
sask interactive

@Game On Ventures 2016

October 20-21, 2016

Toronto, Ontario

MaRS Discovery District

Overview

Attendance at the GameON Ventures conference in Toronto increases the profile of the Saskatchewan Interactive Media industry. The conference focuses on the business development side of the console and mobile game industry, with speakers from all over networking and participating in workshops and talks about best business, marketing practices as well as current ways to increase revenue through monetization of the industry.

GameON: Ventures 2016 kicked off with a number of honoured guests and continued with two fantastic days of sessions, networking and two new additions – an Expo and Pitch Competition. Ryan Holowaty from Noodlecake Studios (Saskatoon) was invited to be a judge for the Pitch Competition.

After an Indigenous Greeting from Constance Simmonds of the Toronto and York Region Métis Council, opening remarks were heard from OMDC President & CEO Karen Thorne-Stone and Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport Eleanor McMahon. Minister McMahon called GameON: Ventures a “catalyst for growth” and the next two days lived up to those words.

Legendary game designer John Romero provided the opening keynote Check out a re-cap of his talk on [GamesIndustry](#) and read an interview with him from the [National Post](#).

Day 1 covered a lot of ground, with plenaries, pitch competitor training and breakout sessions, including *Leveraging the Gaming Community* (with tips and tricks for engaging your fan base with speakers from Ubisoft, Twitch and others) and a great panel on how building diverse teams helps companies tell better stories and find new audiences. The Honourable Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services, moderated a panel on *Doing Good Through Games* – whether that takes the form of inclusion initiatives or games addressing issues such as mental health.

On Day 2, there were presentations on some innovative games – *Floor Kids* and *Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes*. There were breakout rooms that hosted a hands-on workshop and addressed participants’ questions on studio operations. In the Collaboration Hub delegates participated in facilitated meetings with speakers and partners. After lunch, folks converged in the main auditorium to watch the finalists in the first-ever GameON: Ventures pitch competition take their shot at the grand prize of \$10,000 and runner-up prizes from Pycap Venture Partners, FrontFundr, Maple Leaf Angels and Jaguar Capital. The pitches were strong and in the end, MiChecker Gamified App for youth with developmental disabilities emerged victorious.

Quick Facts

There were approximately 47 speakers. Some of which were participating in panels and some that facilitated their own talk.

SaskInteractive had the opportunity to network at a special event held the night before the conference with the speakers and made some great contacts with other Interactive Producers and studios in North America and Europe. We also had the opportunity to network and make connections with Canadian venture capital/ angel organizations as well as many of the national funding agencies software manufacturers and triple A game studios.

Trends & Opportunities:

According to the panelists on the “Overview of Venture Capital Markets” they are starting to see VC’s from the US starting to creep into Canada as they are finding better investments and less competition.

According to the panelists on “How to Profit from Free Games” they recommend that you buy users, hope they invite more users but make sure it makes sense. For example if lifetime of a user generates \$5/user then does it make sense to buy users at \$4/user?

Conference Objectives and Findings

SaskInteractive had set out a focused initiative to not only network with other like-minded organizations or with those that may open opportunities with our members but to also participate and learn from sessions. The following is an overview of some of the session highlights, their learning's and trends.

“Leveraging the Game Community”

Moderator

- [John Gardiner \(Toronto\)](#) – Senior User Acquisition and Finance Manager, Big Viking Games

Panellists

- [Zack Cooper \(Toronto\)](#) – Lead Community Developer, Ubisoft Toronto
- [Dimitri Gochgarian and Robin Veret \(Singapore\)](#) – Co-founders, Rez Creative
- [Jason Maestas \(San Francisco\)](#) – Senior Director of Partnerships in North America and Support, Twitch
- [Anne Devouassoux \(Paris\)](#) – Executive Producer, Kylotonn Games

“The gaming community represents more than just your user-base—it can be the most critical piece to the growth of your game. Developers and publishers succeed when they treat their gaming community as a key partner in growth.”

The panel will provided ideas for leveraging an existing audience to market your game, acquire new users and develop new revenue streams. They discussed tactics for finding new audiences and connecting with gaming communities.

Takeaways

How to make the most out of your audience. Engaging and communicating as you develop and to listen to the feedback. Do not take it as criticism but as an opportunity to make a better product.

“Overview of Venture Capital Markets”

Moderator

- [Mary Sorrenti \(Toronto\)](#) – VP Operations & Finance, Game Pill

Speakers

- [Peter-Paul van Hoeken \(Vancouver\)](#) – CEO, FrontFundr
- [Mike Woollat \(Toronto\)](#) – CEO, Canadian Venture Capital & Private Equity Association
- [Andrew Fisher](#) – CEO, Gigataur

This panel shared trends in venture capital funding giving an overview of the current

According to the panelists on “Market Opportunities in VR” there is still lots of innovation to be had in this space. For example the way “stitching” is done can be improved, the tools to create 360-degree panoramas and the tools to create better VR and AR are opportunities in this market.

Real Estate and Tourism are current and developing markets in VR/AR.

Creating Brand Experiences in VR/AR for companies is a growing trend. *(Retail is an example of one industry that is currently seeking to expand their Brand Experience in this space)*

Companies are seeking interactive producers to develop VR/AR experiences for their brands to take to trade shows.

UBC has a research lab exploring VR in healthcare. Still in early stages but sees great potential for commercialization. Alternative healthcare and fitness (preventative healthcare) is a current opportunity.

Therapeutic and rehabilitation are also market opportunities for VR.

Work with Post-secondary student housing and real estate to create a market for VR in your community.

market. Also on the panel was the CEO of FrontFundr which is an equity crowd-funding platform.

Takeaways

What VC markets are currently looking for and how your company can position itself in order to take advantage of current market trends.

The venture capital (VC) ecosystem is only as strong as the entrepreneurial ecosystem. If you want a strong VC presence you must nurture your start up ecosystem.

Get on VC radars early, have specific metrics that are realistic. VC's may not come to the table right away but will watch and ask if you are meeting goals.

Make sure you know "what the money is for". Is the money for Oxygen or Ammunition? If it is for Oxygen, the VC's may not be interested.

Crowd funding is another alternative however, not all are equal and you may find it difficult to get to the next stage of VC if you have 500-1000 shareholders.

VC's expect you to work your "ass" off and meet your metrics. They also expect "hockey stick" growth.

"How to Profit from Free Games"

Moderator

- [Vikas Gupta](#) – Board Member, Interactive Ontario

Speakers

- [Allen Ma \(San Francisco\)](#) – Founder and CEO, Merigo
- [Joshua Rinsky \(Sherman Oaks\)](#) – Senior VP, Business Development, Quaid Media
- [Ryan Hale](#) – Studio Head, Other Ocean Interactive
- [Elena Fedina \(New York City\)](#) – Data Analyst, SuperData Research

This panel discussed strategies that producers have developed to retain players and to maximize profits.

Takeaways

Do not overlook the data, it is important to use and measure metrics to monitor the trends of your game users. Example: track when users are dropping off, where they are spending money in your game or app. Use the data to try and keep users. Note that knowing your retention rate (7 days, 30 days etc..), how long they stay with the game (app), how much they spend within the game etc...can help you develop strategies that will assist your User Acquisition (UA).

The panellists all agreed that you should release in small markets first and start to collect the data in order to be able to develop your product and marketing prior to launching in larger markets.

There is great opportunity to collaborate with other creative industries in order to pool talent and resources to develop creative and commercially successful products.

Quotes:

"The VC ecosystem is only as strong as the entrepreneurial ecosystem" - Mike Woollat CEO, Canadian Venture Capital & Private Equity Association

"Get to know your account rep" - (Apple or Google) – Allen Ma CEO, Merigo

"The top 10 mobile games make 25% of the industry profit" - Elena Fedina Data Analyst, SuperData Research

"To make money in VR, work with companies or industries who feel threatened from VR" – Shiraz Akmal CEO, SPACES

"Typically folks who from the game development sector are the one's spearheading as they already have the skills in 3d design etc..." – Dora Cheng Co-founder, UForis VR

Other Resources

Check out Zack Cooper from Ubisoft who hosts Ubisoft's "The Blend". Zack is the lead community developer for Ubisoft and is based in Canada.

“Market Opportunities in VR”

Moderator

- [Lucie Lalumiere \(Toronto\)](#) – Executive Producer, 360 Story Lab

Speakers

- [Dr. Bernie Garrett \(Vancouver\)](#) – Associate Professor, The University of British Columbia School of Nursing
- [Vanessa Lawrenson \(Dublin\)](#) – Director, bigOmedia
- [Shiraz Akmal \(Los Angeles\)](#) – Co-founder & CEO, SPACES
- [Dora Cheng \(Pasadena\)](#) – Co-founder, UForis VR

This panel explored the VR markets and what can be done with this flourishing technology. They discussed what else could be done other than games and film in VR. The discussion looked at when VR intersects with other frontiers and industries such as health, tourism, museums, amusement parks, rental and real estate.

Takeaways

Inspiration for new VR markets to explore and leverage.

Panelists agreed that there are still lots of innovation to be had in this space. For example the way “stitching” is done can be improved, the tools to create 360-degree panoramas and the tools to create better VR and AR are opportunities in this market.

The cost of production for VR is still higher than previous costs (linear film or interactive) as the technology really only lasts 6-12 months before replacement for better tech to stay competitive but the space isn’t as crowded in many markets yet.

UBC has a research lab exploring VR in healthcare. Still in early stages but sees great potential for commercialization. Alternative healthcare and fitness (preventative healthcare) is a current opportunity.

Therapeutic and rehabilitation are also market opportunities for VR.

Evaluation

This was the second year that SaskInteractive attended the GameON Ventures conference. We believe our attendance at this conference assisted in developing new and valuable contacts for our members and industry as well as identifying trends and market opportunities to communicate to our membership.

If you wish to learn more about our experience and why as a member we would encourage you to attend in the future, just shoot us an email.

Link: <http://bit.ly/2fmHorA>

Check out SuperData Research – Data, Insights and guidance for game, VR, AR and Interactive entertainment markets.

Link: <http://bit.ly/1K172sj>

FrontFundr a FinTech equity crowdfunding platform.

Link: <https://www.frontfundr.com/>

Noodlecake Studios a successful Saskatchewan game studio

Link: <http://www.noodlecake.com/>

Did you Know?

Did you know that as a member of SaskInteractive you are able to leverage our participation in the [Canadian Interactive Alliance/Alliance Interactive Canadienne \(CIAIC\)](#)?

As a member organization and board member of CIAIC, SaskInteractive is part of a larger voice across Canada that advocates on behalf of our collective memberships to the Federal Government in Ottawa and with other National Organizations that create policy or fund the Interactive community.

As a member you can access the interactive communities in other parts of Canada by contacting us and we will use our network to find the best contacts in other parts of the country for you.