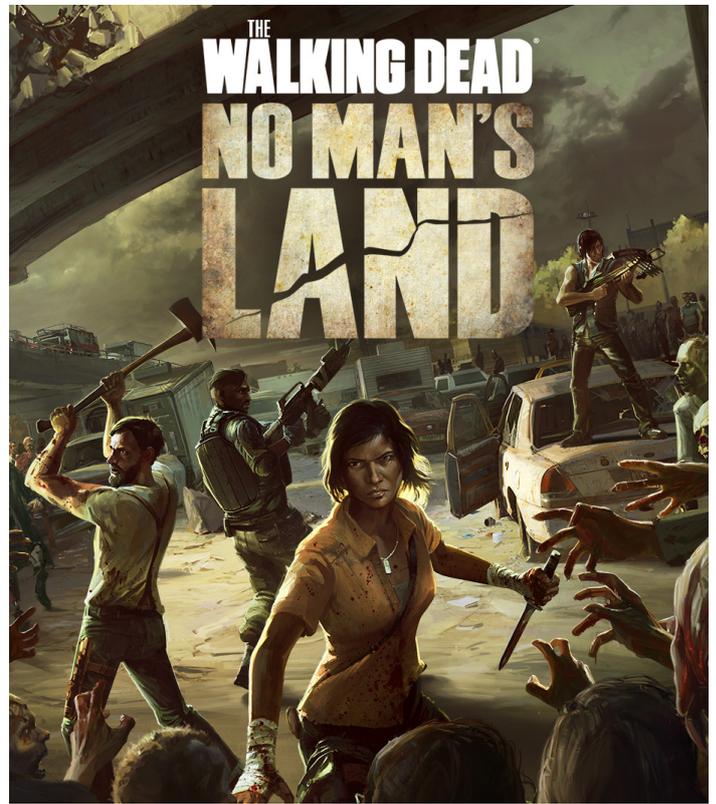




Next Games

Case study

 **unity** Ads



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SAARA BERGSTRÖM
CMO, Next Games



Introducing... Next Games

Helsinki sits as one of the globe's most influential game development hubs. It is, after all, the birthplace of several giants of mobile entertainment and boasts a rich and diverse talent pool of game developers. The city today is a place of furious creativity and unbounded start-up spirit, and one of the Helsinki games scene's stars is unquestionably Next Games. Founded by game industry veterans in 2013, today Next Games is a thriving studio, thanks to the success of its first two Made With Unity releases, their original IP card battler *Compass Point: West*, and *Walking Dead: No Man's Land*, based on the perennially popular comic book and AMC Studios TV series. For Next Games, mobile is a place where quality entertainment and commercial success can co-exist, and as such the team is united in its conviction that making free games need not mean making creative sacrifices. As such, both games are powered by Unity Ads, and doing rather well as a result. “75-to-80% of our player base are actively opting in to watch ads, fueling our business to focus on creating even better player experiences,” asserts Next Games Chief Marketing Officer Saara Bergstrom.

The challenge

Just three years ago Next Games was an entirely new operation. The team's members brought an abundance of experience to the table, but critical success and a steady revenue stream were but distant dreams. As they began to plot out their route to triumph, just how to make sure they turned a profit presented quite the challenge.

"We are dedicated to creating the optimal player experience in our games, and firmly believe that if not integrated seamlessly, ads will annoy the player affecting retention," says Bergstrom of Next Games early investigations into the true value of ads. "Being a tight-knit developer community, we reached out for guidance and to our dismay, we received less than enthusiastic feedback." At this stage Bergstrom and her colleagues were at work crafting *Compass Point: West*, which ably blends mechanics from card battlers and town builders. The game has a hard collecting mechanic deep at its core, a fact which prompted the same response time and again. 'You can't put ads in a battle builder,' Next Games' fellow developers pronounced. 'No one's ever done it and it will never work.'

Establishing a first didn't deter the studio, of course. But pioneer spirit must be partnered with a pragmatic approach to monetization. Next Games had noticed, however, that in-game ads were changing. The bad

old days of 2011 when ill-considered interstitial ads underperformed, while irking consumers, were a fading memory. Something new was on the horizon. Rewarded video ads, where a player chooses to watch a short video ad in return for an in-game reward, were appearing as a promising alternative to established methods.



The solution

The solution to monetizing Next Games' debut titles without leaning entirely on IAP came in connecting the right members of the team with the ad integration process. Their thinking revolved around how the integration of ads would benefit the developer, player and advertiser, and monetize the largest of player types. "We tapped into our lead game designer to work on the integration, rather than using a UI artist who might just slap a somewhere to 'watch ads' button up," says Bergstrom of the process of bolstering *Compass Point: West*'s monetization prospects.

Put so plainly, it's a strikingly obvious approach. Making ad integration a gameplay design decision avoided any possibility that the ads could detract from the gameplay experience. With rewarded video ads tightly integrated into Next Games' storylines and core loop mechanics from the start of the creative process, players were entirely unlikely to feel ads were intrusive or out of place.

The decision was taken by *Compass Point: West*'s gameplay designers to have rewarded video ads 'delivered' to the player via a travelling wagon, in keeping with the title's Wild West theme.



The wagons would arrive at set points in the game, providing players with an opportunity to plunder their riches via watching an ad. Of course, all of those advantages are for nothing if integrating the ad technology – and finding ads to display - puts an unworkable strain on the development studio.

Fortunately, Next Games had made their games with Unity, and its monetization platform, Unity Ads, makes tapping into a vast, meaningful and high quality network of content – in Bergstrom's words – "remarkably painless". With the ad content secured by Unity, and the rewarded videos displaying the content via relevant, seamless integration with the studio's games, all that was left was for the players to engage with the ads.



The results

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Embracing video ads early on in the development has not only seen the aforementioned 75-80% hit rate with users, but remarkably good revenues from all players. “This engagement is having a tremendous impact on revenue, by driving \$0.06 average revenue per player per day,” says Bergstrom.

Next Games also enjoyed first hand experience of the impact rewarded video ads have, in a way that utterly bucks the clichés forged back when interstitial ads were the norm. Quite simply, rewarded ads can boost both engagement and retention. In fact, because Unity Ads allows developers to set caps to stop their players being shown too many ads, Next Games received feedback that would have seemed unfathomable

just a few years ago. “When the wagons stopped coming, players demanded the goods,” suggests Bergstrom. “Our customer support team was flooded with questions asking ‘where are my ads?’ or ‘I want to watch my ads!’”

“Not only do strategically integrated rewarded video ads work, but in addition to IAP, it’s an important cornerstone of our monetization model,” concludes Bergstrom.

“When you create a positive player experience that keeps them coming back for more, rewarded video ads become part of the gameplay. In the end, the increased engagement and retention from a good video ads experience puts money in our pocket from the increased lifetime value of our players.”

About Unity Technologies

Unity Technologies is the creator of Unity, a flexible and high-performance end-to-end development platform used to create rich interactive 3D and 2D experiences. Unity’s powerful graphics engine and full-featured editor serve as the foundation to develop beautiful games or apps and easily bring them to multiple platforms: mobile devices, home entertainment systems, personal computers, and embedded systems. Unity also offers solutions and services for creating games, boosting productivity, and connecting with audiences including the Unity Asset Store, Unity Cloud Build, Unity Game Performance Reporting, Unity Analytics, Unity Ads, and Unity Everyplay. Unity Technologies serves over 1 million monthly active developers including large publishers, indie studios, students and hobbyists around the globe. For more information, visit: <http://unity3d.com/ads>.