



Chickn 2go – Post Mortem

By Dennis Chin
Sunday, June 17, 2007

Introduction

Chickn 2go was a final student industry game project, which was a culmination of all the skills learned in the Vancouver Film School's Game Design program. The project was done in a total of 20 weeks – 8 for pre-production, 12 for development. After finishing the project, we then presented the game on our industry presentations night, held May 30th. The presentations are a formal setting, at the school's theatre, with attendees from the video games industry.

Our team, Milky Entertainment, was composed of 3 people – Mélanie Généreux, Michael Chung, and myself, Dennis Chin. Melanie was the Project Manager and Art Lead, while Michael was the technical lead programmer, and I was the Audio Lead, Quality Assurance Lead and Flash Developer.

The vision for *Chickn 2go* came from the idea about the fried chicken craze and the secret fried chicken recipe, heard in pop culture. Originally, it was planned to be a point-and-click detective story based game, where the player plays as Cluckie, the chicken mascot, and goes on an adventure around the world to retrieve the missing fried chicken recipe to save his restaurant.

We were then suggested by one of our mentors to make it into a mobile phone game instead. He told us all the benefits out of making a mobile game, by outlining the growth and the future of mobile gaming. We then discussed the idea as a team, and not only agreed to move in that direction, but had one new major goal in mind, which was to port the game onto the phone.

Since the game was going on the mobile phone platform, the meaning of the title *Chickn 2go*, models the text messaging lingo used on mobile phones, where words are either abbreviated or spelt in shorter letters, excluding the vowels.

The game was then turned into 3 mini puzzle and action mini games – *Mixing Madness*, *Frying Frenzy* and *The Other Game*. Each consists of mixing ingredients, cooking chicken and feeding chicken in abstract ways. Cluckie still remained as the game's title character

What Went Right

Good Team Dynamics

One major success in our game was good team dynamics. Before starting *Chickn 2go*, we wanted to have a feel of what it is like to work together as team. So we started out with our first mini game project, *Spinball* for Flash class. *Spinball* was a Flash foosball game, with a chocolate/candy theme, which became a success for us as we managed to work really well with one another that we took that going into the *Chickn 2go* project, as we felt comfortable with one another and developed each other's trust.

We acted really professional; we were always there to communicate with one another, keeping one another informed on their status with frequent team meetings. One team belief we had was honesty. We were always honest and open upfront with each other, giving feedback and feelings on the group and the project, and it made the environment comfortable to work around.

Flash Knowledge

We chose Flash to develop our game, because we wanted to further our Flash skills, especially with the opportunity to work with Flash Lite 2.1, which is available to us at the time. Flash Lite 2.1 was still fairly new, as we were amazed of the possibility of mobile content development with Flash. We were fortunate that Flash Lite was easily available through the Adobe web site and that it didn't cost anything to download it. As a bonus, we also had access to a lot of tutorials and websites, documenting Flash Lite, which helped us a lot in learning the plug-in.

Fortunately, Mélanie and I had experience with Flash prior to VFS, which made us really comfortable around the Flash environment. Michael, our technical lead, didn't have any Flash knowledge prior to the program, but grasp onto it really quickly, and managed the Technical Lead role well. We all felt confident with our Flash ActionScript skills that each team member managed to script their own mini game successfully. Michael developed *Mixing Madness*, I developed *Frying Frenzy*, and Mélanie developed *The Other Game*.

Receiving the phones

Our goal at the beginning of this project was that we want to have the game playable on the mobile phone. However, none of us had a compatible phone to work with. Fortunately through our connections within the school, we wrote a letter to Nokia, for possibly sending us phones to work with.

We would receive two Nokia N73 phones within a month. We were very excited that Nokia actually sent us the phones, and as a bonus, it really boosted the team's spirits. We were even more excited when we actually ported the game to the phone, and that it didn't take very long or much work to do it either. Having the game ported to the phone really helped us understand how the game operates on the phone, and to improve the

quality, by watching its memory and the system's limits. By the end of the project, we understood a lot about mobile phone technology and making games for that platform.

What Went Wrong

Audio

We were unsure of sound type we needed for the game to be able to run on the phone. We heard that midi files would work best on the phone, but at the time, we weren't sure if we were getting the phones. I felt a bit uncomfortable for a while in telling our sound collaborators on what file formats the sound should be in. I told them to make us wav files. By the time we got the phones, and understood that midi's were more efficient, it was difficult to get our collaborators to make us the midi files we needed, as they were busy with their own projects.

Fortunately though, I had built a personal rapport with the sound lead of the team, as I contacted him over the phone before spring break, and he managed to squeeze some of his free time over the break to make us at least some of the midis we needed. Although we did get the sounds we needed, they still had a few problems running on the phone, as they were laggy. Our sound collaborators were unable to fix the problem or even finish us the remaining sounds, as they were still occupied with their projects. We did manage to include some of the sounds in the game, and include the music for our two video clips, which were shown at our industry presentation night. For the future, I think more thorough research on what audio types play on the device should be done.

Misunderstanding the roles in pre-production

In pre-production, one of my tasks was designing the art bible. I felt uncomfortable with that role then, and therefore it resulted in some disagreements with my teammates, as well as delay in pre-production. To resolve it, we had a private team meeting and discussed our roles, on what our strengths were and re-assigned roles that we were most suited with.

Since Mélanie was the art lead, she took over the art bible, and I handled the audio document, since I received a lot of positive feedback from the audio I composed in *Spinball*. That led me to becoming the Audio Lead for *Chickn 2go*. What would work for the next time would be to evaluate our strengths prior to the project and then assign the roles suited for based on the strengths.

Breaking the phone

About 3 weeks before the industry presentations, an unfortunate incident occurred; we accidentally broke one of the phones when we were moving some stuff on our desks, when the phone slipped off the table edge and crashed on the floor, damaging the

screen. Even though that we still had another phone intact, we were afraid of how this would effect our presentations, and our reputation. We all had a discussion and decided that whatever happened, that we stick together and take the responsibility as a team, because blaming it on one person would not help any better, and would make the team look unprofessional.

Fortunately however, Nokia was able to send us a replacement phone just in time before the presentations. We are very appreciative with Nokia helping us in providing us the phones, but we should be more careful with devices and take more responsibility on them.

Conclusion

I had a fun time working on *Chickn 2go*. We achieved our goals to make a Flash game that was playable on the phone, and we managed to partner with Nokia in supplying us the phones. We also achieved our goal to make a game that we could all have fun working on, and as a result, we became the first student group in the Game Design program to successfully have made a playable game on an actual mobile device.

I had a wonderful time working with my team, as I learned so much from them, sharing their knowledge and work styles. Outside working on the project, we also got to bond with one another by going out to lunch and dinner many times, especially at fried chicken places too, and shared many laughs and stories with each other. I also learned a lot from our industry mentors as well. They've given me great feedback, constructive criticism and ways I can improve myself to become a better worker.

Making this project helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses and to where I want to be in the industry. I got to learn a lot about mobile technology and someday I would love to pursue more mobile or casual game projects as a possible career path, with the knowledge and experience acquired.

Overall, we managed to complete the game on time, with three fun mini games, developed by each team member, and that we are all proud of the accomplishments made in this project.