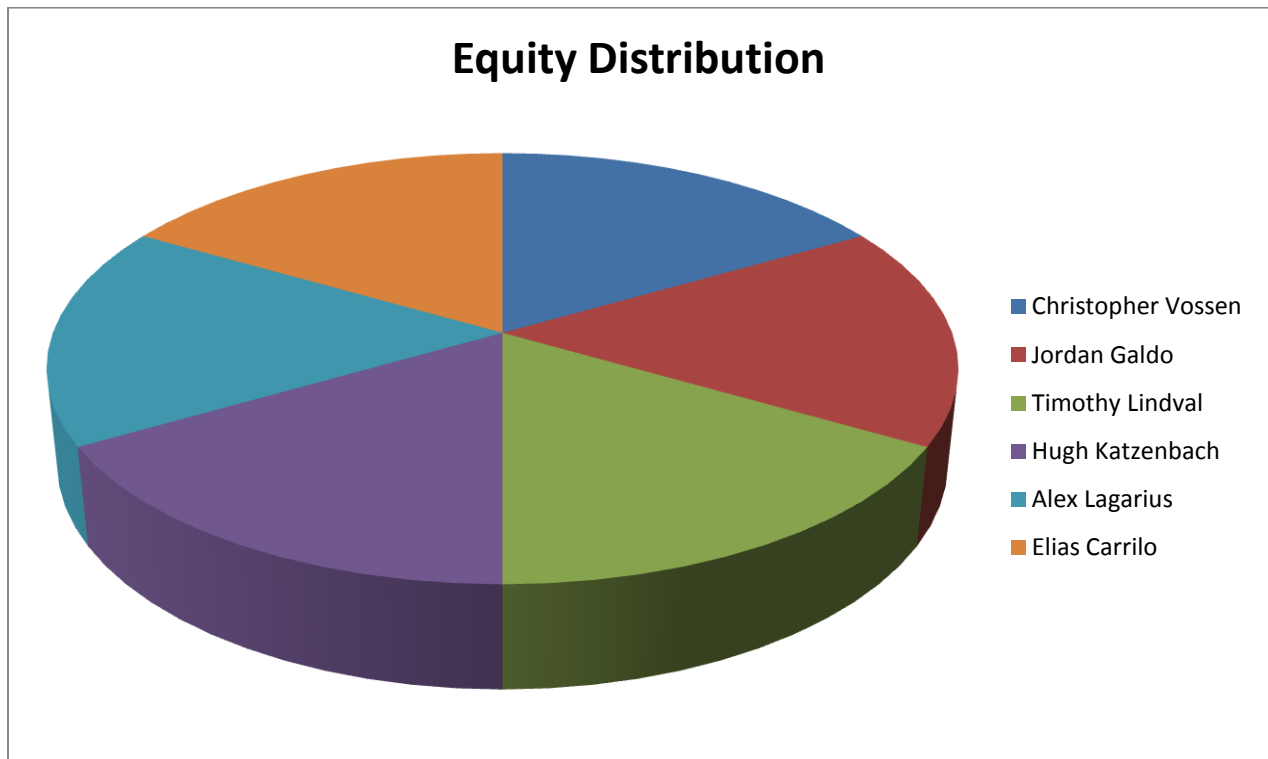
Peter Kong: Artist (consultant)

Jasmine Sien: Artist (consultant)

Asma Uz-Zaman: Artist (consultant)

Team Equity Distribution

Having started the company together and each member contributing equal amounts of work, Team placeholder's Equity is split evenly between the six founders.



Development Practices

Team Management

Team Placeholder is split into three main teams: Development, Sound, and Art. Each team is managed using a variation of the Agile Scrum methodology, a design methodology used to break large projects into smaller user based tasks. Individual teams are overseen by their scrum masters, managers, or team leads while the Product manager keeps ties and communication going between all three. The development team currently meets four times a week to keep updated on the games progress and to report on current tasks. The Art team meets three times a week to gain new assignments and to receive critiques on current work. The Sound team meets once a week as a check in.

User Testing

Team Placeholder prides itself with holding rigorous weekly user tests. The team runs through an average of six new testers a week, receives their feedback, and iterates design based on user responses. In the past month Team Placeholder has tested the game with thirty new users and have made appropriate design changes to make the game accessible to all levels of players.

Metrics

Alongside of user testing, Team Placeholder keeps track of the user's play experience using in game metrics. These metrics keep track of things such as: amount of time to complete a level, number of failed attempts to beat a level, and location of failure. By following the data Team placeholder can determine which maps are suitable for our target audience, if a map is too hard it is moved to a later stage, if a map takes too long to beat it is shortened. These tools allow for the level designers to maximize play experiences.

JOURNEY TO THE SUN

Product Information

Overview

Journey to the Sun is a team based puzzle solving experience set in a whimsical luminescent world. The game tells the story of three friends who set out to save their village by finding a path to the planet's surface. Players must coordinate and cooperate with their teammates in order to solve each puzzle and advance forward on the trail. Levels are bit-sized allowing for a quick, pick up and play, gaming experience.

Features

- Family friendly
- Easy to learn
- Cute cheerful artwork
- Original team based puzzle solving mechanics
- Quick bit-sized levels
- Multiplayer & Co-op enabled
- Provides a light hearted social experience for everyone



Technical

The game engine behind *Journey to the Sun* was built by Team Placeholder as a C# application using the XNA Framework. The XNA Framework is a toolset that enables game applications to be ported to PC's, Xbox 360, and Windows Phone 7. The engine is modular in design and flexible enough to make on the fly changes allowing for additions to the game be implemented with ease. *Journey to the Sun* boasts a “What You See Is What You Get” (WYSIWYG) map editor that allows for level designers to preview and test the maps they are currently working on.

Business Strategy

Overview

The Business Strategy of Team Placeholder revolves around three central areas: exhibiting *Journey to the Sun* at Independent Games festivals, releasing the game onto the Xbox 360 and scaling up Team Placeholder's production.

Independent Games Festival

Independent Game developers, or indie games, are smaller game companies that are not housed under a publisher. With the limited resources brought about by not being owned by a publisher, indie game companies hold festivals or competitions to bring much needed visibility to their self published games. Recognition is given to the top ranking games of the year along with awards for excellence in visual arts, audio, design, and best made student games.

Team Placeholder plans to enter *Journey to the Sun* in the following festivals:

- IndieCade, “www.indiecade.com” Submissions due by June 15th 2011
- Indie Game Challenge, “www.indiegamechallenge.com/home/” Submissions due by October 1st 2011
- Independent Games Festival, “www.igf.com” Submissions due by November 1st 2011

Pricing

If released on Xbox LIVE Arcade the full version of *Journey to the Sun* would sell for \$15 per download, with supplemental revenue coming from PDLC.

Premium Downloadable Content

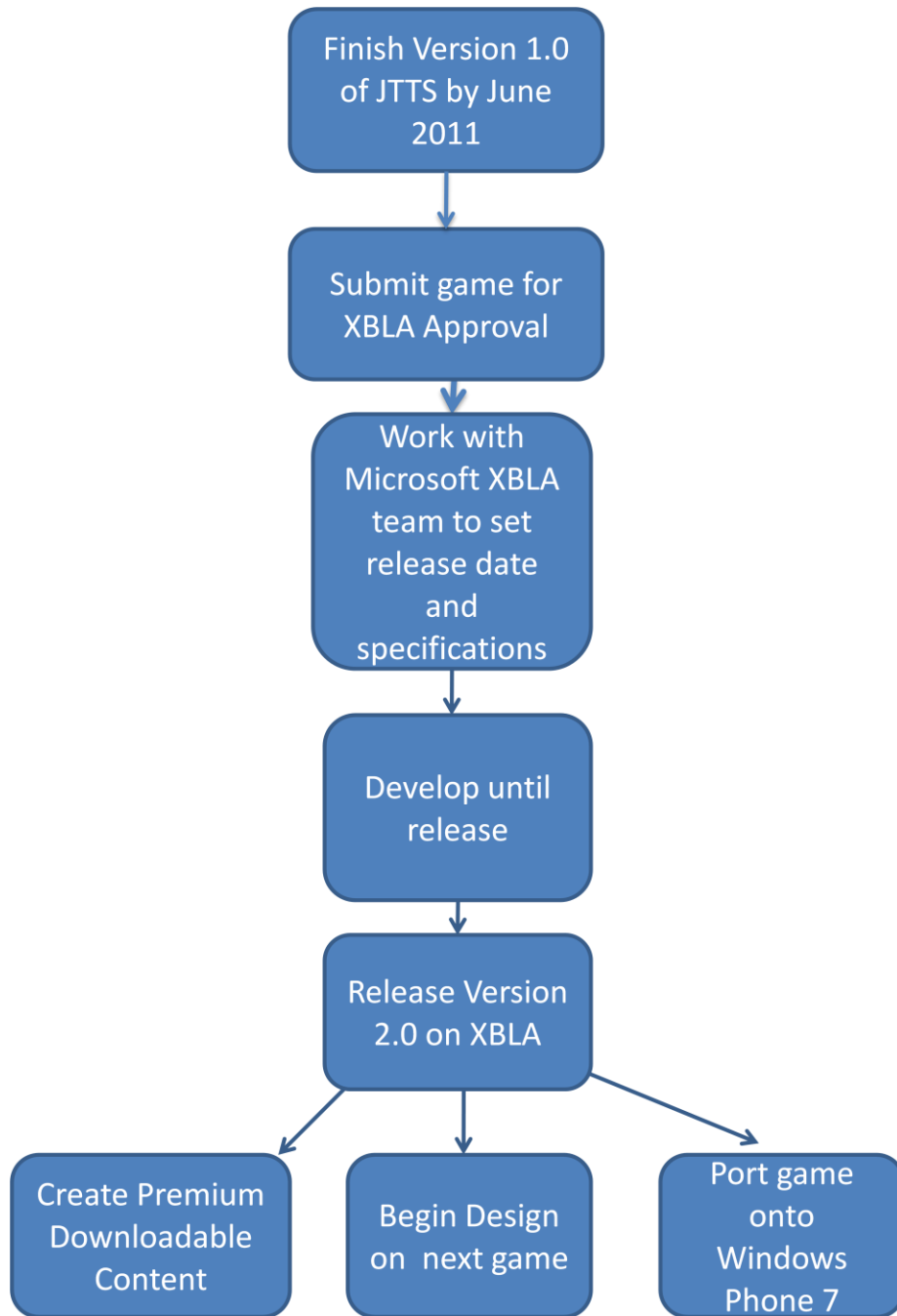


Premium Downloadable Content or PDLC are extra peripheral downloads that add content to games that are already purchased, these downloads are often micro priced at around \$1 - \$3. *Journey to the Sun* would release a series of new worlds every month along with more playable characters, new game modes, and new character skins (also known as costumes, see character above).

Releasing onto the Xbox 360

By June 10th of 2011 Team Placeholder will have *Journey to the Sun* completed to a semi-polished state. By July 1st Team Placeholder will pitch *Journey to the Sun* to the Xbox LIVE Arcade submissions team for approval. If approved, Team Placeholder shall work with an XBLA business development manager to cement a release date and review the qualifications for making *Journey to the Sun* XBLA acceptable. Before the release date, the team will work on any necessary changes or additional features needed.

After the games initial release Team Placeholder will expand into three separate areas: the creation of Premium Downloadable Content, Porting *Journey to the Sun* onto the Windows Phone 7, and the design of a sequel to *Journey to the Sun* or a new project entirely.



Market Information – Xbox LIVE Arcade

Overview

Xbox LIVE Arcade (XBLA) is Microsoft's premium online videogame distribution service that offers downloadable Xbox games. Compared to traditional retail titles, the games on XBLA are smaller, less expensive and cater to intense short-term experiences.

The XBLA channel provides three essential components for releasing *Journey to the Sun*: Visibility, Lowered costs, and access to the Xbox live audience.

Visibility

Xbox LIVE Arcade features:

- Currently over 30 million active members
- Access to 35 countries
- Over 850,000 daily transactions on Xbox LIVE
- Sales ranging from 30,000 to 500,000 units
- A condensed library of 376 Games

Lowered costs

- Online distribution means no manufacturing or retail costs
- No Shelf Life limitations: games remain on XBLA indefinitely
- Generous royalty sharing: 70% developer, 30% Microsoft

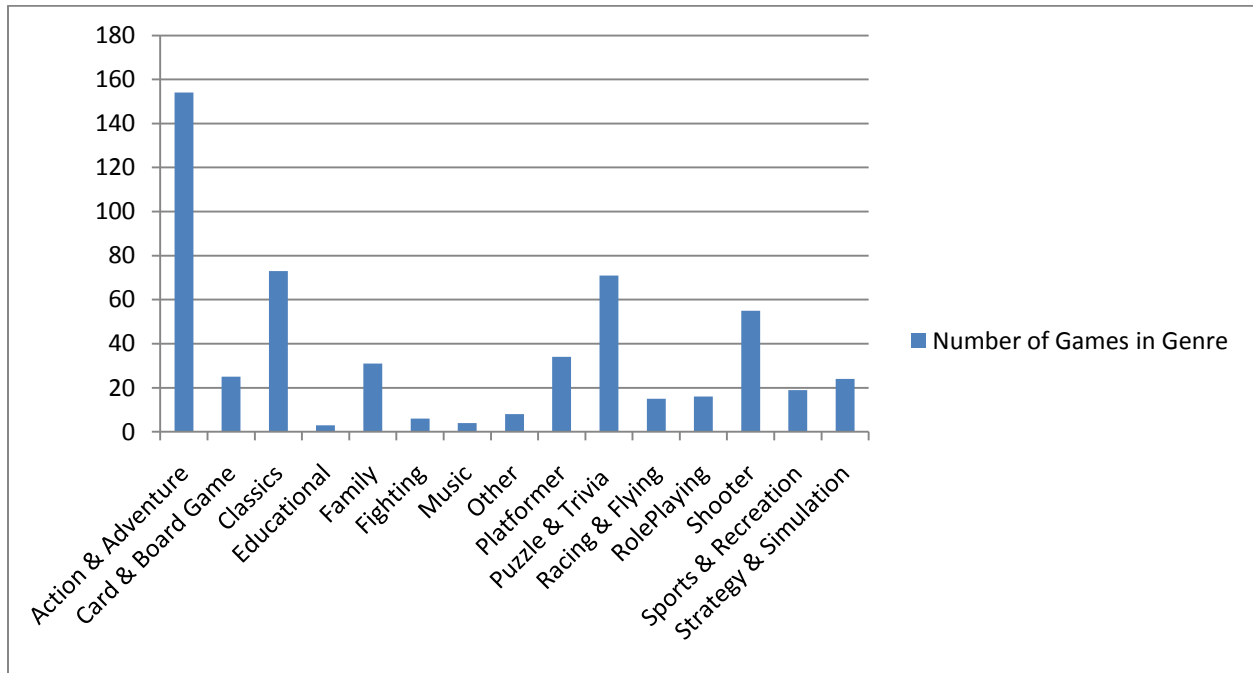
Demographics

Primary: "The primary Xbox LIVE Arcade gamer today is a highly engaged, dedicated gamer. They are usually short on time and thus looking for a quick playing experience. These players have a high propensity to pay, try new titles, and own multiple titles." –Microsoft casual games

Secondary: “The secondary/tertiary gamers in the household are wives, girlfriends, kids, and parents. The games that appeal to them are games they can experience alongside the core user (co-op).” -Microsoft casual games

The demographics of the XBLA users fit the target audience of *Journey to the Sun*. The primary user will be drawn in by the fast paced action and bit-sized levels, while the games co-operative game play and cute characters will appeal to the secondary user.

XBLA Portfolio



Journey to the Sun would be categorized under Puzzle, but has elements similar to that of the Action & Adventure and Platformer genres.

Barriers to Entry

The largest obstacle in releasing a game onto Xbox LIVE Arcade is the Microsoft XBLA approval system. In order to keep the service from being over saturated with games, Microsoft keeps tight restrictions on their XBLA game portfolio. To release a game onto the XBLA service, indie developers must adhere to

Microsoft’s 6 pillars of quality XBLA games and in addition the proposed game must not be similar to any current games in the XBLA portfolio.

6 Pillars of Xbox LIVE Arcade Games	
XBLA Games	<i>Journey to the Sun</i>
<p>1. Innovation Games must be unique ideas that bring forward new play experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original team based puzzle solving game mechanics.
<p>2. Gameplay Pick-up and play gameplay. Allows for bite-size entertainment experience. Designed for the ENTIRE family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to learn, start tutorial has been repeatedly refined through user testing. • Quick levels, average complete time of 2 minutes. • Family Friendly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No blood ○ Cute cheerful characters ○ Scaling difficulty ○ Forgiving, No lives or continue system
<p>3. Visuals Game must be visually appealing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses the new cutting edge visual technique of two-dimensional sprites in a three-dimensional world.¹ • Cutesy Anime style characters set in a whimsical bioluminescent lost world.
<p>4. Multiplayer Xbox LIVE online play integration. Local Multiplayer (2+ on a single console). Co-Op. Social Experiences. Offline gameplay.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journey to the Sun was built around multiplayer. • Capability of implementing online play. • Currently Support 3 player local multiplayer. • Have Co-Op play.

¹ This technique was recently made popular by the top selling games: Pokemon Black & White and Recettear

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a lighthearted on the couch social bonding experience. • Support Offline gameplay.
<p>5. Marketplace Paid Downloadable Content (PDLC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Levels & Maps. - Weapons & Character Objects. - Game Types. - Game Skins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our map editor allows us to rapidly create new levels and worlds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 – 2 days to make a polished level ○ 1 month to release a new world • Modular game design allows for us to easily add in new characters and special move objects. • Game is receptive to adding in additional game types: time trials, vs. battles, team races. • Game Skins require only minor tweaks to character sprites; we already have an assortment of character skins.
<p>6. Global Appeal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphical style appeals to comic book and anime fans worldwide. • No culturally insensitive material: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No blood ○ No Profanities or nudity ○ No Ghosts or Ancestors • Gameplay is not story or language driven.

Competitors

Similar Games

There is only one game similar to *Journey to the Sun* and that is *Trine*, a three player puzzle platformer, which was released in September of 2009 to rave reviews and essentially created a new genre of multiplayer puzzle solvers. *Trine* was released on the Playstation Network, Microsoft's Xbox LIVE Arcade's lead competitor. Since Microsoft currently has no games similar to *Trine* on XBLA, *Journey to the sun* can move in and become "Microsoft's *Trine*" thus adding a competitive edge to Microsoft's XBLA portfolio.



Financials

Use of Investment funds

1. The hiring or commissioning of an industry grade artist(s)
2. Rental of a live-in workspace for the team
3. Minimal living/work necessities i.e. food, toilet paper, and internet
4. Indie Game Festival Entrance Fees

SWOT Analysis

<h2>Strengths</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Large devoted team that has passion about video games- Low development costs- Unique and Innovative Video Game- Targeting casual gamers- Simple and easy to learn- Weekly user feedback	<h2>Weaknesses</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Creating complicated game- New entrant- Lack of finances- Timescales and deadlines pressures
<h2>Opportunities</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Access to large Xbox Live user base of over 30 million users- Rise in casual gamer- Video Game industry growing- Chance to partner with Microsoft again in the future- Xbox 360 user base still rising	<h2>Threats</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Must be approved by Microsoft first- Microsoft has majority of control of release details- Casual gamers hard to market to