

Content Evolution: The Episodic Video Game Model &  
Cross Sections Between Today's Music and Video Game Industries

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Submitted to the Department of Global Entertainment and Music Business of Berklee College of  
Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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26 June 2015

## 1. Abstract

This culminating experience will take the form of a Research Paper. The following thesis project aims to analyze the reemerging and trend-like popularity of the episodic video game content development and distribution model (hereby referred to as EVG). This research further explores the key conditions of the current video game industry that have since lead to the re-evaluation, experimentation, and implementation of the episodic gaming concept. This study was conducted in two phases, the first being a literature review of available secondary sources and information, followed by expert interviews with video game industry professionals of various backgrounds. In conclusion, this study will provide a deeper investigation of the current impact of episodic gaming processes, along with an evaluation of the sustainability of the model. The study has resulted in an understanding that the EVG is neither a fad nor a concept that will completely revolutionize the industry, but it is one of several emerging innovations that will thrive in upcoming years.

This study also aims to shed light on various parallels and cross-sections between the modern video game industry and the music industry. By recognizing similar (yet sometimes vastly different) elements, concepts, and best practices shared by both industries, this paper hopes to encourage cross-industry analysis and increase shared learning between industry professionals. The successes and failures of each industry are lessons, and should fuel further growth and innovation in today's dynamic and rapidly changing global entertainment and music business.

Keywords include: Episodic Gaming, Downloadable Content (DLC,) Social Engagement, Transmedia, Emerging Business Models, Game Development, Game Publishing, Game Distribution.

## 2. Research Questions

Digital distribution has revolutionized every sector of the entertainment industry, and the video game industry is no different. In the last two decades, changes in entertainment media concepts, technologies, and consumption habits have necessitated serious evolution in video gaming. The gaming industry is full of potential and rapidly growing, though as a result, the market is becoming increasingly competitive and tense. Furthermore, with the increasing availability and decreasing cost of entertainment media, various entertainment industry sectors are now in direct competition for consumer's attention and disposable income, more so than ever before. According to a 2014 study conducted by the ESA (Entertainment Software Association) close to 50 percent of gamers who are playing more games than three years prior are spending less time watching television or movies, both in theaters and in domiciles.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, gamers with dedicated consoles are using their gaming machines to consume other media, with 50 percent of gamers consuming movies with their console, and close to 25 percent of gamers listening to music and watching television as well.<sup>2</sup>

In the game industry, there seems to be endless possibilities for innovation and experimentation with content development and distribution models in the digital age. Specifically, over the last 5 years a episodic video game development and distribution has emerged as an exciting, engaging, and cost effective model. This approach has been attempted in the past, but today's video game ecosystem has provided the perfect opportunity for EVG content to succeed and compete with the traditional industry model (physical AAA product

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<sup>1</sup> "Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry." Entertainment Software Association. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

model) and emerging industry innovations (free-to-play model, customized independent developer content, and experimental pricing models).

This study attempts to answer the following: Is the episodic video game model simply a fad, or is it a model that will completely revolutionize the video game industry? In order to delve into this idea, one must also define the significant elements of today's video game ecosystem that indicate opportunity and value in implementing the episodic model. The subject will be analyzed from the developer, publisher, and gamer perspectives, and the impact of the changes in gamers and consumers purchasing and engagement behavior will be determined.

This study also aims to provide enough insight to encourage an increase in cross-industry analysis and synergistic practices. Through the study of the victories and losses that come with competing in dynamic entertainment industries, music industry pros give themselves the edge. By practicing smarter analysis

### 3. Literature Review

#### a. Global Video Game Industry Overview

In order to fully dissect the importance of the episodic gaming model, an understanding of the global video game industry is essential. This includes the industry's major segments, stakeholders, and influencing factors that have analysts predicting a continual growth and upward trajectory for the industry. Only after such a picture is painted can EVG be seen in proper context and examined to uncover the implications that come along with the models mainstream adoption.

Firstly, according to NewZoo's 2015 Global Games Marketing Report, the global video game market is predicted to increase revenue by 9.4% between 2014 and 2015, growing from \$83.6 billion to \$91.5 billion in 2015.<sup>3</sup> With a \$107 billion dollar estimation by 2017, it is no big secret that the video game industry is booming.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the global video game industry has seen steady growth over the last decade, completely opposite to the current situation the global music industry faces. In order to maintain revenue growth, the video game industry has seen new models like EVG emerge, to combat the losses that come with dramatic shifts in the industry, including technological advancements (processing power, memory, graphics, smart devices, mobile) and changes in consumer behavior (shorter play periods, competing entertainment media, subscription/free model expectancy)

The game industry can be deconstructed into three main segments: the "package" segment (broken down into hardware and software sub segments,) online & digital, and social gaming.<sup>5</sup> The package segment can be considered the traditional video game industry, with developments in the online and social segments increasing yearly. Simply put, hardware companies manufacture home and handheld gaming consoles and accessories that support them, and software companies develop and produce video game content. This content comes in various play styles and genres, in the form of physical discs, digitally downloadable content, or online-accessible iterations.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, the main market segments of the video game industry can be identified as: packaged, downloadable content (or DLC,) online, and mobile.<sup>7</sup> In recent

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell, Colin. "Worldwide Video Games Market Will Grow 9.4 Percent This Year, Says Report." Polygon. April 22, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.polygon.com/2015/4/22/8471789/worldwide-video-games-market-value-2015>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Alessandro Schiliro (Xerfi Global), "Video Game Companies – World, Hardware, Software, Mobile and Social Gaming Market Analysis 2014-2017 Trends – Corporate Strategy"

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

years, as predicted, mobile and online gaming have seen huge periods of growth, and have pioneered new gameplay and monetization strategies.

Since video game software is dependent and limited by the capacity of the hardware used to run the programs, the short history of the video game industry can be divided into eight generations of gaming hardware cycles, beginning in the late 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Many industry experts predict an end to the console cycles, as advances in multimedia integrated technology are inevitable, and an improved quality in hardware and software have marginalized differences between the latest console generations.<sup>9</sup> With dedicated hardware becoming obsolete, the industry is in the middle of a period of experimentation and innovation in the forms of emerging business models and models of monetization.<sup>10</sup> Free-to-play, personalized subscriptions, crowdfunding, and a plethora of other models are evolving into the future of monetizing video game content.

There is a key dichotomy between the larger major publishers and developers and the smaller independent developers, similar to the landscape in today's music industry. Console manufacturers arguably hold the most power, granting game licenses to publishers, who in turn pay royalties on revenue generated from selling games.<sup>11</sup> These major industry stakeholders also control the main distribution channels for games, each controlling their own content delivery channel (Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, Steam, etc.) Video game companies also rely on third

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<sup>8</sup> Alessandro Schiliro (Xerfi Global), *"Video Game Companies – World, Hardware, Software, Mobile and Social Gaming Market Analysis 2014-2017 Trends – Corporate Strategy"*

<sup>9</sup> Zatkin, Geoffrey. "GDC Vault - Awesome Video Game Data 2014." GDC Vault - Awesome Video Game Data 2014. 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.gdcvault.com/play/1020152/Awesome-Video-Game-Data>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Schiliro (Xerfi Global), *"Video Game Companies – World, Hardware, Software, Mobile and Social Gaming Market Analysis 2014-2017 Trends – Corporate Strategy"*

party distributors to get games into the hands of gamers. These outlets include diversified chain stores, specialized chain stores, independent retailers, and E-retailers.<sup>12</sup>

Hardware and software sales are highly seasonal. The video game industry relies heavily on sales during the fourth quarter, composing around 40% of its yearly revenue. The first three quarters are generally stable and yield similar returns.<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, video game companies tend to release new consoles and AAA titles close to the year's end, capitalizing on the already increased spending habits seen during the holiday season.<sup>14</sup> Drove of gamers consider the summer season to be the least exciting release-wise. To combat smaller sales figures, major distributors periodically launch massive sales of catalogued games at deep discounts, Steam's Summer Sale being one of the most renowned. These sales play catalyst to impulse back-catalog purchases that help companies lead into the final quarter of the year.

Worldwide, gaming industry revenues are highly concentrated to specific geographic regions. The three most important markets include North America, Europe, and Japan, with North America and Europe accounting for 80% of packaged game sales.<sup>15</sup> However, with global economic prospects slated to improve from 2015 onwards, the near future could see an increase in disposable income, which could lead to increased spending on leisure and entertainment activities.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, areas like South America and Asia have seen the biggest jump in consumer spending, and combined with increased accessibility and penetration of high speed

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<sup>12</sup> Alessandro Schiliro (Xerfi Global), *"Video Game Companies – World, Hardware, Software, Mobile and Social Gaming Market Analysis 2014-2017 Trends – Corporate Strategy"*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> "Global Economic Prospects to Improve in 2015, But Divergent Trends Pose Downside Risks, Says WB." Global Economic Prospects to Improve in 2015, But Divergent Trends Pose Downside Risks, Says WB. January 13, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/01/13/global-economic-prospects-improve-2015-divergent-trends-pose-downside-risks>.

internet and mobile connectivity, the video game industries in these regions will begin to grow and thrive.

Finally, recognizing the current popularity of video games worldwide hints at the true potential of the global video game industry. It is impressive to note that video game popularity and audience sizes are now growing in all demographic segments.<sup>17</sup> According to the ESA, the average gamer in the United States is 31 years old, over 50% of gamers are female, and there are an average of two gamers and one console per household.<sup>18</sup> Though gaming popularity skews young, social and mobile gaming have led to increases in consumption in older generations.

Essentially, video games have entered the mainstream around the world. With increasing demand, rapid technological innovations becoming more accessible to larger populations, and an improving global economic situation, understanding emerging opportunities in the video game industry can be extremely lucrative. Ultimately, failing to innovate and recognize the shortcomings of traditional models and best practices can lead to depreciation and large losses if left unchecked.

#### b. The Traditional “Packaged” Game Model

With an understanding of the global game industry, one can accurately compare the EVG model in question against the traditional development and release strategy for packaged games. Katherine Isbister, a professor at NYU, stated, “As the industry scrambles to keep up with evolving tastes and technology, this new sensibility could herald a big shift in the way the

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<sup>17</sup> Alessandro Schiliro (Xerfi Global), “*Video Game Companies – World, Hardware, Software, Mobile and Social Gaming Market Analysis 2014-2017 Trends – Corporate Strategy*”

<sup>18</sup> “Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry.” Entertainment Software Association. 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. [http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ESA\\_EF\\_2014.pdf](http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ESA_EF_2014.pdf).



developers approach their product.”<sup>19</sup> The traditional best practices of video game companies are changing. To discover potential in different shifts in strategy, it is wise to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the standard model before weighing them against the opportunities and shortcomings of the EVG release strategy.

After the emergence of the home console and up until the mid 2000s, video game companies generally approached developing and releasing a game in the same way. Traditionally, game developers produce video game content for specific consoles designed and manufactured by hardware companies. The game is then printed on CDs, packaged, and distributed to various retail outlets, with publishers supporting releases through traditional media marketing and public relations campaigns.<sup>20</sup> These games are sold at a standard retail price, with today’s accepted packaged game price typically at \$60 US dollars. Since various game genres and player styles influence the amount of content provided by individual games, most gamers agree that games should contain between 20-40 hours of gameplay (with some role playing games containing upwards of 100 hours of playtime potential.)

In this packaged game environment, blockbuster games launched and developed by the major (and newly conglomerated) video game companies dominate the industry. Similar to the music and film industry, top tier releases combine to accumulate a majority share of revenue. In 2012, the top 20 games released accounted for 41% of in-store game sales in America.<sup>21</sup> In 2013, it only took Grand Theft Auto V (published by Rockstar Games) 3 days to earn one billion dollars

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<sup>19</sup> Bluestein, Adam. "Video Games for Grown Ups." FastCompany.com. December 1, 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Perrin, Alexandre. "The Value Chain of the Video Game Industry." Berklee Valencia,

<sup>21</sup> Tang, Stephanie. "Blockbuster Titles Dominate Video Game Market More Than Ever." GameSkinny.com. October 1, 2013. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.gameskinny.com/t293p/blockbuster-titles-dominate-video-game-market-more-than-ever>.

post release.<sup>22</sup> Comparatively, the music industry sees an even bigger impact by blockbuster artists, with the top 1% of artists accounting for 77% of recorded music income in 2013.<sup>23</sup>

Since the advent of the digital age, traditional packed games have become available for digital download straight to console or PC. The capacity to create downloadable content (or DLC) to support and add value to games post-release has allowed video game companies the opportunity to release new or improved content to supplement previously released titles. These additional content downloads serve to extend the lifecycle of a game, while continuing to monetize the depreciating product. Extended monetization is extremely important, as the majority of a video game's sales are seen in the weeks directly following release.

Furthermore, the budgets necessary to create the AAA releases of today have skyrocketed. While budgets vary between titles (along with the willingness of video game companies to share the true extents of their budgets,) game producers have pinned game budgets for the 7<sup>th</sup> console generation games (PS3, Xbox 360, etc) between \$20-\$60 million dollars.<sup>24</sup> For the 8<sup>th</sup> generation blockbuster titles, however, budgets have been recorded at \$100 million dollars and up.<sup>25</sup> 2013's Grand Theft Auto V had a budget of \$265 million dollars, and 2014's title Destiny (Bungie/Activision) took an incredible \$500 million dollars to develop.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tang, Stephanie. "Blockbuster Titles Dominate Video Game Market More Than Ever." GameSkinny.com. October 1, 2013. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.gameskinny.com/t293p/blockbuster-titles-dominate-video-game-market-more-than-ever>.

<sup>23</sup> Resnikoff, Paul. "The Top 1% of Artists Earn 77% of Recorded Music Income, Study Finds." Digital Music News. March 5, 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/permalink/2014/03/05/toponepercent>.

<sup>24</sup> "How Much Does It Cost To Make A Big Video Game?" Kotaku. January 15, 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://kotaku.com/how-much-does-it-cost-to-make-a-big-video-game-1501413649>.

<sup>25</sup> C., T. "Why Video Games Are so Expensive to Develop." The Economist. September 24, 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/09/economist-explains-15>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

### c. The Episodic Video Game Model

Overall, current industry conditions have left incredible opportunity for emerging players in the industry to innovate and experiment with new content development, pricing, and distribution models. Along with both the “freemium” model and paid subscription experimentation, advances in episodic gaming have garnered much attention and excitement in the last five years. The model is pioneered by Telltale Games, who have released a slew of critically acclaimed episodic games since its formation in 2004, including *The Walking Dead*.

So what exactly is an episodic game? Well, a search for “episodic gaming” online may yield several definitions, none of which have been universally agreed upon. To be concise, the criteria laid out by Gamesutra’s Rick Sanchez will be considered, and is as follows, “ 1. Each episode stands alone but is part of a larger whole. 2. Each episode has a relatively short duration of play. 3. Episodes are delivered on a regular schedule over a defined, and relatively brief, period of time that makes up a season.”<sup>27</sup> This criteria separates episodic games from other similar concepts, including standard DLC (although episodic games are most often digitally purchased and downloaded similarly to DLC,) expansion packs, installments in ongoing game franchises, and sequels.<sup>28</sup>

The model is built on smaller pieces of game content released as parts of a whole (similarly to episodes of television or other serialized media like comic books) released and consumed in a pre-defined schedule, with interim periods between episodes ranging in length from several weeks to a couple of months. Again, the model employed by Telltale Games can be recognized

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<sup>27</sup> Sanchez, Rick. "Why Bother With Episodic Games?" Gamasutra. 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1747/why\\_bother\\_with\\_episodic\\_games.php?print=1](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1747/why_bother_with_episodic_games.php?print=1).

<sup>28</sup> Kraft, Jason. "Episodic Gaming in the Age of Digital Distribution." Gamasutra. April 18, 2006. Accessed June 26, 2015. [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3462/episodic\\_gaming\\_in\\_the\\_age\\_of\\_.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3462/episodic_gaming_in_the_age_of_.php).

as the new standard episodic formula, releasing critically acclaimed episodic games in collaboration with some of the most successful and popular Intellectual Property (or IP) on the market.

Developing and releasing games in an episodic way brings key advantages over the traditional model. Primarily, episodic development can alleviate some of the high fixed costs that lend to extreme budgets for blockbuster hits. Logically, smaller teams can be built to produce smaller amounts of content. According to the Economist, “Higher costs have made publishers timid, preferring to serve up more of what their customers like rather than risk tens of millions of dollars to do something untried.”<sup>29</sup> Traditionally large budgets have led to a saturated market of sequels and installments in the strong IP that have been shown to provide the largest and safest returns for video game companies (think Call of Duty, Assassins Creed, etc.) Releasing in episodes also minimizes the impact of having to cancel a game, since realistically, video game producers could essentially cut losses and end an episodic series mid cycle, similar to television’s quick cancellations for poorly rated or viewed content.

Companies that employ the episodic model find themselves in a much more flexible position, with the ability to take more risks and try out far more ideas than major publishers can. Overall, the development cycle for episodic games is much quicker and cheaper than traditional games. It’s easy to see why creating less content in more incremental timeframes can shorten the overall time it takes to develop a full episodic game, in comparison to developing a blockbuster amount of content for a single release. The smaller amounts of content found in episodes also lend to minimized packaging and distribution costs, since it is more efficient to distribute episodes digitally instead of on physical CDs. Today, previously privatized distribution platforms that

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<sup>29</sup> C., T. "Why Video Games Are so Expensive to Develop." The Economist. September 24, 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/09/economist-explains-15>.

were unavailable to experimental indie developers opened for use. This means that any game developer, for example Telltale Games, can host, market, and sell their games through the mainstream digital channels that were previously unavailable to them (i.e. the WiiU store.)

Finally, since independent developers now have more access to larger audiences, they also have more access to direct user feedback. Companies can listen to the people playing their games in close to real time, which can influence both mechanical gameplay elements (installing new features, eliminating bugs, adding new game modes, etc.) and narrative elements (story direction, dialogue options, story variation/deviation, etc.). This direct feedback loop can help developers avoid spending countless hours and capital developing content that their fans simply don't want or enjoy as well as projections may have predicted.

When considering the lifecycle of an episodic game series in comparison to a traditional packaged game release, EVGs can extend their relevance and monetize far longer than traditional titles can. This comes with the increased amount of content being consumed by gamers. Gamers can potentially be more invested in episodic IP for longer periods) since there is simply more content coming at them in incremental and digestible packages. Gamers may be attracted to an episodic games' characters or narrative or gameplay style or difficulty, but whatever has them invested will simply be reinforced more often than traditionally released games will. With a shorter wait period for the content they crave, gamers should have episodic games positioned ahead of other titles in their mind, since some of their most desired sequels may be years away from launch.

This concept of increased engagement with the games also increases the amount of engagement seen in the communities surrounding the games. These communities can be found on platforms developed by the studios releasing the episodic games, but also are heavily

concentrated across social media platforms worldwide. This boosts word-of-mouth and online mentions of the game, which in turn can help minimize spending on traditional marketing budgets overall. However, this constant stream of information and engagement is not an easy task. Melissa Loomis of GameRant.com further elaborated on this challenging undertaking:

“...without constant engagement, updates, and news, it would be far too easy for an episodic game to slip into obscurity. Episodic games allow players to play multiple games at the same time, but that can easily mean that some games get forgotten in favor of those that update regularly. It’s a precarious balance, and not something that every developer is capable of keeping up on.”<sup>30</sup>

Some game developers may find that they simply don’t have the resources (personnel, time, , etc.) to effectively handle the high level of engagement necessary to keep an episodic game afloat. Developers should begin to consider other development and release strategies that may be more manageable.

Finally, one of the most lucrative opportunities available to episodic games comes in the form of increased licensing of already popular IP. Transmedia experiences are becoming more common as technological advances allow for expanded experiences in already commercially successful narratives or created universes. Telltale Games is on the forefront of this concept, having released games based on prominent and top selling television, movie, and comic book releases, such as *Game of Thrones*, *Back to the Future*, and *The Wolf Among Us* respectively. In an interview for MCVUK.com, Telltale’s SVP of Publishing Steve Allison outlines the company’s excitement in regards to this strategy:

“Over the past few years we’ve purposefully gone after the concept of making great narratives based on IP that people are passionate about,” says Allison. “With everything we do our goals are pretty simple: put people into a narrative within a universe they are super passionate about and give them the ability to drive

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<sup>30</sup> Loomis, Melissa. "Serial Stories: How Releasing Episodic Games Can Help Indie Developers." Game Rant. May 10, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://gamerant.com/indie-developers-episodic-games/>.

and connect to the narrative the way they want to as opposed to sitting back and watching TV or a movie passively.”<sup>31</sup>

With strong ties to beloved characters and stories comes great responsibility, but if executed properly, episodic games have the potential to create synergistic experiences in collaboration with license holders of other entertainment industry properties. These complimentary episodic games may find success where big budget video game ports of movies and television have failed, as movie games are viewed as poorer quality products. Continued success with licensed episodic games can ideally change the public perception of these expanded universe products, and stir up major investment by game companies in purchasing licenses for popular entertainment IP

On the surface, may seem that an excess of advantages support the adoption an episodic model, but the strategy is not without flaws. For starters, it is extremely possible that, when pieced together into a final product, that the individual pieces of episodic content can be more expensive to the consumer than the entire package. Secondly, since episodic games are largely distributed online to cut costs associated with physical products, populations in areas with poor Internet connectivity will be left out of the mix. Additionally, physical products like instruction manuals, posters, goodies, etc., are neglected as well.

In line with cutting costs, less equipped companies may begin to produce episodic games with the intention of recycling funds earned from previous episodes to develop the following episodes in the series. Simply put, if an episode 1 doesn't make enough money, then the second episode may never see the light of day. All in all, some game developers may choose to stick with traditional model because their games just don't work in episodes, and would be unwise to split up them unnecessarily.

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<sup>31</sup> Jarvis, Matthew. "Telltale's Publishing Chief on Reviving Licensed Games, Championing the Episodic Model and Taking on TV." MCV UK. May 21, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.mcvuk.com/news/read/telltale-s-publishing-chief-on-reviving-licensed-games-championing-the-episodic-model-and-taking-on-tv/0149823>.

Both the traditional packaged game model and the episodic model have their strengths and weaknesses. Even though packaged games are still dominating the industry, episodic developers are picking up speed and growing the support for their cause with every quality episode released. So the question remains; will the episodic model revolutionize the industry, or will the concept fade away as the industry continues to grow and evolve?

	Pros	Cons
Packaged Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger content allowance</li> <li>• Large profit margins</li> <li>• Established tradition</li> <li>• Standard Pricing</li> <li>• Physical retail presence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive and increasing budgets to develop</li> <li>• Lengthy development</li> <li>• Inflexible regarding bugs and quick fixes</li> <li>• Potential long interim periods between games</li> </ul>
Episodic Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller, digestible content packages</li> <li>• Increased flow of content</li> <li>• Increased social engagement potential</li> <li>• Cheaper to develop</li> <li>• Easy to distribute digitally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all games may work in episodes</li> <li>• Combined content may be more expensive broken into pieces</li> <li>• Danger of oversaturation or burnout</li> <li>• Danger for decreased level of quality</li> </ul>

#### 4. Methodology

In order to answer this research question considering the importance of episodic gaming to the game industry, qualitative research was deemed most effective. When debating the value in various primary data gathering strategies, it made the most sense to conduct expert interviews, as opposed to conducting surveys or general questionnaires. Certainly, extracting complex and long form information to analyze was most enlightening when exploring the present and future implications of EVG. Conducting general surveys to a larger sample size just wouldn't be as helpful, since the desired information was deeper than simple yes or no answers or ranked



opinions could ever be. Therefore, by not limiting the breadth and depth of the responses developed ideas, more could be extrapolated from the gathered data. The newly synthesized concepts that resulted from the analysis are surely more grounded and plausible than theories would be if data were collected in another fashion.

Eight individuals were chosen to respond to twelve open ended questions, considering topics directly related to the episodic gaming model and video game industry as a whole. Interviewees explored the concept of EVG through the lenses of industry professionals, each holding various positions in the industry, with the exception of two true gamers. Some of these roles included game writing, game developing, community management, and industry consulting. Some questions also compelled the interviewees to consider things from the perspective of the consumers and gamers that support the industry and purchase content.

Lastly, those interviewed, like most people working in the industry, are gamers themselves. Each person brought their own baggage and personal experiences to the table, and the passion and thought put into their responses added validity to the study as a whole. In fact, most opinions were backed up by examples or supporting ideas, which further drove their points home. It was interesting to note where responses from various people were most similar, and where they were farther off. Some interviews were conducted over live calls, some interviews were submitted through long-form written responses, but overall the dialogues that resulted from these interviews were invaluable to this study.

Gathering this primary data allowed the concepts and ideas identified in the literature review to be challenged and further examined. Additionally, many of the responses included links or suggestions that lead to supplemental secondary data resources in the forms of editorial and opinion articles, panel discussions, blogs, video blogs, podcasts, and even more scholastic and

research based articles. Furthermore, many responses exposed areas of the study that directly reflected concepts and processes that cross over between the video game and music industries. These thoughts spurred deeper analysis of the gathered data, this time through the lens of a music industry professional. This combination of data analysis strategies and expanded secondary information has resulted in confident and synergistic outlooks on both the present episodic game processes and the model's future.

## 5. Results

After compiling the responses recorded through the aforementioned expert interviews, it seems that one cannot say with certainty the episodic model will revolutionize the industry. However, they also cannot dismiss this innovation, or say that the model will wither away as the industry continues to evolve. Considering both the primary data collected from industry veterans and gamers, along with the secondary data compiled through the literature review, there is no reason to believe that the episodic video game model will not last the test of time. As a sustainable and competitive option for game developers and publishers, episodic games will continue to be produced and consumed by the general public in both the immediate future and beyond.

Through this study, several elements of the discussion have led to the unraveling of episodic gaming's potential, unveiling evidence that allows for educated predictions about the industry's evolution. These topics include the activities and mainstream incentives of the major and indie publishers, the issue of content quality and oversaturation in episodes, the importance of social

engagement, and emerging trans-media opportunities. Each of these ideas and the resulting conclusions drawn from them will be explained in more detail in the sections to follow.

a. Majors, Indies, and the Mainstream

The first major green light comes from the major publishers themselves. These powerhouse corporations really have no downside to trying the episodic model, and will most likely experiment with the concept with little to no risk. Unlike independent studios and developers, the majors dominating the industry have the skilled personnel (or access to them) and the necessary resources to complete blockbuster titles regularly. Therefore, adapting one of these pre-built teams, or forming a new development team specifically to use experimental models comes with few negative side effects. Chris Krueger, MFA and game developer, commented on this idea, “While not necessarily indicative of a trend, Square Enix’s publishing of *Life is Strange* does, I think, indicate a willingness by major publishers to adopt the model.”<sup>32</sup> Other major players like Ubisoft, 2K, Rockstar, Konami, and Capcom have all been willing to release episodic games of their own, or at least episodic additions to their traditional releases. Coupled with the increased potential to land strategic and valuable partnerships with IP franchises from other industries, gamers may see more episodic options available for their favorite universes in the near future.

After considering the majors, one might wonder how their activities may affect the fate or decision making of independent game companies. Interestingly, indies usually employ the models and strategies that most effectively allow them to create games and experiences that they believe in, outside of the influence of major publishers. In fact, indies should be feeling less

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<sup>32</sup> Krueger, Chris. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 23 2015.

pressured to conform, since it is now easier than ever to access and reach mainstream gamers through previously unavailable public distribution channels. In addition, the whole episodic movement has been pioneered by independent studios from the get go, with Telltale as the undisputed king of the realm. More and more majors are adapting to the Indies, and are recognizing the need to adapt their content to the needs of today's gamers. These changes in the behavior and expectations of consumers necessitate make the evolution of content development and distribution unavoidable.

Simply put, if gamers can't buy what they want or don't like what they are currently offered, the industry suffers. Jonah Wallerstein of Whalefood Games believes the real tipping point would come if everyday gamers begin to expect their games to be delivered in episodes. However, this phenomenon may never occur, considering that there are vastly different ways companies can successfully develop and provide quality gaming experience to end consumers.

#### b. Oversaturation and Content Quality

One of, if not the biggest defining factor for any episodic game release is the quality of its content. It is no secret that the world of 2015 is more media saturated than ever. There are more distractions (both good and bad) fighting for the attention (and therefore spending power) of busy people around the globe. Content is still king, so in order to stand a chance of surviving in an industry with an increasing amount of competitive entrants, episodes need to be of a consistently high quality, and need to meet the expectations of the fans awaiting their release.

It is seemingly inevitable that with mainstream content adoption comes some form of oversaturation or devaluation of whatever the product.<sup>33</sup> Developers can combat this devaluation by consistently delivering exceptional gaming experiences in line with both their core fans and the outside audiences they hope to reach. Harmony between price point, playable hours, the number of episodes, and the periods between episodes seem to be the most important variables when gamers are considering episodic games. However, the quality of the content surely dominates the hierarchy. A great game will help minimize the impact of the missteps taken considering the other variables. The better the experience, the more willing to compromise consumers will be. If a game is good enough to create loyalty, engagement, and anticipation, then fans will be more willing to pay a bit extra, wait a bit longer, or replay episodes more frequently until the subsequent release. Greg Lane of Tin Heart Interactive agrees, singling out the Sonic series as one of many franchises that suffered more from lack of quality than availability of new games.<sup>34</sup>

As far as oversaturation or the potential to burn out demand is concerned, it seems that the perception of the gaming public is vital to sustaining valuable episodic IP. This risk of perceived oversaturation, outlined by Adam Redding of the SBFVGS Podcast, can be present when episodes are released too frequently or in abundance. With too quick of a release schedule, gamers might grow tired or annoyed of the constant barrage of content, even if the combined total of the gameplay offered by episodes is the same as a typical gaming campaign. Adam further explains, “The good thing for episodic games is that we know serialized storytelling works in other media (comics, TV.) So if we compare a traditional AAA game release to a movie, and an episodic game to a TV show, you can get a feel for saturation points. 5 seasons of a TV show is pretty standard, but 5 Iron Man movies will probably fatigue fans and require

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<sup>33</sup> Krueger, Chris. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 23 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Lane, Greg. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 16 2015.

longer breaks between releases.”<sup>35</sup> Overall, if the content isn’t stellar, doesn’t align with the desires of the gamers, and isn’t released in a package that is manageable and digestible, and then other development models should be explored.

One agreed upon strategy to improve the expectation management of gamers is to come together as an industry and concretely define the differences between concepts like episodic games and downloadable content offerings. For example, unfortunately the term DLC has mostly negative connotations among gamers, and even with easily distinguishable advantages for developers, large populations of gamers see DLC abuse as unforgivable. Botched launch day DLC offerings and malicious money grabbing of game companies trying to “cash-in” and take advantage of consumers may leave some gamers with a negative preconception of the similarly downloadable episodic content model. Perhaps if the majors can succeed in changing the name of DLC to “episode” or something clearly defined, then the format of episodic gaming may be somehow ‘legitimized’ and therefore more approachable to newcomers.

Lastly, it just doesn’t prove effective for developers to convert their systems to produce episodic games if they already have control well-oiled machines cranking out franchise installments and blockbusters. Since episodic development seems to work best in small team settings, a drop in quality could result during a massive shift in strategy towards episodic games releases. If it isn’t broken, the majors are not going to try and fix it, and no matter how high the budget, the expected monetary return will likely be worth the unavoidable and increasing fixed costs. When episodic games are proven to return higher profit margins at comparable or increased levels of efficiency, which is when major publishers may go all in on the EVG model and say goodbye to the packaged business of the past.

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<sup>35</sup> Redding, Adam. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 13, 2015.

### c. Social Engagement and the Importance of Community

Addressing the importance of the perception and needs of gamers leads directly into the third important factor in keeping an episodic model sustainable; social engagement. The episodic gaming model necessitates constant community engagement, growth, and management. Without a focused social engagement strategy, episodic games will slip through the cracks, succeeded by other media competing for gamers (and non gamers) attention. This social engagement is necessary to grow demand and anticipation for coming installments, to fix bugs and improve gameplay, and to drive the spotlight to the developer's activities as a company. In order to keep players coming back to newly released episodes or a newly premiered game series, they need to feel like their voice is heard and that their opinions matter to the developers crafting the gaming experiences.

The type of episodic game being developed will surely influence the amount of time, energy, and resources dedicated to community building and managing. Experts agree that games based on narrative and storytelling excel in the episodic model, and that non-narrative game types (puzzle, strategy, sports, etc) can succeed when engaging elements, narrators, or innovative features are thrown into a game's mix<sup>36</sup>. The most effective strategy, according to Jonah Wallerstein, is a combination of both allowing the player ecosystem to affect the game directly themselves (i.e. Minecraft, or any game that allows open modding,) as well as to design and deliver enough content for players to digest and converse about.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Redding, Adam. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 13, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Wallerstein, Jonah. Interview by Louis Pratt. Skype. June 22, 2015.

The conversations and dialogues that circulate throughout the communities surrounding games are important both online and offline. Word of mouth is just as important as ever, especially since gaming fans are extremely passionate and vocal about their opinions. Gamers also revel in opportunities to share their experiences in person. Gaming conventions attract thousands of gamers and fans to their yearly events, with both new and old fans excitedly asking questions and discussing trending topics in gaming. Additionally, game developers and gamers alike frequently create groups that meet to game together, discuss gaming culture, share and test personal projects, as well as to pass along and receive best practices in different areas of interest.

In the digital space, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr are extremely useful for observing and listening to fan communities, with each platform allowing different types of information to flow and different lessons to be learned from fans.<sup>38</sup> Across the board, experts agreed that tastemakers found on YouTube and emerging streaming platforms like Twitch will be keys to unlocking new fan bases and stimulating previously captured eyes and ears. Dave Voyles agrees, labeling Youtubers as “the future of media...the more of them who enjoy your content, the more likely it is to succeed and gain adoption.”<sup>39</sup> As it is most unwise for an individual to manage and serve an entire community alone, making sure that a dedicated team is actively listening, engaging, and communicating with fans is of the utmost importance.

#### d. Trans-media and Cross-Platform Opportunities

The final, and arguably most exciting prediction that stem from this study highlights a growing probability of trans-media and cross-platform opportunities for entertainment industry

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<sup>38</sup> Voyles, Dave. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. May 29, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid



properties. Specifically for video games, advances in technology now allow for unbridled experimentation and transformation of video game IP into various types of products and experiences across multiple industries. Diversifying and expanding the universes fans revel and the narratives that influence them allow for innovative collaborations between emerging and established entertainment companies at increasing levels. Resulting collaborative products will cross consumer boundaries, increase possible revenue streams for entertainment properties, and extend the reach and monetary value video game properties.

For example, Virtual Reality (or VR) is pegged as one of the most promising innovations being explored today. The concept has been tried and tested for decades, but technology today has advanced to a point where companies around the world are exploring creating peripherals and experiences in virtual reality. However, failures dealt to past attempts to gain traction with VR, coupled potential high hardware costs have some analysts skeptical of any real breakthroughs in the near future.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless, VR allows industry veterans to dream up big concepts to unleash when the tech catches up with the game industry. Perhaps creating VR video games for licensed properties will result in more engaging and attention commanding experiences for gamers and non-gamers alike. Maybe using VR headsets can enhance the experience of gamers tuning in to watch their favorite YouTube star live stream their gameplay, effectively making them more apart of the action than ever. Whatever the outcome, VR advancements allow for the development of products and experiences that have been limited to science fiction lore for a century, and that is an exciting thought.

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<sup>40</sup> Voyles, Dave. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. May 29, 2015.

Outside of Virtual Reality, other trans-media experiences are emerging as exciting opportunities for entertainment sectors like television, gaming, and music to collaboratively create new experiences for their existing and future fans. For example, Marvel and Telltale Games have announced a collaborative project based in the Marvel superhero universe, including both a television series and an interactive gameplay component.<sup>41</sup> Television/video game super shows have been attempted, Mavel and Telltale could knock this venture out of the park, likely to cause to swarms of other companies to try the same process for themselves.

Those looking into creating a “supershow” must be careful of the franchises they choose to collaborate with. Choosing the right narratives and universes to transform into transmedia products can streamline gaining traction, since franchises make the right moves create audiences eager to engage with their favorite universes however they can.<sup>42</sup> Immediate danger can be seen in creating pieces of a larger trans-media content offering that are too interconnected or dependent on each other. Companies should avoid storytelling that requires fans to consume every bit of every media offering related to their favorite characters in order to understand or enjoy the experience.<sup>43</sup>

It is also important to recognize that trans-media experiences are not limited to digital mediums. Translating video games into live experiences can be unique ways for fans to interact with various aspects of a games experience in new and inventive ways. For example, in celebration of the success of *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog), a modern and mature narrative adventure released in 2013, a live staged production called “The Last of Us: One Night Live”

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<sup>41</sup> "Marvel and Telltale Games Teaming Up for 2017." Telltale Games. April 23, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. <https://www.telltalegames.com/blog/discussion/94655/marvel-and-telltale-games-teaming-up-for-2017/p6>.

<sup>42</sup> Krueger, Chris. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 23 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Lane, Greg. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 16 2015.

was born.<sup>44</sup> This live event included live staged readings of cut scenes found in game, performed by the actors that brought them to life, musical performances by the composer of the game's musical landscape and themes, as well as commentary from the games designers themselves. The event was an overwhelming success, and should encourage game publishers to explore innovative trans-media transformations of their product in the real world space, just as they would explore digital options.

The increasing ease of unique releases across different platforms will also drive content design and development innovations in coming years. Companies now have the ability to develop games that can be adapted to more hardware platforms than ever. Along with typical console releases, games are being finding homes on tablets, mobile devices, smart TVs, and other emerging offerings. This doesn't just allow for the same games to appear in more places, however. This phenomenon allows for unique additional experiences to be released complimenting game releases and marketing campaigns. For example, in conjunction with the announcement of the post-apocalyptic game *Fallout 4*, Bethesda also released a mini-game for mobiles and tablets named *Fallout Shelter*. This concept is genius, and allows for fans of the *Fallout* universe to engage with elements of the story in new ways, successfully stimulate demand for the release, and provide a valuable and entertaining experience all in one package. For reference, *Fallout Shelter* is currently ranked as the #1 downloaded iOS app in 25 markets worldwide, surpassing 70 million play sessions thus far.<sup>45</sup> The game will be released for Android users shortly, and will surely continue to dominate the app market until the release of *Fallout 4* in 2016.

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<sup>44</sup> Hamilton, Kirk. "Watch The Last of Us: One Night Live, Right Here." Kotaku. July 14, 2014. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://kotaku.com/watch-the-last-of-us-one-night-only-live-right-here-1612354298>.

<sup>45</sup> Carter, Chris. "Fallout Shelter Continues Its Mobile Success, Hits #1 in 48 Countries." Destructoid. June 25, 2015. Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://www.destructoid.com/fallout-shelter-continues-its-mobile-success-hits-1-in-48-countries-294792.phtml>.

Finally, a trend in emphasis and desire for mature storytelling and characters could be the secret ingredient that allows trans-media and cross-platform content to penetrate the mainstream worldwide.<sup>46</sup> Series like *Mass Effect* and *The Last of Us* have entered the upper echelon of gaming history by providing deep and profound narrative experiences for fans to consume. With an increasing availability of player choice influencing the narrative and gameplay experiences delivered, game companies can move into audiences that may have dismissed video games in the past.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps these more customizable and profound game experiences will lend to an increasing respect of video games as a narrative medium (in comparison to books, film, TV) and lead to maximized consumption of content worldwide.

## 6. Conclusion

At the end of this study, an overwhelming sense of hope arises when considering the episodic video game model. After considering all of the primary and secondary resources collected, one can confidently argue for EVG to be a sustainable option for game developers and publishers as the industry continues to evolve, without worry that consumers and gamers are losing out with this shift in content delivery and consumption. Considering the current actions of major and indie developers, the implications and effects of technological advances, social engagement, and emerging trans-media opportunities, EVG can be ruled out as simply a “fad.” Though unlikely to completely revolutionize the industry, one can be certain that exploring the episodic model further will be time well spent.

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<sup>46</sup> Krueger, Chris. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 23 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

It is also extremely important to appreciate and take advantage of all of the concepts, ideas, and lessons that can be shared between the music and video game industries. With extreme similarities and distinguishable differences, readers of this study should aim to add value to their own best practices and projects through the implementation of cross-industry ideas. For example, why shouldn't video game crowdfunding seek to monetize the development and design process that precedes game releases, in a similar way to Pledge Music's current model? Why shouldn't bands study the successes and failures of community management activities in major commercial success like *Minecraft*? Why shouldn't indie game developers take their games on tour during the beta phase, or collaborate with musicians to show off video game products at live concerts or festivals?<sup>48</sup>

It is no secret that dynamic changes in technology and consumer behavior have led to the evolution of content offerings in both the music and video game industry. Whether the shift is from packaged games to episodic games or from cd sales to singles or streams, the key influencers of industry innovations have been found to be increasingly similar. By pulling out pages from other industries handbooks, industry professionals of all types can discover ways to positively affect their own process and the processes of adjacent or otherwise distant industries in real time. Hopefully, the findings illuminated by this study will serve to increase shared knowledge between industries, and inspire further research of emerging entertainment industry ideas in the important and volatile global ecosystem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>48</sup>Lane, Greg. Interview by Louis Pratt. Email. June 16 2015.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix 1

#### Interview Transcript

1. If major publishers adopt the episodic model, will indie game developers be pushed to do the same?
2. With strong IP and characters dominating popularity and market share, is it wise to adopt a model like episodic content, since the process could aid in further oversaturation of the market? (i.e. Legend of Zelda episodes losing appeal/burning out due to overextension)
3. What kind of impact do you think the steam-box, or customizable hardware will have on the home console market?
4. How has the advent of DLC positively or negatively affected the overall game development and launch processes?
5. How do you think the digital distribution revolution taking place in the modern video game industry adds or diminishes value in content released today?
6. How do you create, maintain, and grow the social ecosystem built around games (and fandoms) to extending the lifecycle of a game?

7. It has been proven that games with a narrative focus can support the episodic model, but how can games that focus on other features or play-styles adopt the episodic content concept successfully?
8. How active are you in communities involving your favorite content? Where/with what platforms do you interact with other members in the community?
9. How has crowdfunding influenced the development process of games?
10. Why do you think there has been such a lack of price model experimentation with games?
11. What are the most promising trends you see in video games today?
12. What are your thoughts on the future of “super-shows” (i.e. Marvel and Telltale’s announced collaboration, multi-media storytelling content)

## Appendix 2

Example of completed interview

### **Greg Lane – Tin Heart Interactive**

1. If major publishers adopt the episodic model, will indie game developers be pushed to do the same?
  - a. **This is difficult to say. Currently, I would point to the indies who are starting the episodic movement. Studios like Telltale and Cardboard Computer**

*(Kentucky Route Zero)* seem to focus on this format. The length and content of episodic work works better for small teams – if they can exist long enough to get the next episode out. If the major publishers could change even the nomenclature of “DLC” to “Episode” then I think the format of episodic gaming would be somehow ‘legitimized’ to gamers. Major publishers already have yearly series (*Assassin’s Creed*, *Call of Duty*) yet they’re still not considered as episodic. They may have a difficult time putting the necessary polish on with quick turnaround times.

2. With strong IP and characters dominating popularity and market share, is it wise to adopt a model like episodic content, since the process could aid in further oversaturation of the market? (i.e. Legend of Zelda episodes losing appeal/burning out due to overextension)
  - a. **I think burnout could come from poor quality, rather than too much content. Ideally, episodic games would be short enough to get through in one to three play sessions. With that length, players could consume it and desire more. On the other hand, I think a franchise like Sonic has suffered more from lack of quality, not from too many games available.**
  
3. What kind of impact you think the steam-box, or customizable hardware will have on the home console market?
  - a. **I’ve not developed for Steam before, so I’ve not analyzed their audience in much detail. I think the success of micro-consoles and VR devices comes down to the content being created for them. It’s great to see they’re getting a bunch of funding now, but I don’t see where the mainstream breakout is. We’ll have to answer a lot of fundamental questions (“Can this Steam game be played without a full keyboard? What is the benefit?” “Am I using 3D in a way that adds to the game beyond just being a gimmick?”) while at the same time it’s becoming easier and easier to get onto the existing platforms as an indie.**
  
4. How has the advent of DLC positively or negatively affected the overall game development and launch processes?
  - a. **Sometimes, day 1 DLC isn’t understood by the customer base. My understanding (Sorry, I’ve yet to work on a AAA release) is that regional certification and mass reproduction takes a long time to do before launch. Instead of disbanding the team (we should really be asking why this is common in the industry) the company keeps the staff onboard and they produce additional content. DLC is good, in my opinion. How it’s handled, however is sometimes (often) very bad – and this is often tied with retail stores. If DLC is pre-purchased as part of a bundle, it prevents players from “voting with their wallets” and paying money for what they view as quality.**

**Additionally, content is reserved for pre-ordering for specific retailers, preventing players to access all of the games content. So, DLC overall? Positive for development, negative in how it's handled (and shown to the audience) at launch.**

5. How do you think the digital distribution revolution taking place in the modern video game industry adds or diminishes value in content released today?
  - a. **This is a mixed bag from every direction. I think digital distribution is good for the player, and both good and bad for the developer. Players now have access to a range of games from a long history of game development for relatively cheap. Developers that release into this environment are competing for time and having to price their game at a point that will get them noticed. The ease of digital distribution has overall has produced a load of crap content. (Jim Sterling has a lot to say about these kind of shysters: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5svAoQ7D38k&list=PLIRceUcRZcK0E1Id3NHchFaxikvCvAVQe&index=3>)**
  
6. How do you create, maintain, and grow the social ecosystem built around games (and fandoms) to extending the lifecycle of a game?
  - a. **The most successful way to do it is to actually not do it alone. Engage with your potential fans, and involve them as community managers and evangelists for your game. Talk about it all the time. I think there's actually a lot of crossover in how bands succeed as well.**
  
7. It has been proven that games with a narrative focus can support the episodic model, but how can games that focus on other features or play-styles adopt the episodic content concept successfully?
  - a. **Most often, this is handled with selling level packs, which sometime includes a new mechanic. I'm not sure this will ever hold as much sway as the narrative engagement. (Oddly enough). Mario is a game series that is often light on storytelling. I couldn't imagine that game selling several times a year. To do that, a mechanics-based episodic game would have to be adequately challenging in order to keep players entertained from session to session. (That's what works for the crossword puzzle in the New York Times, right?)**
  
8. How active are you in communities involving your favorite content? Where/with what platforms do you interact with other members in the community?

- a. **Of things I like? I'm an old man. I read supporting materials and discuss with people IRL. Sometimes I'll even discuss these things over beers to get the debate really engaging. At conventions, I compliment cosplayers. That's about as close to the community I get. I watched a fan twitch stream of the Elder Scrolls. I felt like an awkward voyeur. I've looked at message boards, and they either move too fast to actually participate in (while living the rest of life), or are filled with trolls.**
9. How has crowdfunding influenced the development process of games?
- a. **It has blown players' minds on the actual cost (in dollars and time) of development. In response, developers are using it as a partial fund. Either way, it seems that all of the games that have been kickstarted are late. Development is always slower than expected and is difficult to estimate. The other crowdfunding option that's just starting to be explored is Patreon. Personally, I'd love to see this as a model, but I think it's largely just a popularity contest, and has little to do with content.**
10. Why do you think there has been such a lack of price model experimentation with games?
- a. **Because there's always a sale. Because there's a recession. Because the content is so easily pirate-able. You have a generation of folks that are broke and think keeping up with videogames are a right. Art is always difficult to price out. I think that's why the games industry is more comfortable following gambling with a free-to-play (pay-to-play) model. Fuck dude. I'd love to pull in more of what I learned from being in a band. I'd love to put out a tip cup at live demos, and I'd love to sell t-shirts, but I'm afraid that the expectant audience wouldn't understand and would want more for free. Have you seen how much free swag the big companies hand out? Indies are sort of held to that standard from both an expectant audience and an internet full of trolls. The prices stay the way they are because of a silent embargo of "that's the way things have always been".**
11. What are the most promising trends you see in video games today?
- a. **The opening of platforms. Even Nintendo has an indie publishing program! NINTENDO. Seriously. The tools are getting cheaper with a rev-share that works. With both of these, I hope to see game studios be able to settle anywhere. Even Pennsylvania.**
12. What are your thoughts on the future of "super-shows" (i.e. Marvel and Telltale's announced collaboration, multi-media storytelling content)

- a. I don't know much about Telltale's efforts. Marvel should do a good job with it. The golden rule will be to allow each piece to stand alone. Don't expect your audience to have read every bit of lore before enjoying what you create.**