

Tekstivastine Podcastille: Marketing Art and Content Creation In the Game Industry

Wanda

Welcome to the DGC podcast, brought to you by Expa Game Business Cooperative and Jamk University of Applied Sciences. I'm your hostess Wanda O'Rly and here we discuss game industry, game education and the bridge between them and any related topics and projects. Today in the studio with me is Alexander Razuvalov marketing producer and broadcaster ex-Red Hill Games and ex-War Gaming, welcome.

Alexander

Hi. Hi, everyone.

Wanda

And from Jamk University of Applied Sciences. Joining us is Sameli Rinta-Hirvelä, a visiting lecturer in 3D modeling. Welcome.

Sameli

Thank you kindly for the invitation.

Wanda

In today's episode, we will be diving into the career development options and tips for artists in the game industry. Our guest is not only an experienced artist, but also someone who has mentored other artists and been in charge of recruitment in the past. So let's just start with the basics. Alexander, please tell about yourself a little bit. Your background, career, skills and passions.

Alexander

Yeah. Hi everyone. Again. And thank you for having me here. So it's really nice to be first time Jyväskylä. Talking about my career I actually started, after my uni, I graduated, Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics, and I started my career, on a TV channel as an engineer. And after, like, several years, I just realized, it's not, like, completely for me. I just want to kind of grow more and TV, like, doesn't give an opportunity to grow. So I wanted to grow more in terms of the production, of videos. So that's why, I mean, it was in 2013 when I joined wargaming as a video editor and, I started my career, you know, making videos about the game and I just realized there's a huge demand of, like, you know, great specialists that can who can help, you know, like to promote game to games or like to promote everything, everywhere. And they just started growing there after like a year, I was promoted to, like, I became a team leader of the teams and I, like, was a team did for eight years or something in different teams. So, and for me, it was crucial not to, you know, like, have a title but to make some projects, which is like, can motivate people, to like what you do and, to motivate teams to, you know, like, be better. So, and after eight years of work gaming, I was, just technical director was, like, head of rapid production team. It was just another story. How we how we made production inside the

production. But, what I wanted to achieve is like, I several times say was at, Gamescom. And when I saw, you know, the players faces, how they smile and how we, how they like, content we make and the game we made. So they just, like, you realize why you do that. It's not about your, you know, like, self motivation or like, making something meaningful for yourself. It's about them. So and this way kind of, you know, put me here, I just, applied to several companies outside of Belarus because of some political things happened in 2020. And then after that, I just realized that I want to grow more. Maybe not in, like, hard skills, but in soft skills, because obviously, I was born in Belarus. I lived in Belarus for 35 years. And, I realized that there are no opportunity to work in an international company. And I wanted to work in any international company. And I applied to Redhill Games, which was like, great, you know, kind of move from Belarus to Finland. So, I just started making the same for another game and another company, and here we are. I'm still here, and, I like my life here in Finland and enjoy it a lot.

Wanda

That's great to hear and thank you for, elaborating so much so. So, again, like, very often with the professionals in the gaming industry have, who have been our guests before, they kind of describe how they have arrived to the industry from somewhere else. So with a different background. And that's usually the thing with the experienced professionals, because we haven't had this pipeline from education to games industry before then just a couple of years now.

Alexander

That's true.

Wanda

That's so, so, in in your work, as a kind of a broadcaster and, marketing art, producer. You've been working in game studios, obviously, but, can you tell a little bit like differences in perspective with that? How does the work of someone who works in marketing art, and these kind of, perspectives differ. That's from, game artist who makes art directly for the game.

Alexander

Well, yeah, the difference here is the purpose and the end result. So the purpose for game, artists are like purposes. It's like you need to deliver not only content there, but you need to deliver something. Talking with, I don't know, programmers, designers. And you need to optimize your content. It's not about, you know, making, the, like, some end result. It's about the experience, players feel. And, it's about more about feelings and about more of, I would say, limitations of the art you make because you can't, you know, make, draw a tree with, five millions of polygons. It's not necessary. But for marketing, you can. Actually, you just need to render it once, spend a lot of time. But anyway, so, it's, it's more about, like, different purpose. So marketing art, is all about promoting the game. Game art is more about the game itself. Experience. It just, you know, like different. Well, I, I can say there's like, different purpose for, for art. So that's why it's really, you know, like different because marketing artists should think of, like, alignment to the brand. They should think of, I don't know, like how to, deal with art director or with the brand itself just to, you know, promote your product. Game artists, are like, they're working more on, experience than just, you know, like some sort of, end result, meaning video or, advertisement or, like, image you make.

Wanda

Yeah, I think that sums it up pretty well. And, turning this to Jamk point of view, obviously the Jamk games education program allows students to specialize in programming, arts production aspects. But have the students identified marketing art also as a viable option of combining, like there are two skills and the kind of business development point of view. Is this something that is actively discussed in the studies?

Sameli

Oh, absolutely. And I personally kind of take any credit for this because this really is something to students because they not only make games in our program, but they also consume games. So they know from the get go that the marketing art is like a window, like a, like a store window to the game. So it kind of, how should I say real customers in this and they understand this as like, consumers themselves. So to speak.

Wanda

Okay. And, does this, kind of give more, like concrete examples of, like, how does this show throughout their, student journey? So how what what aspects do the artist when they develop, but basically incorporate in their studies? Are there specific courses for this or is it all project based or.

Sameli

I would say it's mostly project based. And they learn this during the project step process, from the starting point to the finish line. So they say they see that, in order to successfully market a game, they are gonna need some good marketing art. And as I said, it's going to be the window. The actual game. And that's the first thing that customers will be seeing. And, based on that, they will usually make the purchase decision later on.

Wanda

Yes. Yes, definitely. And, obviously, like all of us, everybody who works in the games industry are familiar with their media, but it's really very important to highlight this, like distinction between

Sameli

Absolutely

Wanda

What is the role of the artist. Depending on what you pursue. But, okay. Alexander, based on your experience, what are the viable career options for artists in the games industry these days? Can you evaluate on how they have evolved in the course of the past ten years or so?

Alexander

Well, it's a great question. I would say that nowadays people just need to know a lot. It's not about like, when I started my career as a video editor, I was just video editor. You know, I was I could focus on just editing, how to make cuts, how to capture materials from, like, your PC. But nowadays it just evolves a lot. Just people just need to know everything. And, it's more about, like, of course, AI generated things that as well, influence, a lot, different aspects. But anyway, there are several options or several, apps you can choose to, to follow and, well, there would be anyway. In terms of concept, in concept, artist is a way to, you know, like a developer skills or a 3D modeler or environmental artist or UX and UI, of course, with use and when, for example, you need to know not only how to build interfaces, but how to animate them, maybe how to make some, you know, like animation inside and how should it look in your project. And, yeah. Well, and anyway, technical art is always it was a huge demand. You know, we had a joke before, so, to find proper technical artists, usually you need to find, like, someone and teach him or her. But because it's it's not, like, really simple to kind of adopt skills people have to the project you have. So it's just something that you, you need to know and hire those who want to, to grow. Maybe it's the way for some technical artists and the same goes to the basics. But, we have a lot of indie studios nowadays. And, with indie, you can't really focus on something like on, on, on. One can bet on your like your skills and play with them only like the technical artist you can. You should wear a lot of hats.

Wanda

And just as a follow up question, do you find that this like a master apprentice kind of setting between like, more experienced and, junior artists? It's still the go to wait for, to build a, you know, your expertise in the games industry.

Alexander

Well, to build expertise. It's the thing I was thinking about while I was going here. And to build your expertise, you just need to do something. It's not about. You should just constantly make something on the everyday basis. You need to, like, open your laptop, your, like, start your PC, and you know, just just do something. So

Sameli

If I if I may add, you have to be interested in something, not just make something for the sake of it, but you have to be like actively feeding your own interest in doing things. I'm finding things out in this regard.

Alexander

Yeah, exactly, exactly. So you need to know, like what do you want to achieve first? And then you need to kind of build your just path how to achieve that. So there's of course there will be the gap always between, more experienced people and like less experienced people. But the key here is just you. You should focus anyway. And, you know, like,

Wanda

Yeah

Alexander

Achieve what you want to achieve.

Wanda

I'm just going to tap there. On what you said that you want need to know what you want to achieve. And this might be like when you step into the shoes of a young student, that they might not yet know that what is actually the career path that they want to take, but still, like being aware of these options, the different career paths. And what do they require, would definitely be something to start with? And if I turn this to you, Sameli, do you think, like these aspects that were highlighted, like, technical art, marketing are the concept art? All of these, all these different aspects, highlighted in the Jamk games education program and, what would be the best ways to incorporate these youth that Alex just presented to it into the professional upbringing of their students?

Sameli

Well, in my opinion, we tried to offer like a solid generalist foundation. And when you have that, you have this like ability to jump from one thing to another and, and just find new ways to develop your skills further in that field. So we are not trying to stretch our studies too thin. So we tried to offer and cater to everyone, but instead of have a like solid foundation from which draw and try and specialize in further studies.

Alexander

Yeah. And this is the why I'm jealous because I didn't have such opportunity when I was like younger when I was studying because, you know, I know that, Finland, or that Finland education provides a lot of, you know, like some basement for you as an artist to grow. And if you want to grow, you will grow. If not, you just need to probably choose something else. But anyway, the basement is great. So you have a great like. Yeah, we're sitting in, small studio, which has everything you need for like, podcast and for something else. So it's just, great thing that, you know, Finland provides as a country.

Wanda

Yeah, well, happy to hear that. And that's definitely an uplifting perspective.

Sameli

Yes. I'm going to be stealing that Finland provides, sounds really good to me.

Wanda

But I think like you mentioned earlier about like your soft, soft skills development and that's a great way to actually jump into the topic of, what are the most important skills beside, artistic skills an artist in the games industry should hone? And why?

Alexander

Well, I would say first. And the main, the major skill you have to have is collaboration and communication. So every game, every project that you are working on or like I've participated. So I, I had some projects, which I did alone, but, most of them are, you know, teamwork. So and talking about collaboration is the most and common thing that you should be first of all, flexible flexibility is the key. Sometimes people can be, you know, they have their opinions, they can be a bit stubborn in a ways. And like they just want to make what they want to achieve. But, it's always nice to have an ability to think of it from the first person and to understand, first of all, for who you are, you know, making something and then like how the audience would, you know, like, react on what you do. So not thinking about your personal, like, ego in a way. Yeah. But thinking of, like, what player, what viewer or whoever else your client will achieve with your project. So for me, it's like several freely base, skills, collaboration, communication and flexibility. And then do not limit yourself with, like one tool or one pipeline you are having just, you know, you you should just think of something on the edge to expand that. So back in the days in wargaming, we, like invested a lot of our time and effort making some projects in 360 videos. For example, we made some movie. It was 40 minutes movie in 360. Which we earned some, you know, award somewhere. But anyway, it was made not because we wanted to kind of, you know, achieve some award. It was we tried some new things to just if it became popular, popular, we wouldn't be outsiders, you know, we would know what, like how to use that. So I would say that's another thing. Yeah.

Wanda

Yeah. Again, very, elaborative, and any thoughts on, Alexander's answer?

Sameli

Well, I have nothing but agreement to all of those points. And especially as someone who has done, freelance work a lot in the past, I can see that the especially if I start with the flexibility thing. So you will always be facing customers that they don't really agree on your way of doing things, although you are the professional in that situation. So having flexibility and ability to to work with different kinds of people does not only apply to studios and working as a like indie developer with small team, but you also have to have it in all kinds of areas regarding 3D.

Wanda

Yeah, and I think this perspective that you both are bringing has to do with like obviously artists, have a little bit more, identity invested in their work

Sameli

Oh absolutely

Wanda

Than, for example, programmers. So, so this this becomes a very, very crucial thing, this, this flexibility that you both both mentioned about, like, added that it got to do with kind of not attaching yourself with the output too much or how would you how would you define this flexibility? I'm interested.

Sameli

I would say it has many aspects, especially because, as you said, artists usually. Well, to define themselves, this if you, if you ask a programmer what what have you been doing all your life, they are not likely going to be asked for me. All I've been being programmers since six years old, but if someone's been doing art, they usually have done it for them. For for their whole lives. And it becomes this great ego thing and you have to learn to put that side in a way.

Alexander

Yeah. And I would add here. So taking, in like consideration that, industry awareness and trends, for example, my kid once, told me like, hey, shall we make a game? And I said, like, what game do you want to make? And he's like, well, I want to make game about dinosaurs. And I ask him like, hey, what dinosaurs would do there? And like, start started asking more questions about. And he was so shy and he said, like, well, I don't want to make game anymore because it's like a lot of different things you need. I he, he needs to think about.

Wanda

Yeah.

Alexander

And the thing is here that then after like several it was like when he was like five years old, but now he said like, hey, dad, I want to install, this Roblox, engine to make something, to just try something. And if you open to something new. So it would be easy for you to just, you know, like, succeed, you know, because, I, I once remember when we, made a choice moving from traditional pipeline of CG, like making CG videos to, like an Unreal Engine or, like, using some, some unreal whatever. And people in our teams, they were quite against it. They were thinking it's not the same quality they wanted and so on, but anyway, viewer can decide if it's good or not. So. And the same with the experience of the game. If you make it with like really traditional approach. And then there are some companies evolved and became popular as Roblox I mentioned before. So it's just you kind of should should try at least, to kind of follow the trend.

Sameli

Yeah. And a good ad that, accepting new things for change also kind of a style of evolution. So being open to trying out new stuff you have never tried before, even though you might be, say a little bit shy or scared to try new things, it can open a whole lot of new doors, just like I said.

Wanda

And that's this, flexibility and kind of, inclination to try out new things. Does it also help kind of detach from that one single style and you're one kind of go to ego attached approach? Do they correlate?

Sameli

I do believe we can both agree on this.

Alexander

Yeah. The thing is here, I think you know, some of course, if you are a great character artist, it's really hard for you to just, you know, pivot your career into something else. So you should develop characters anyway. But to develop characters, it's not only requires like your artist skills, but character is not only about visual, it's about like story behind. So you can you can grow there. Just pivot your career into narrative stories about your character. And this is the same. It's a story about character because character can be great. Not only because it was cited from Marvel movie or from something else, but it's because, like, you kind of made the story behind and put a lot of effort. And also one thing to add I forgot about that is there are like several fundamental disciplines like, animation. So animation gives you it's like a vessel that gives you an opportunity to animate the character, to change his or her like characters, like view for players. And, it, it gives a lot. So, you know, when you, you make a model, with t-pose and then animated, it would be like different.

Sameli

Yeah. If I could like, explain this open a bit. So, for instance, even though the character model would be the same for throughout the game, but if they like will be changing the stance or the way they start to move in different scenes, the the players are going to be perceiving that differently. So it's one of those things that you can pour in stories into this blank vessel as, as you said, and create something completely new in that way.

Wanda

Great insights. So what I'm picking up here is that, as an artist, to grow professionally, you should be always kind of thinking one way or the other, kind of laterally. So. So what can I do around the mastery that I already have and expand on that? Whether it's like diving deeper into character development and bringing these different aspects or, so, so it doesn't have to be so fixated on the idea of what you've been doing. And for example, switching to animation, then gives you new perspective on basically the same assets,

Sameli

Yes.

Wanda

But you're working from a different point of view. Thank you so much. This is all very, very inspiring. I'm just cautious of the time. So I would now, dive into the last section, of our talk and, talk about a little bit, finding a job as an artist from the gaming industry. So, Alexander, how would you advise aspiring game artists to manage their expectations regarding career development? What what what must one be ready to face in the context of seeking a new job?

Alexander

Yeah. As my colleagues joked, run for straction, but no, please don't do that. First of all, I want to say that growth takes time, to develop your skills. We all probably know about this. You need to spend 10,000 hours, you know, making crafting something. But you anyway, need to, just, you know, only realize that it needs time. You can become great artist in, like, you know, in a second. And, yeah entry level can be an uninspiring. You probably need to focus on some, you know, like, assistant jobs. But it's part of the journey, in, in, like, it was my journey. And I think it's a great journey to understand if it's yours. Actually, Yeah.

Sameli

And if I may comment in this, it's really fascinating to see that, careers have taken such drastically different paths since Alexander has began a lot of these small gigs and built on his career from there. And in the other end, I have, like, started doing this, selling assets to businesses and doing, work with, individuals and small firms. So who can not really afford this entire studio in my freelance work, that is.

Alexander

Yeah, it's actually great point because portfolios gives you more than a degree, because degree is just so, maybe before like 15 years ago, we had troubles with, like, where to find and proper information. But now we have internet. We have everything. I have, I have two artists in my team who grew up as an artists, watching videos on YouTube. It's great, but it's true. You can find, the proper, you know, way to learn something new. But, then if we have, learning experiences everywhere. So it means that you can probably start making, the one advice I could give myself 20 years ago that I should start making something during my studies because I didn't I just, you know, I was, making parties and so on, but. Yeah. So, you need to just focus, on your portfolio as well. Taking freelance jobs, taking, some help helping others, to achieve, their projects. You're on it, like, high level and, portfolio gives you more. So my first, team lead in game development company was the guy who didn't graduated from the uni. So it really like it matters for like, maybe for, my girlfriend she's a teacher. For teacher or for doctor. It matters. To become a great artist, it's not only like education. It's your willingness to to develop.

Wanda

Any thoughts on this.

Sameli

Absolutely, agreed. I really cannot stress enough how important thing a portfolio is. And like, like Alexander said, even though if one doesn't finish the studies, the portfolio is going to be the key to so many opportunities. And literally that's usually the first thing hiring managers see. So the portfolio and how it's laid out, what kind of, different things there are, is it like is it diverse. Are there like characters environments whatnot and that's it creates a selling point. I used student or undergraduate can have.

Wanda

I think this is very valuable advice, especially about like starting to develop your portfolio already during your studies. Since this is a Jamk podcast, I'm going to disclaim here that, we're not encouraging the students not to finish their degree.

Sameli

Absolutely not. Don't do that.

Alexander

Please don't don't do that. You have here like everything to grow and spend your time just, you know, making something meaningful for you and for your future.

Wanda

That's very, very nice and kind words. And, since we're coming, coming to the end of it, I might run this, by the both of you, but any final words of wisdom or encouragement?

Alexander

Yeah. I'd say consistency beats inspiration. Sometimes you would need to do something that you don't enjoy, but sometimes you would work on something really meaningful for you. So I would say it doesn't matter what you do. Are you a leader or you are an artist are you like just, you know, like to be in a team. You just just need to keep in mind that, it's not, how to name that. So stay adaptable and keep, your focus on what you what motivates you and what you want to achieve.

Wanda

Thank you so much. Anything to add to that Sameli?

Sameli

That's already quite credit wise and this is quite the icy waters treading here because you are asking advice from someone who does not listen to any advice. But maybe to perhaps build on that motivational thing. So, you should always set yourself some clear goals because motivation, that's, that's a really fleeting thing. And if you just quickly decide that, oh, I'm going to be modeling some cars today, and then your motivation just drops down like a bad, bad, what's it called, a course line. Then that can be really discouraging in the long run. But if you set yourself clear goals, like for instance, in a month, I'm going to have this car body modeled completely. That's something you can really attach yourself to and, you know, keep going even though that's going to be bad days. There is going to be days when you have no motivation. You can't even get up from the bed. But those are going to get you through, in my experience.

Wanda

So what I'm getting from both of you is of like a balance of inspiration and then just like, clear, concrete goals.

Sameli

Absolutely. Yes.

Wanda

Yes. Thank you so much. This was a DGC podcast. Thank you so much for listening and tune in next time for more interesting game industry discussions.