PIRATE KINGS

Jelly Button

Case study

unity

How Jelly Button brought their dream game to life

Creating a unique social experience

It's been downloaded over 50 million times. It's the number one grossing game in 20 countries. Every month, it has a combined total gameplay time of over 5000 years. What is it? It's Jelly Button's free-to-play, multiplayer, multi-platform game, Pirate Kings, which was made with Unity.

Jelly Button released Pirate Kings at the end of 2013 on iOS, on Android five months later, and on WebPlayer (Facebook Canvas) five months after that. Pirate Kings offers a unique social experience. In other games, social interactions tend to be minor, but in Pirate Kings, they're fundamental to the game. Players can interact with their friends whether they're online or offline, and they don't have to wait for a response to see the results. So, for example, they can steal their friend's treasures or even attack their island, whether the friend is online or not.

"The social interaction actually affects how you play the game, not just visually. And you can see the effect in real-time whenever you connect," says Ron Rejwan, one of Jelly Button's five founders and CTO. "We call this a Mingle player experience because it combines elements of both single and multi-player games in a unique way."

This unique social dimension can make the game experience very emotional, and Rejwan believes that it is a key reason for the game's explosive popularity.

"We've seen amazing growth with an especially engaged audience in SE Asia," Rejwan says. "Players talk on online communities about how the game has affected their lives and friendships. There's hundreds of reviews with some users even warning not to play the game if your friendships are not strong enough to withstand social pirating. And that's a sign of emotional engagement. People even share original videos and songs about their experiences interacting with friends in the game. It's amazing to see how it's touching people across the world," he says.

The challenge

**How to live up to your own high standards**

The degree of success with Pirate Kings may have surpassed Jelly Button's expectations, but the level of quality in their finished product was the result of an ambitious development process. Their recipe for creating original quality content is to get feedback quickly from as many people as possible within their network of game lovers, all of whom share their high standards. This network is comprised of their own team, family and friends. In order to succeed, however, the process needs to be streamlined.

"Making great games takes time. You need to investigate the idea and play around with it," says Rejwan. "We didn't want to be like a factory, releasing 40 games a month. We aim to release one or two games every year, but they have to push the limits of product and technology. They have to be mobile friendly, multi-platform and based on an original idea that offers a great experience."

Back in 2011, however, they had been working mostly with Flash, which didn't enable them to get where they wanted to go.

"It was a terrible experience, and we knew we needed for something to change," Rejwan says. "We've been in this industry for a very long time, and it's more than just a job. Games are important to us, and we know that if a game doesn't live up to our expectations - in terms of great art, technical quality, and the overall experience - then it's just not going to be good enough," he says.
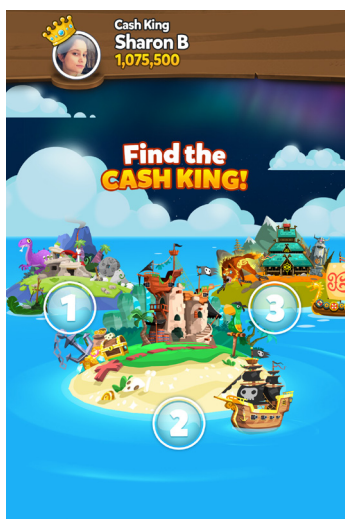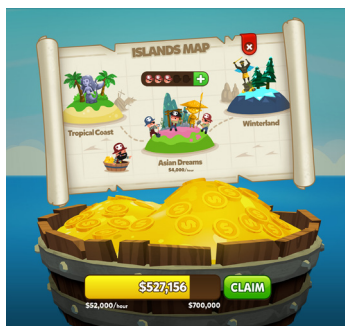
The solution

Sometimes it takes a community to develop a quality game

What Jelly Button needed was a way to iterate as fast as possible in order to get a proof of concept. The technology, community and collaboration possibilities that Unity presents have enabled them to test their concept very quickly.

"Within a month, we can have a prototype where the core game mechanics, the way it looks and behaves, the features, and the capabilities of the game we test, are all quite polished. And that means we can get valid feedback quickly from as many people as possible," Rejwan says.

Jelly Button adopted the Unity Engine in 2012, and they've used it to develop Pirate Kings, and their second game, which will be released later this year. For Rejwan, it was love at first sight.

"I guess you could call me an unofficial technical evangelist for Unity," he says. "I really love the platform. One of our aspirations is

to become a brand name for the industry, one that inspires the next generation of game players and developers. And Unity is a big part of that. We take part in forums, look for and provide answers in QAs on the Unity Community, and participate in live events. In fact, we've even hosted several Unity meetups of our own in our office. And we're actively educating and cultivating a new crop of Unity developers in Israel."

Time-savers that let them get down to the nitty gritty

One way Unity saves Jelly Button time is by enabling them to create prototypes that are very close to the quality of the future final version, and the integrated Unity Cloud Build capabilities are important in this respect. With Cloud Build, they can create builds for their team, focus groups, and do QA without wasting time on administration.

"Unity Cloud Build is an awesome tool. We rely on it heavily. Integrating it to the Unity Editor was so quick; it took 10 minutes to set up and

literally saved us dozens of hours of manpower every month," Rejwan says.

The Unity Asset Store is another offering that enables Jelly Button to prototype quickly. They use it to save time by adding all kinds of game elements quickly, which they don't deem crucial for them to develop in-house.

"Whether it's gorgeous graphics, a 3rd party IAP integration, or something else that we buy, the Asset Store saves us so much time in the prototyping phase and allows us to focus on creating great games. It's unbelievable. I don't even know how it would be possible otherwise."

The multi-platform capabilities in Unity also save Jelly Button considerable time and headaches by allowing them to work on several game versions in parallel without having to manage separate projects and duplicate code for iOS, Google and Facebook. They can release the different versions with very minor adaptations.

The facts in brief

Founded in 2011, Jelly Button Games is a free-to-play mobile game company based in Tel Aviv, Israel, with around 50 employees. Their premiere game release, Pirate Kings, has over 50 million downloads globally.

The challenge
A fast prototyping process was needed in order to streamline a development process aimed at producing one or two groundbreaking games per year..

The solution
The Unity Engine, Cloud Build, Asset Store and Community have increased the efficiency of the development process enabling Jelly Button to focus on creating and testing unique and innovative, high-quality games.

The results
- Can create basic prototype within days
- Integrated the Cloud Build collaboration tool in just minutes
- Saved dozens of developer hours monthly

The results

The dreams that games are made of

Unity has helped the Israeli game developer stay true to their core vision: To create original, premium quality games with unique and innovative social dimensions.

> "To sum it up in one phrase, Unity enables us to turn our dream into a reality."

**Ron Rejwan,
Jelly Button co-founder
and CTO**

The combination of the Unity platform, the integrated Cloud Build and the Unity Community, where they can seek answers to niche problems and participate in the conversation, enables Jelly Button to focus on their goals. As a result, they've cut developer time significantly and can create working prototypes very quickly.

This has opened the door to the kind of long-term success they can be proud of. And for Jelly Button, success is defined as creating unique, quality games that stretch the boundaries of social interaction.

"To sum it up in one phrase," Rejwan says, "Unity enables us to turn our dreams into a reality."