

CE Reflective Paper

Louis George Pratt

Master of Arts – Global Entertainment and Music Business

Emilien Moyon & Alexandre Perrin

26 June 2015

1. Summary of the project that was completed

To fulfill the Culminating Experience requirement (also known as ‘CE’), I decided to conduct a research project. This research project focused on analyzing and understanding a video game content development and distribution model that has re-emerged in today’s industry known as “Episodic Gaming.” My research question (or questions) revolved around exploring the model and its sustainability, in the context of evolving content in the global entertainment industry.

My initial idea was quite simplistic: is the episodic gaming model a fad, or will it revolutionize the industry? I began my journey to answer this question, but this type of ‘hot or cold’ thinking quickly changed as I dove into my research. I realized that I should be studying the model through the lens of its potential, and consumed primary and secondary information to form my final opinion on the subject: that the episodic video game model won’t completely revolutionize the video game industry, but it will continue to flourish as an extremely valuable strategy for game developers and publishers to adopt and utilize, in competition with the traditional boxed game release model that still dominates the gaming industry.

Another important part of my project involved comparing both the video game industry and the music industry, in order to uncover the processes and market factors that have led to a continual transformation in the content provided to fans, customers, and consumers. My experience studying and understanding the music industry allowed me to wrap my head around the causes and effects of certain scenarios in the industry, and flooded my mind with ideas to explore. My analysis of the episodic gaming content model, along with cross-industry comparisons and analysis were the main focuses of my research paper.

2. Results: How the project did and did not align with expectations

The project basically aligned with what I expected it to be. The beginning few months of my CE were a roller coaster ride, but once I finally landed on a research project and solidified my subject, things seemed to flow as expected. I knew that I had to deliver a final research paper and defend the thesis to a panel of jurors at the close of my graduate studies, and I'm finally at the end of the process, preparing my materials to present my research on the 2nd of July 2015.

One thing I did have trouble understanding was how much I should value and weight the importance of the CE project and process in the context of the rest of my studies. Since the beginning of the year, the CE project was conveyed to our class in a light that made many students put the project on a pedestal, which built up a fair amount of stress for the average GEMB student. Personally, as I started to dive into the CE projects completed by past students that were made available to us, it seemed like the projects weren't that big of a deal. The papers seemed like regular papers I've seen submitted in typical post-secondary classroom settings, so I was left unsure of how much energy and time to commit to the project and process.

Since I ultimately ended up with a research project, it didn't end up feeling like the time commitment was comparable to any of the classes I've taken. Perhaps it is due to the nature of my topic and my passion for the industry and the ideas I was exploring, but it seemed that my research was executed in quite a lax and comfortable way. Besides the work and stress that comes along with approaching deadlines and deliverables, it felt like the CE was more of an afterthought, something that I had to complete simply as a requirement to graduate. At the end of the process I still feel this way, and am excited to complete my oral defense and move on to commencement and the next steps of my professional career.

However, I do feel that the specific research I did will be an invaluable asset as I pursue positions in the game industry.

3. Process

My CE process was a rocky one. From the get go I was dead set on completing a consulting project. As soon as the different project options were made available to us, I began to reach out to both my network and industry professionals at companies I respected and had interest in, with hopes to secure a consulting position and start working as soon as possible. I felt that the consulting project option was the most beneficial in regards to my professional development: I could gain (more) “real world” industry experience, build my network, and potentially open doors to employment opportunities, all while tapping experienced music industry veterans for their knowledge and perspectives.

After several weeks of searching, I connected with a Senior Vice President of Consumer Sales and Marketing at Universal Music Group named Adam Zelinka. After conversing with him and pitching the CE process and requirements (and myself, of course) to another member of his team (the VP of Strategic Insights and Research), I earned the opportunity to collaborate on a research project with UMG. Over the next several weeks, we continued to discuss possibilities for the year, and decided that the most interesting project to consult on included analyzing the online engagement and consumption of music of Baby Boomers and Generation X’ers on various social media platforms, and it seemed that it was a matter of time before the project would launch.

Unfortunately, administrative and legal complications lead to the project’s cancellation. It is common knowledge that the music industry has had some serious problems involving internships. In today’s entertainment industry, it is almost mandatory to complete

one or more unpaid internships, with most entry-level positions positioned just out of reach for most professionals entering the industry. Many companies have come under fire for taking advantage of free labor, including UMG. For this reason, the legal department at the Major decided it would be too risky to collaborate with me. Why? Simply because of the way the project was named and positioned. The project was positioned under the umbrella of consulting, but it also required me to refuse compensation. Without compensation I was seen more like unpaid intern in the eyes of the company. As such, UMG felt uncomfortable with my middle ground positioning, and didn't feel like the risk of adding me to the team was worth it. They recognized that I would be doing a substantial amount of work for the company, and felt that without compensation I could potentially have the grounds to pursue legal action after the completion of the project in hopes of being compensated...unfortunate, yet understandable.

After concluding that the Universal gig was finished before it started, I was lucky enough to be introduced to a few contacts that Adam felt might fit my ambitions and academic needs. After a few more weeks of calls and conversations I settled in with another company by the name of RelentlessGenerator. Also known as RGenerator, the company was positioned in the direct-to-consumer space, with its business activities including designing, developing, and maintaining customer relationships for entertainment industry clients, including a contract with SONY Music. Our conversations resulted in securing a second consulting opportunity, this one rooted in analyzing the potential advantages, disadvantages, and opportunities for the company to move into the "Over-The-Top" content space.

I was assigned to the Director of Product management Haseeb Javed. As the first semester continued and came to a close, we began to outline the objectives and timeline of the project, along with the scope of activities I'd be performing and the resources that were available to us. It seemed like this project would be the one, and I even went as far as meeting

him in RGenerator's New York office during the winter break in between semesters.

However, things started to seem strange after I returned back to Valencia for the spring semester, with my attempts at reaching Haseeb failing to find responses. After two weeks with no success, I decided to call the office and see what was wrong. When I spoke with the receptionist, I was informed that Haseeb no longer worked for the company, and I was refused the phone number of the CEO of the company Dan Pelson, my original contact with the firm. He then proceeded to hang up the phone, seemingly signaling the end to a second consulting project before it could even get going.

It was at this point that I decided that a research project would be the most logical choice moving forward. I had lost so much time trying to launch the original two consulting projects I secured that I couldn't afford to waste time pursuing another opportunity. I figured that if the third time was the charm, than choosing a research topic that I was completely passionate about was my only hope for finding my perfect CE. I settled on the idea of studying the video game industry, in order to fortify the "Global Entertainment" element of my graduate studies. After brainstorming research topics with my advisor, Alex Perrin, I decided that exploring the episodic content model being employed in the gaming industry was the most compelling and exciting to me.

I decided that conducting qualitative research fit my needs better than quantitative research. After solidifying my topic I jumped into conducting my literary review, which continues even as I complete my final deliverable. One of the problems I faced was that most of the academic research conducted on video games highlight video game violence and the effects of video game violence on gamers. I found myself finding my most valuable information through a combination of editorial articles written by industry professionals, podcasts, and video content including panel discussions, interviews, and personal points of view. Additionally, my advisor made resources and data available that would have been

unobtainable (or just too expensive to afford) on my own, all the while helping me focus my ideas and plan the subsequent steps in the process.

This literary review influenced my decision to conduct expert interviews in order to gain more perspective on the subject, and all of my findings during my initial research period helped me outline twelve interview questions that I proceeded to ask a variety of industry pro's. These interviews helped me strengthen my hypothesis and spark even more ideas for the project. Using my personal network, the networks of my peers, as well as social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, I connected with and interviewed 8 people from gaming industry, working in different roles for different sized companies. The knowledge they had to share is invaluable, and ultimately aligned with my position post-research: that the episodic model won't change the game, but it will be a popular and sustainable option as the industry moves forward.

5. Contribution to the discipline and profession

This research contributes to the discipline of entertainment industry studies in several ways. Primarily, it provides a resource for anybody that is interested in the video game industry or video game development and distribution. This includes industry professionals unfamiliar with the subject, individuals who hope to enter the field and are exploring the episodic model as a potential business opportunity, and fans of gaming and entertainment industry processes in different capacities.

I also hope that publishing a version of this paper will serve to inspire other's interested in learning about the video game industry on a deeper level, whether as a full white paper or as an article/editorial piece on an e-journal, blog, or website. Through out high

school and university I was always compelled to study the video game industry, and I hope this research leads to other similar research projects.

Furthermore, I feel that the cross-industry analysis I included in my paper will bring value to the industry through an expanded point-of-view. There is so much that can be learned through examining industries outside of your own. As such, the similarities, differences, parallels, opportunities, and shortcomings I discovered during my studies should serve to add depth and spark ideas to innovate and improve upon concepts, techniques, and mechanisms in each industry respectively. Experience is a masterful teacher, so taking notice and learning from the successful and unsuccessful ventures from other industries is essential, especially in industries as closely related as the video game and music industries.

6. Impact on the student completing the work

This entire process helped me apply skills that I've learned and practiced throughout my academic and professional career. The process gave me the opportunity and the freedom to continue to explore my professional self, my professional aspirations, as well as to experiment with different styles of working. Since all of the responsibility was on my shoulders, I made sure to explore different study and work techniques, in order to continue to refine my skillset and professional self.

The project also helped me further my plans for the future, in both the short term and long term. After several years of study focused on the video game industry, I feel that there is no reason for me to believe that working in the video game industry in some capacity is out of reach. I feel much more confident that I could present myself as a valuable asset to any company working the video game ecosystem, and have begun to research possible job openings in the field.

I also believe that I am extremely equipped to combine my knowledge of the video game industry and the music industry to create a service or company that is positioned to create collaborative projects or experiences using elements from both spaces. For Branding Sponsorship & Advertising I completed a research paper on the opportunities for fruitful and sustainable collaboration between musicians and music brands and video game brands, and I believe that exploring these opportunities from either side of the industry, whether freelance or in house at a company, are exciting and feasible ventures for me to take on in the future.

