

G D C O N L I N E 2 0 1 0

APP STORE SURVIVAL

launching and sustaining a successful franchise



Arash Keshmirian,
Co-Founder and CEO
Limbic

ABOUT MYSELF



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

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Masters at UCSD in Computer Science with focus in Computer Graphics / Rendering

I love entrepreneurship. Started my first company in High School. You are at the helm, you can try anything you want, and you are rewarded based on the success of the ideas you have and the work you put into executing them.

Graduated MS in Computer Science @ UCSD, decided to start own company instead of getting a regular job met Iman Mostafavi and Volker Schönefeld, Founded Limbic.



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

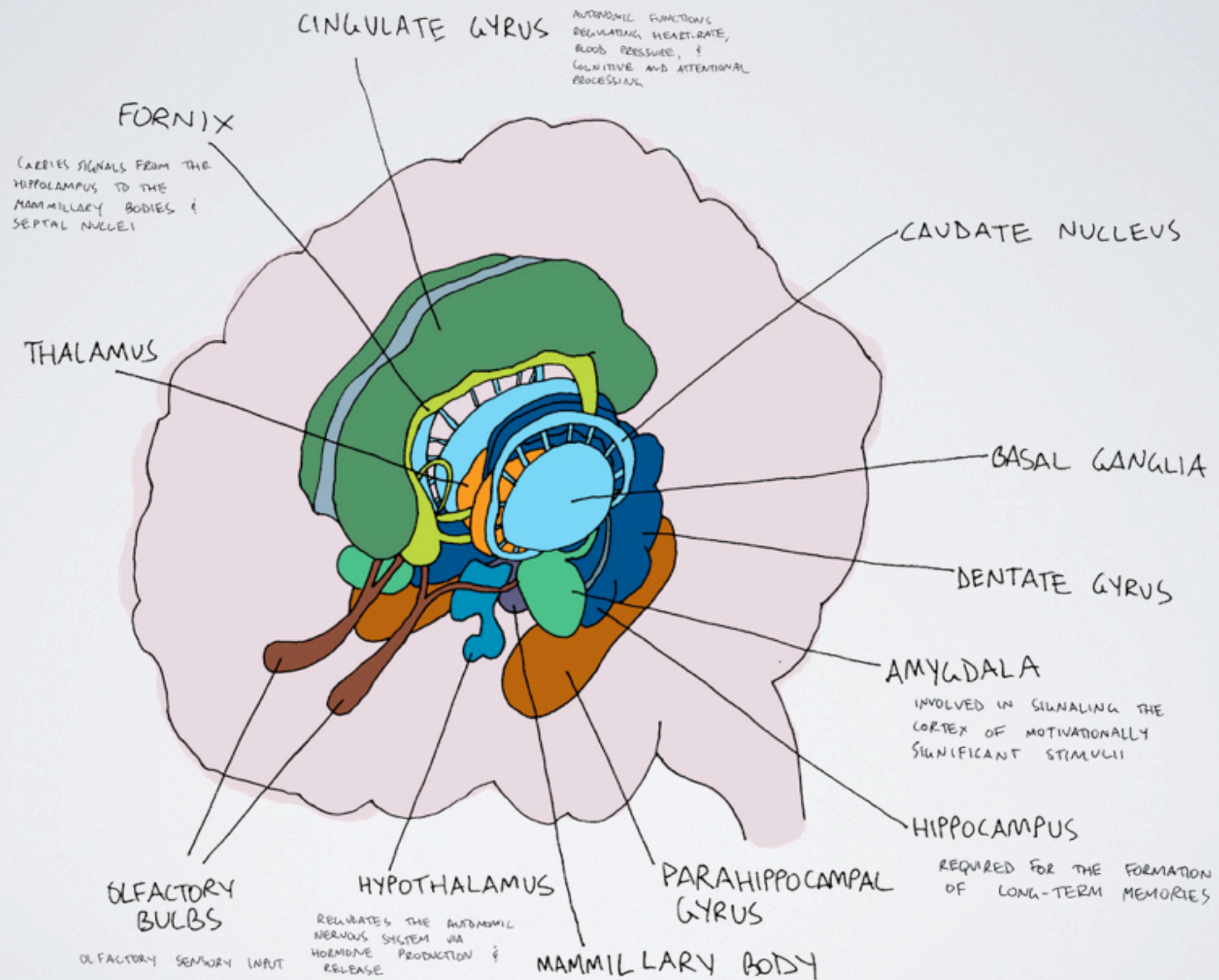
3

Two goals driving the founding of Limbic:

Build the best Tower Defense game ever made, that we would want to play ourselves

Be our own bosses, and make a living doing what we love

The Limbic System



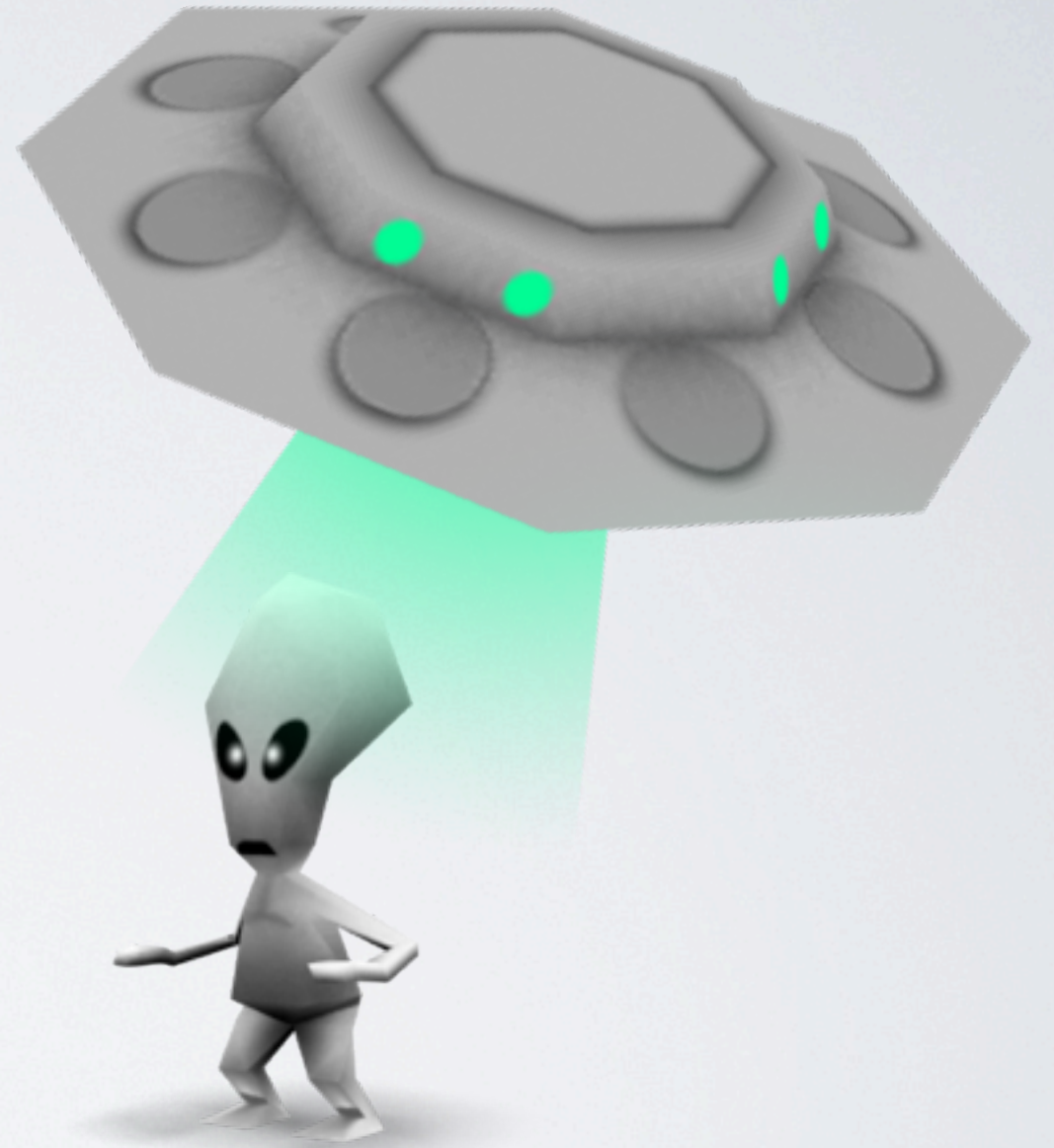
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4

The Limbic System. Fun, emotion, all that good stuff starts here.

TowerMadness



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

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5

Quick intro to TowerMadness, and the story.

TowerMadness



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6

A couple madness screenshots to continue introducing the game.

TowerMadness

Daily Downloads, May 23, 2009 to September 19, 2010



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

7

Discussion of spikes and major releases, raising the baseline

- Not sure what you plan on saying here but alluding to what caused the spikes might be good.
- Also, a separate breakout by product - or just isolating the free version might be insightful because it will likely show more distinct plateaus.

TowerMadness

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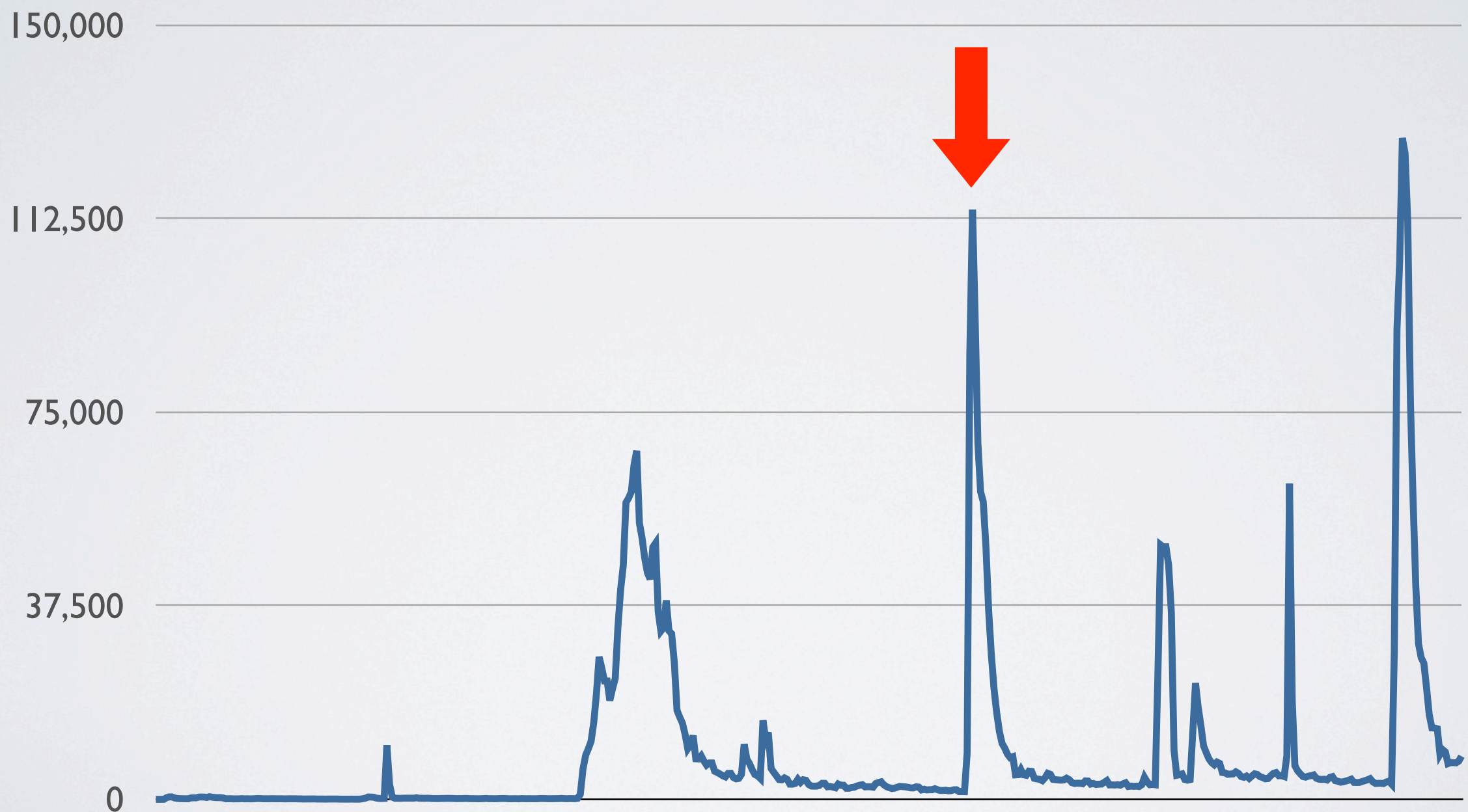
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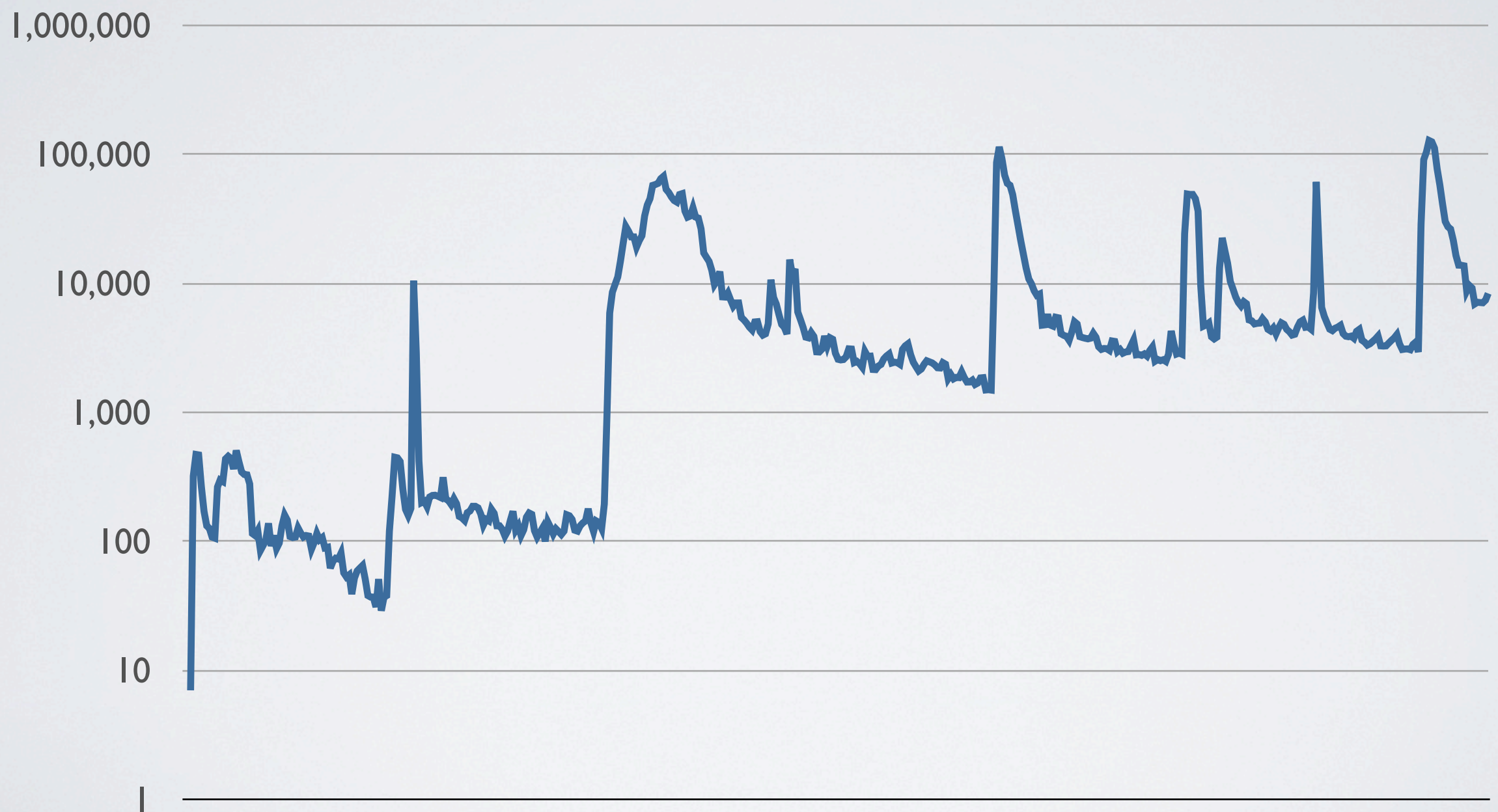
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8

Logarithmic version of the same chart as before.

Might mention Chinese TowerMadness HD sales surpassed US today

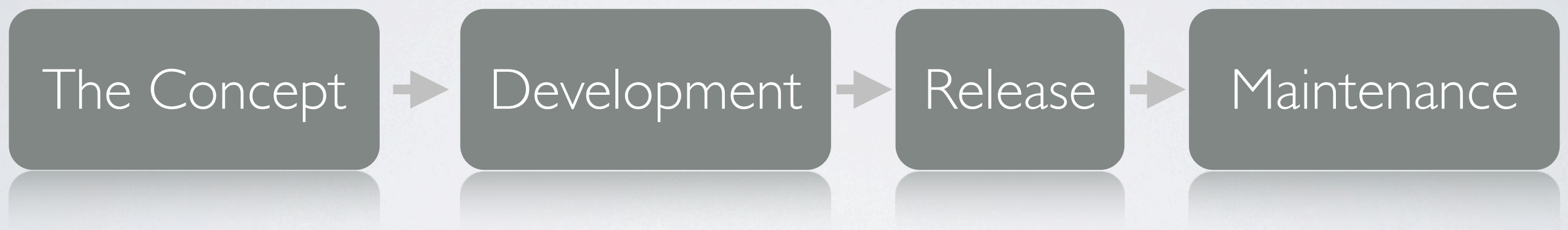
WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

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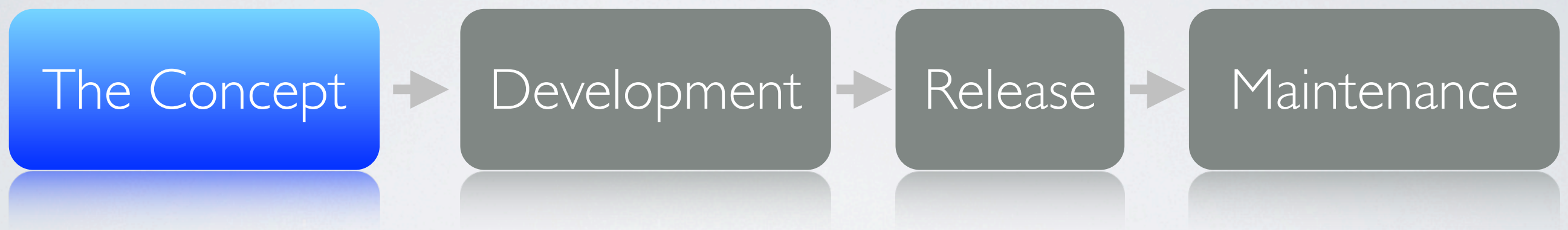
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9

Exactly what this talk is - an in-depth record of how we've taken a game from the simplest idea stage all the way to a fully released and successful game, and what we've learned from our experiences and those of our friends in the community

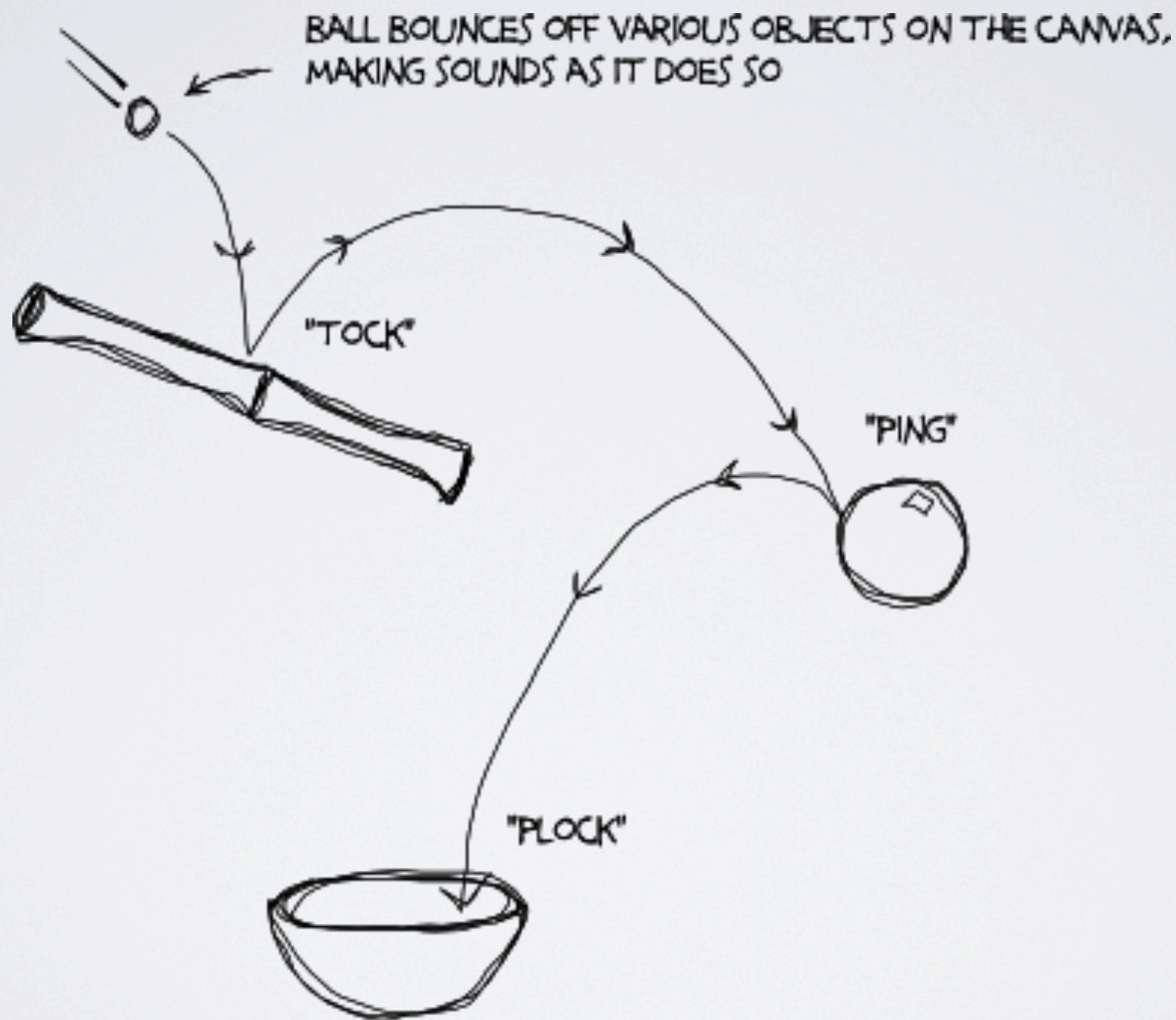


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“I HAVE A GAME IDEA!”



mccormick.cx

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The idea is only a tiny component of what it takes to make and market a good app. Jokingly mention all the emails we get about people who want us to build their idea for a handsome revenue share.

Tower Defense game was by no means a super original idea or a particularly revolutionary one.

Message about really thinking about your game from all angles - many great ideas for games fail from lack of planning or vision, not because the idea or concept wasn't good. The execution was just bad.

PLAYABILITY



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Ideas that last, keeping players coming back

Easy for players to pick up straight away

Easy to pick up, difficult to master ideas are best.

Playability - it has to be enjoyable enough to want to play more than other games - or other things - you are also competing with things like TV, reading, emailing, etc

DEPTH AND EXPLORABILITY



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Deep content, Explorability - Sword of Fargoal, PvZ, Space Miner, I Dig It
Variation - Zombie Farm
Expandability - Games with levels/worlds, themes, inventories

COMPETITION



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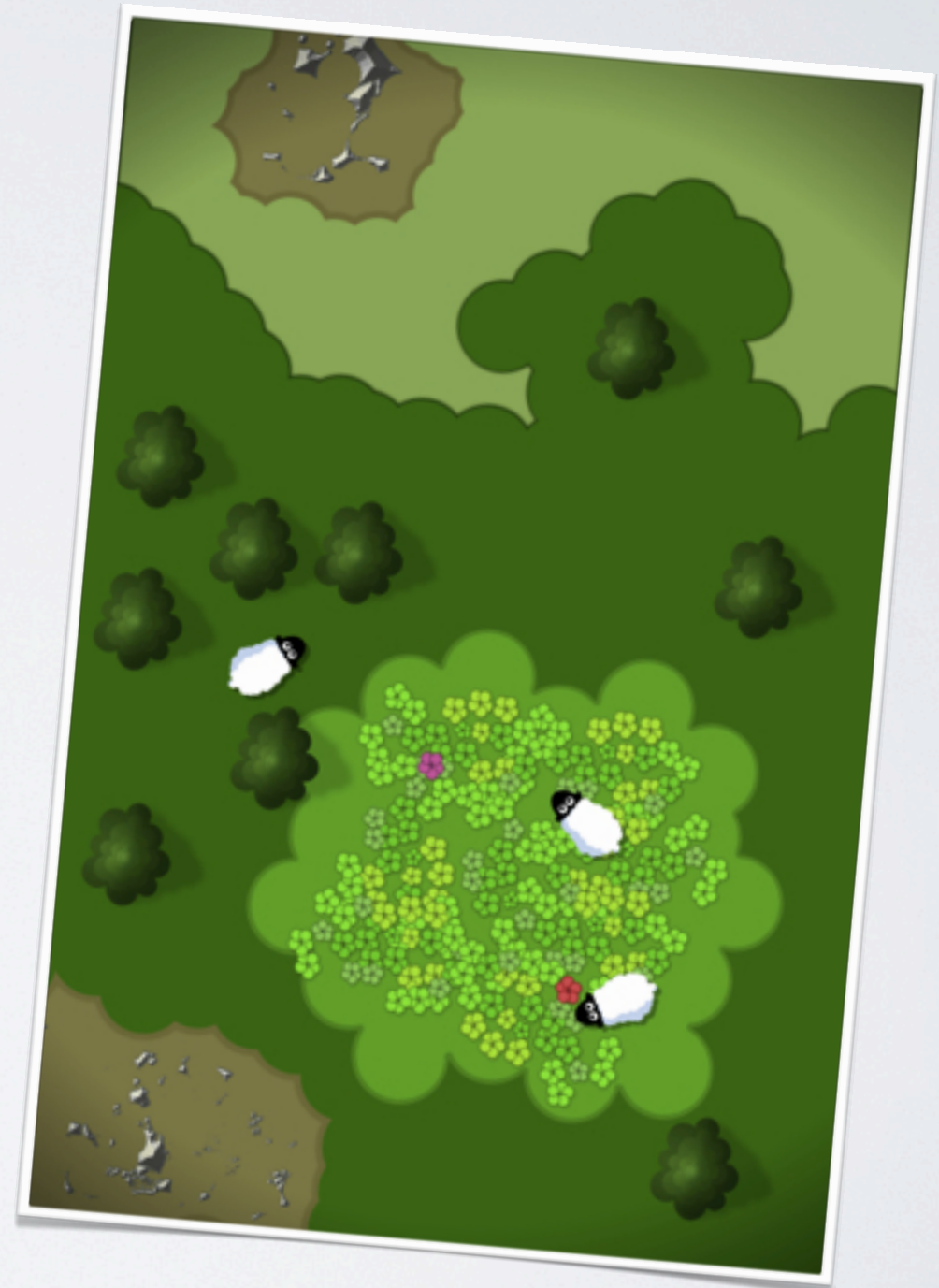
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Competition

- Scoring
- Achievements

Allowing users to compare themselves is an awesome reason to keep playing. Do this wherever possible. Friends are even better than strangers.

PLAYABILITY



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Most importantly: has to be fun!
Prototype, prototype, prototype

MARKETABILITY



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Marketability - It has to have enough uniqueness (to the game or the marketing) to be able to **FIND** an audience. Many good games are never “found”.

- Start with a pre-amble about how the App marketplace is somewhat unique in its structure and you can't approach it like anything else (like a website). Here are a few tips for things that are core to success in the App store:

- Find a game name that makes sense, is memorable, and is marketable

- Do exhaustive trademark / domain search

- Choose a name that is google-able ("bounce" or "cards" is bad)

(Examples will be given of how to take your core concept and make it better).

- Number of characters of game needs to be short, as iPhone/iPad Home Screen only allows limited # of characters and abbreviation is ugly

- Once the name is decided, set up the application in iTunes Connect right away and reserve the name. (You can upload the binary later and initiate submission, when you complete the game) - Deliver this a special insider tip: "Many don't know you can..."

- Trademark your name if you can afford it, and reserve the domain(s).

MARKETABILITY

Haypi Kingdom

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I wish Haypi Kingdom had named their app bundle more carefully.

MARKETABILITY

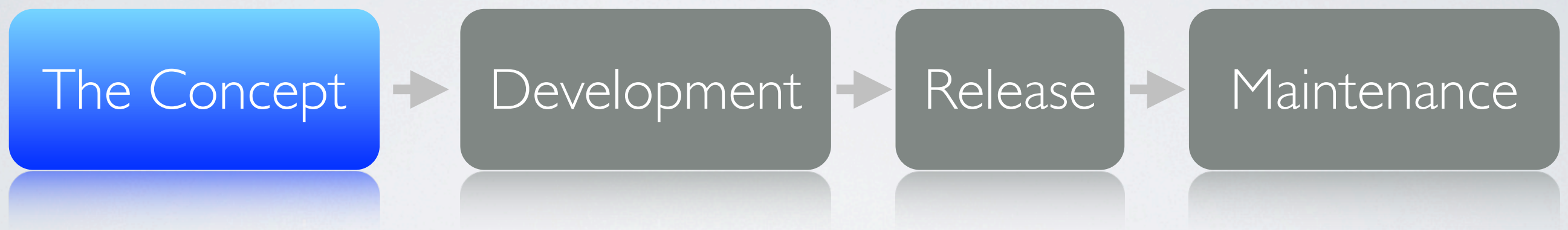


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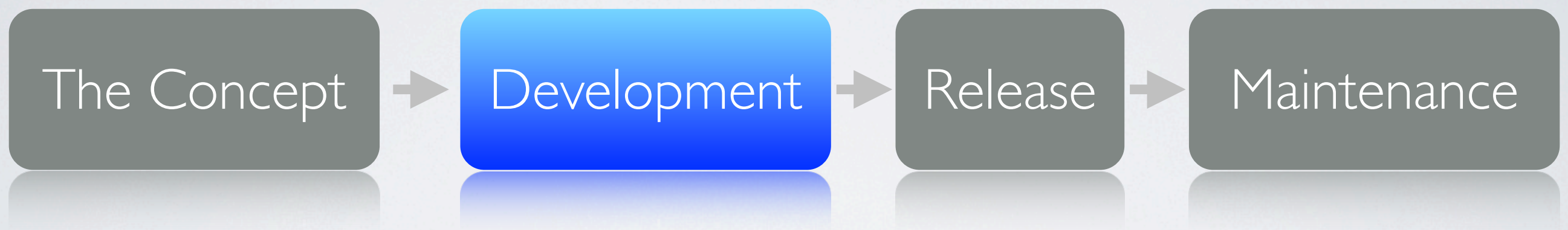
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That's it for Concepting. Moving on to Development.



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DEVELOPMENT

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21

- **Probably want an overview here saying that basic decisions about how you build and the energy you put into the hard work is where it really pays off.**
- **If you don't have an engine, Unity / Cocos2D are good ones**

DEVELOPMENT



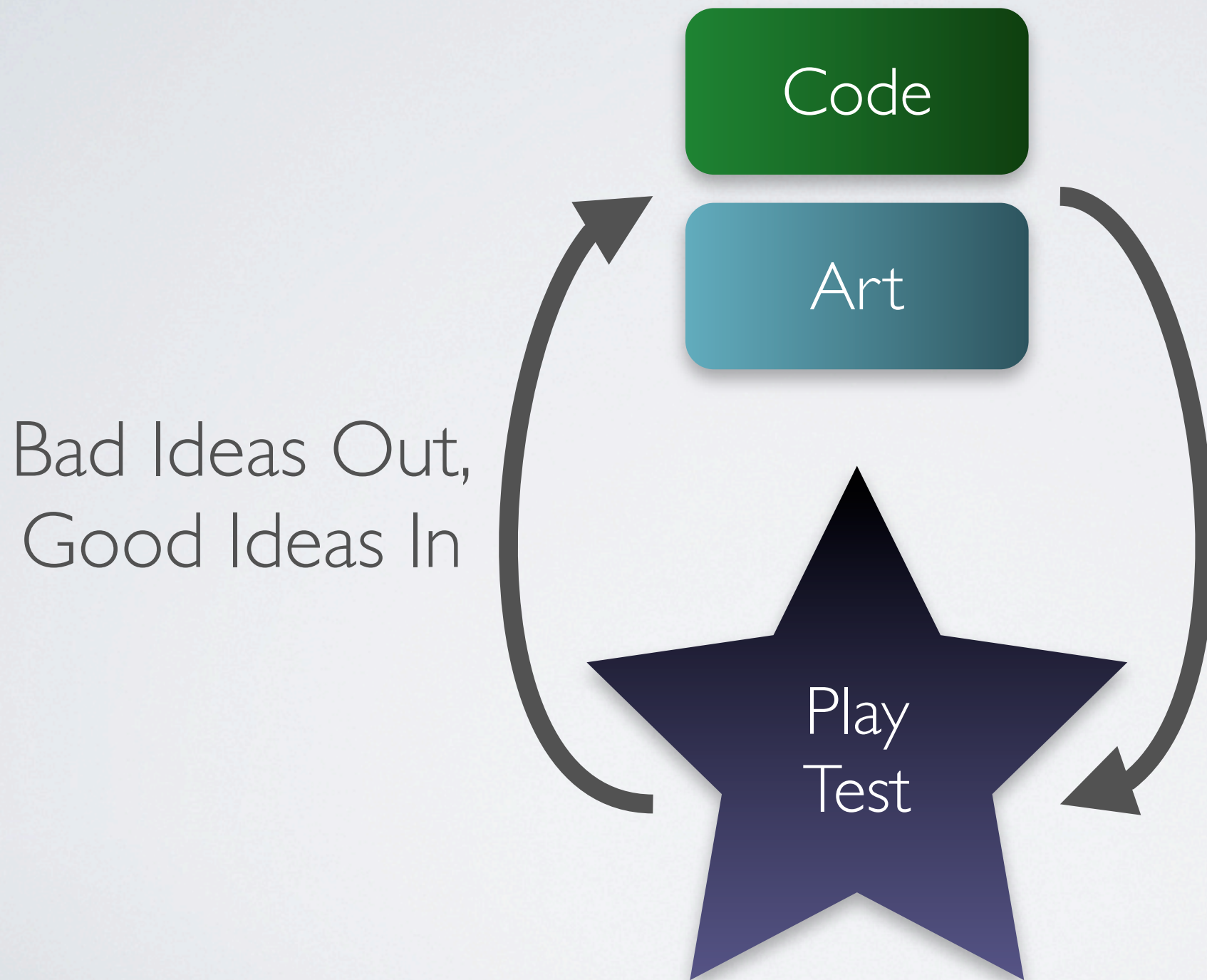
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DEVELOPMENT CYCLE



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Thursday, October 7, 2010

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Small, frequently-played iterations

Constant play testing

- Your game also needs to be as fun as you planned. Zero-art prototypes (great dev tip) are great to nail down the game concept before you go too far down the wrong path.
- Play to your strengths. If you are not very good at art but strong in programming, use a style where you can succeed. Work within your team's abilities.

BETA

Does it work?

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Thursday, October 7, 2010

23

It is not like traditional software - it is less about does it work and is it buggy - but more about is it fun - more akin to audience test screenings for film.

Massive resource in refining and polishing your game

Many perspectives

Test throughout your development, not just at the end

BETA

~~Does it work?~~

Is it fun?

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FINDING TESTERS



Friends and Family



touchArcade
...Keeping you in touch with the latest in iPhone gaming

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Friends & Family - Mention Dad

Touch Arcade Forums - harsh and truthful

iBetaTest.com and others

Many won't test at all. (Maybe play once, never again)

You need to keep testers as close as possible, watch them play closely.

Keep it realistic and sterile. If you have to show them how to do something, there's a problem.

A BUG SLIPS THROUGH...

Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

25

Bugs. Reviewers will crucify you. (Highlight this last bit as your personal philosophy and punch it with real life examples)... and it pretty much goes downhill from there.
Update can fix bad reviews

A BUG SLIPS THROUGH...

1. Money wasting (v1.2)



by JEREMY GAN on Sep 20, 2010
All I get is a white screen that I paid \$.99 for.
Thanks a lot? Now, can I please have my money
back?

2. Fix the white screen glitch! (v1.2)



Please

byZ on Sep 20, 2010

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A BUG SLIPS THROUGH...

1. Money wasting (v1.2)



34. Stupid (v1.2)



by Mpowl2013 on Sep 16, 2010
Every time I open it a blank white window opens
up in front of the game...
Don't waste your money

DO NOT GET IT!
Doesn't do anything!

on! (v1.2)

on Sep 20, 2010

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A BUG SLIPS THROUGH...

1. Mon

40. White screen (v1.2)

★☆☆☆☆ by Qwfcxefhbcrggvzf on Sep 16,...

Every time I want to play a white screen comes up

41. White screen (v1.2)

★☆☆☆☆ by Mossbrady 8112 on Sep 16,...

Every time I try to play a plain white screen shows up

Doesn't

, 2010

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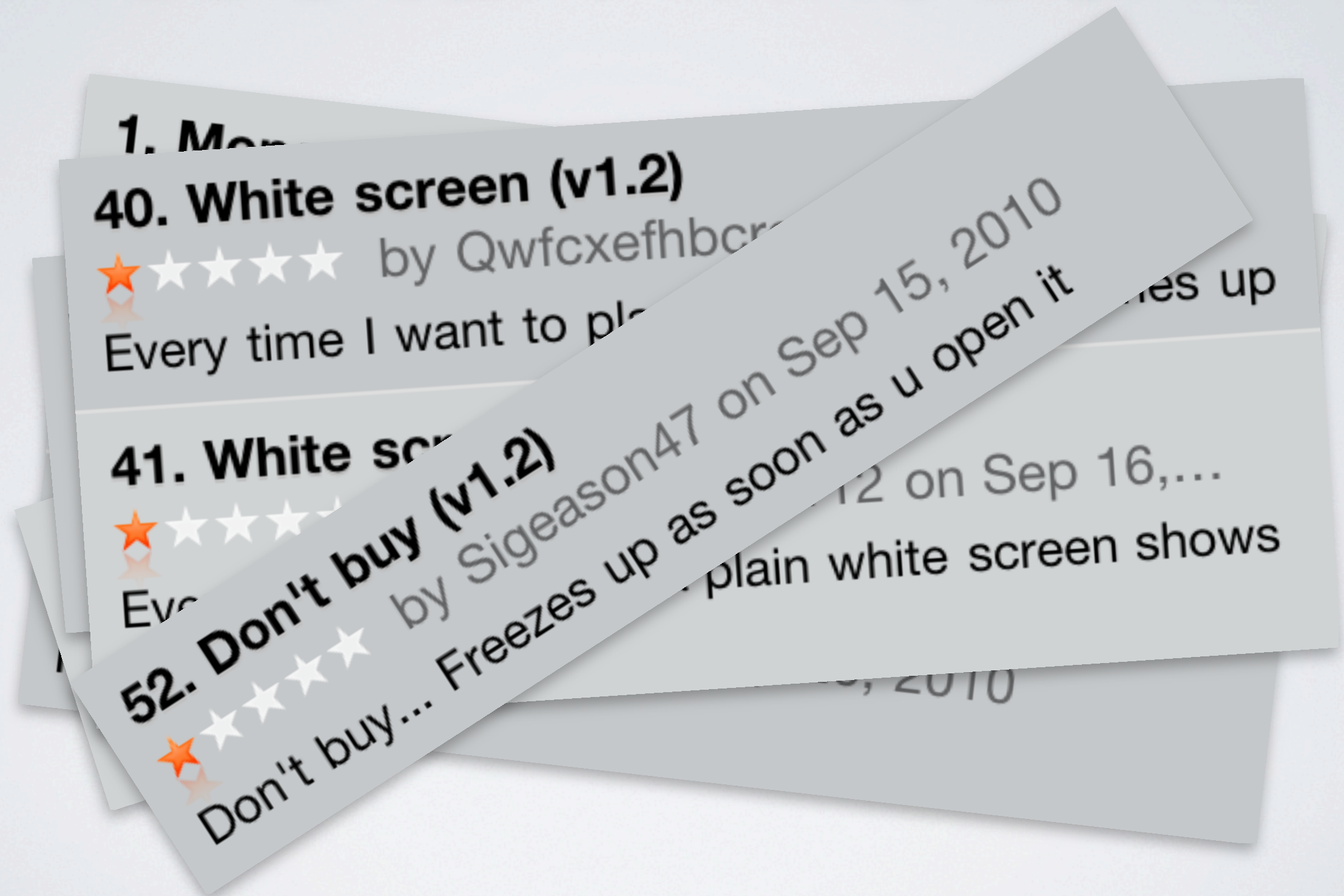
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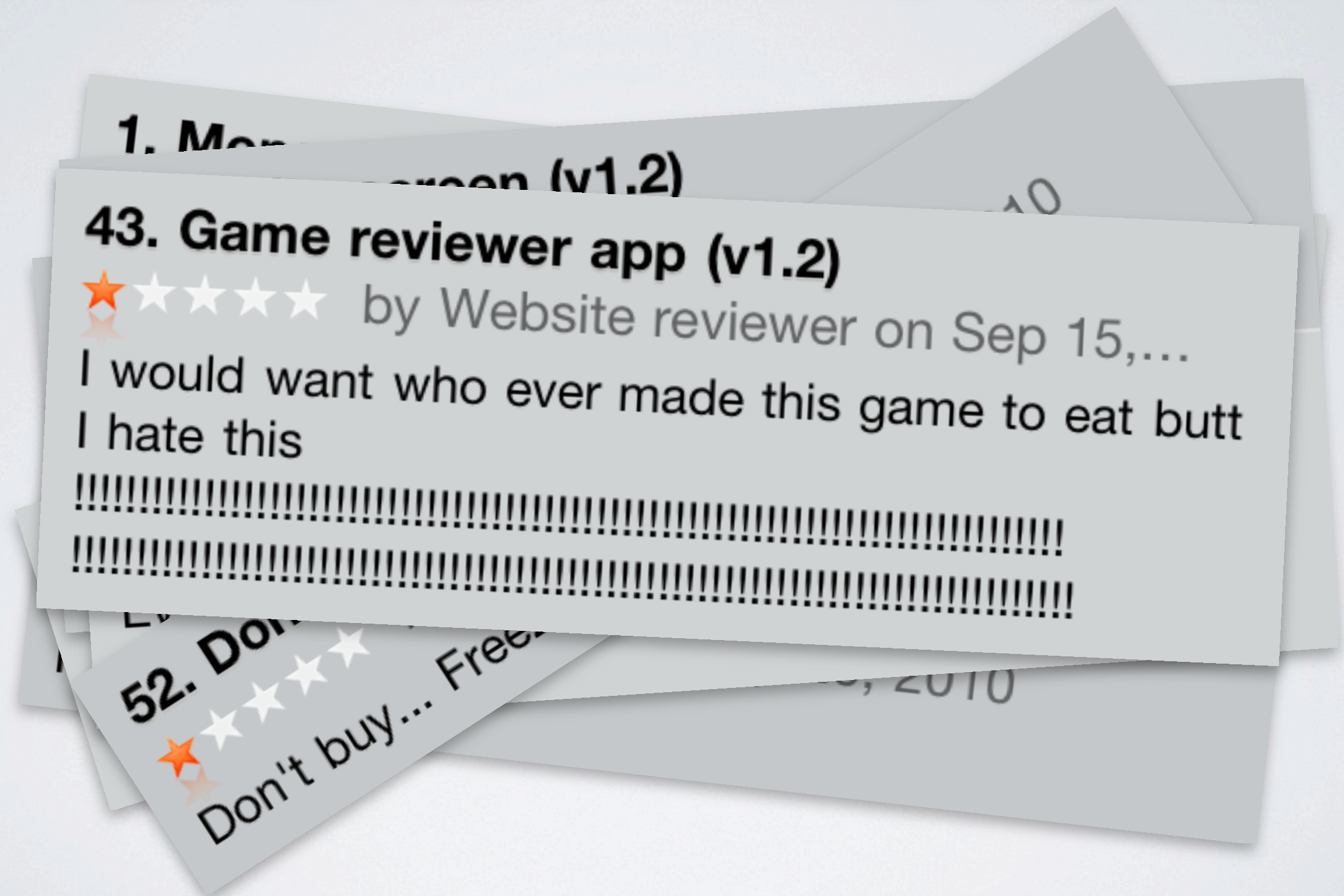
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APP STORE MEMORY

Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

26

Your app might delete the user's phone, then set their house on fire, but once your next update comes out and everything works fine, everyone gives you five stars and no one remembers anything. I'm not saying you can get away with anything, but, really, you can get away with anything.

PRO-TIP: Emergency Approval Requests

APP STORE MEMORY



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CODE



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

27

App Store Gotchas

- Do not use any private APIs. If it's not in Apple's documentation, don't use it. We've been dinged for this before.
- Don't use iPad or iPhone images in the game, or any other Apple trademarks anywhere.
- Don't develop in a vacuum, "you all know this but it's easy to fall into the trap - DON'T LET IT HAPPEN"
- Forums, Mailing Lists

Use source control, and project management tools

- Quick plug for team management tools like Lighthouse, Git, and Dropbox(make sure to tell them why)

CODE

Private APIs



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

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**Private
APIs**

**Apple
Images**



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Private APIs

Apple Images



Talk to Other Devs!

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ARTWORK



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- Economy right now means that a lot of really great artists are available, you can find first-rate teams willing to work for you.
- Art is important! If you're not an artist, you need to hire one or team up with one. Plan for having good screenshots. More on screenshots later.
- Lots of good Artist-Programmer teams.

ARTWORK



Stephen Eastop

Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

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Got to design with fingers in mind. Test your artwork on the device!
Make sure critical elements of the game are not covered up by the hand.

PIXEL PROPORTIONS



24" Monitor

Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Thursday, October 7, 2010

30

Pixel size is decreasing at a crazy rate. .27mm for 24" monitor, .07mm for iPhone 4. (94ppi to 326 ppi)
Important to design artwork for pixel density. Just because you have more pixels doesn't mean you can cram more information into the same space... you have to make things LARGER.
Make @2x versions for all your Cocoa images.

PIXEL PROPORTIONS



24" Monitor



iPhone
3G / 3GS

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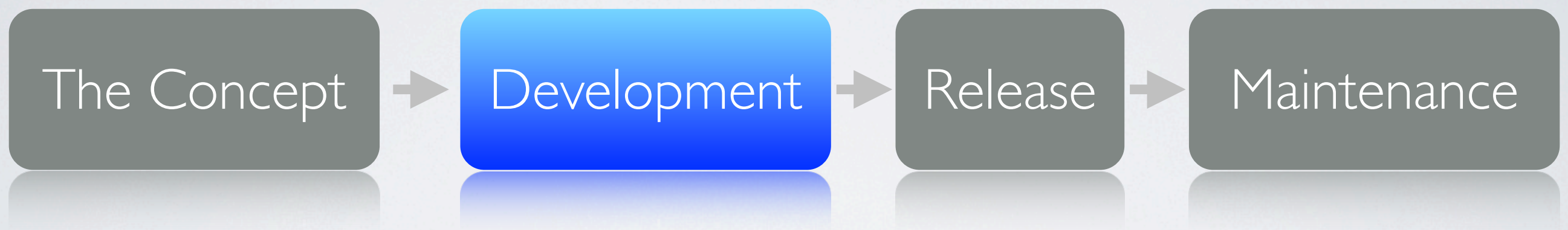
iPhone
3G / 3GS



iPhone 4

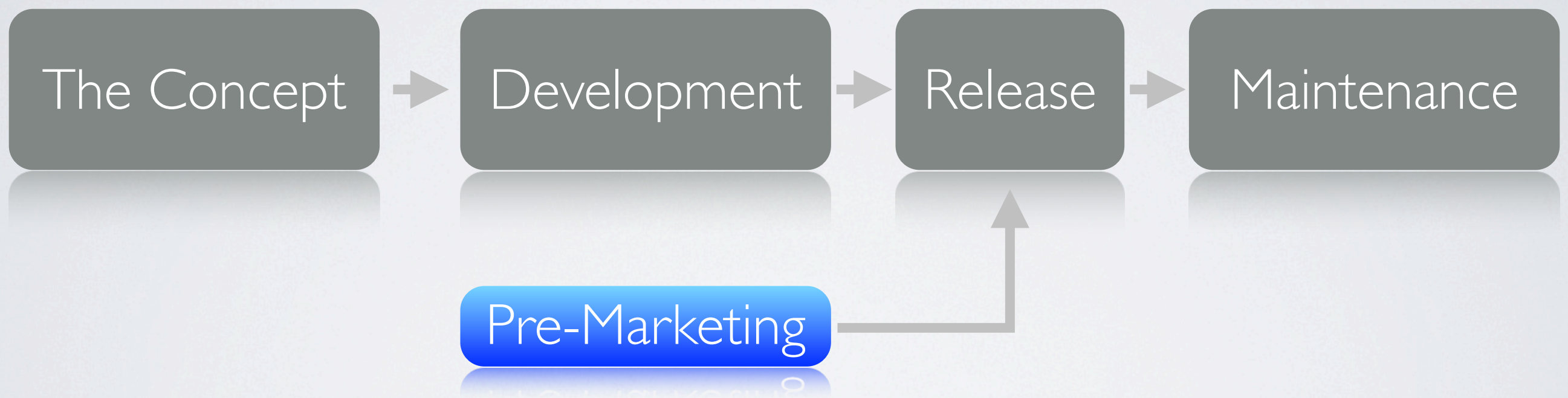
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Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

So now the game is done, and we're ready to release, right? Not quite. During the development there's an important step I'll go into next: pre-marketing.



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PRE-MARKETING



New York Times

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Thursday, October 7, 2010

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Arnold Kim, TouchArcade

Others: SlideToPlay, PocketGamer, 148Apps

Not just apps: TUAW, Gizmodo, Wired, Joystiq... (harder since apps are a small part of their coverage)

Getting Marketing Ready

- Gather a hitlist of reviewers, and learn a bit about them and what they like to write about. It goes a long way towards wooing them.

- Find their contact information through any means necessary. **No Press Releases!**

- Exclusives

- Leak some stuff: You might consider picking one of the publications and giving them an exclusive -- access to your game a week or two before anyone else.

- This doesn't have to be at release. You could send them some in-development screenshots as a teaser if you have something good.

PROFESSIONAL PR

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Thursday, October 7, 2010

34

PR Firms, Expensive investment, 2+ month lead time

We haven't tried this yet, but: David Whatley swears by it... usually \$5-10k per month, at least 3 months

Here is what a PR firm might be able to do for you:

- Get you more articles/reviews to promote your games**
- Increase the overall profile of your company if that is important to you long term.**
- Help you with strategies for positioning your game (ie. is it for experts, is it like X game but more intense, etc) They can help you develop and pitch for your game that can inform much of your marketing**
- Some can help with design and finding creative resources for you**
- Help with public speaking, presentation if you feel that is important to you at this time.**

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PROFESSIONAL PR



+

2 Months
Lead Time

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PRE-MARKETING

Submit Application to iTunes Connect...

Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

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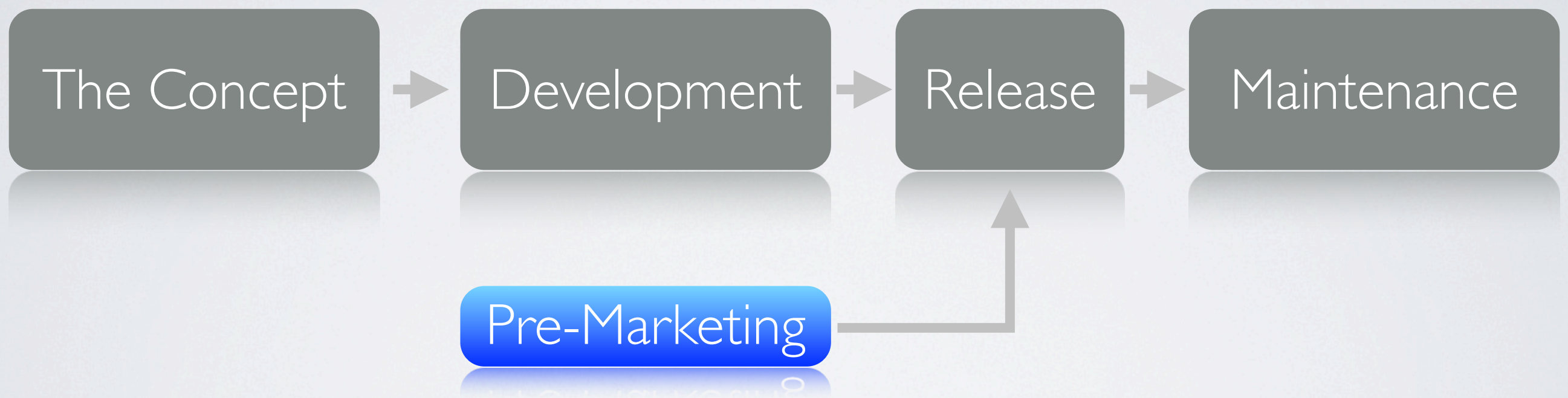


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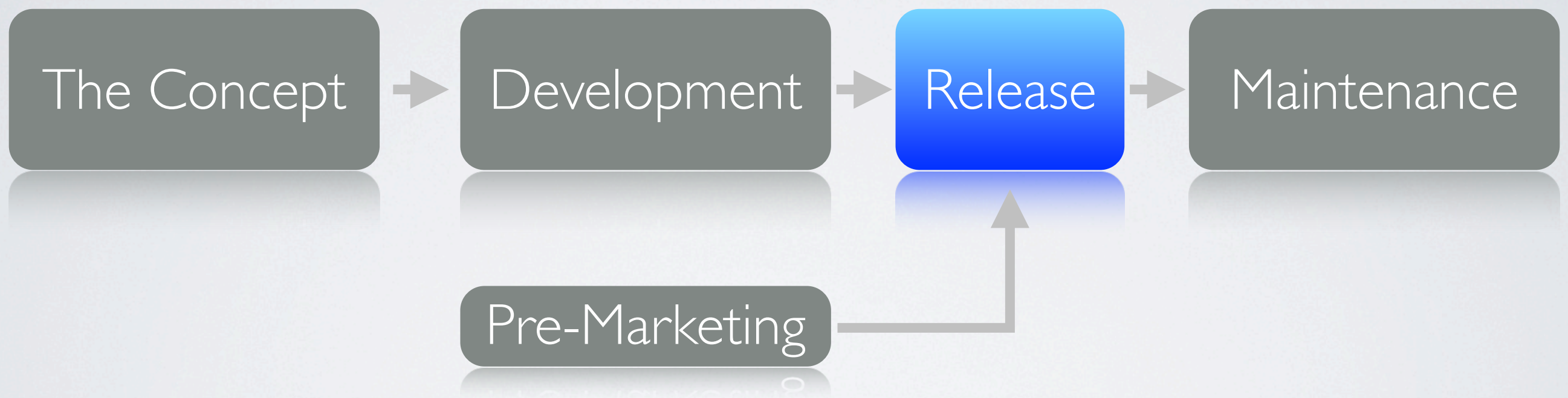
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Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Pre-Marketing is done! Finally, can we launch?



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

Okay, sure.



Arash Keshmirian, Limbic



Release

Storefront
Design

Arash Keshmirian, Limbic

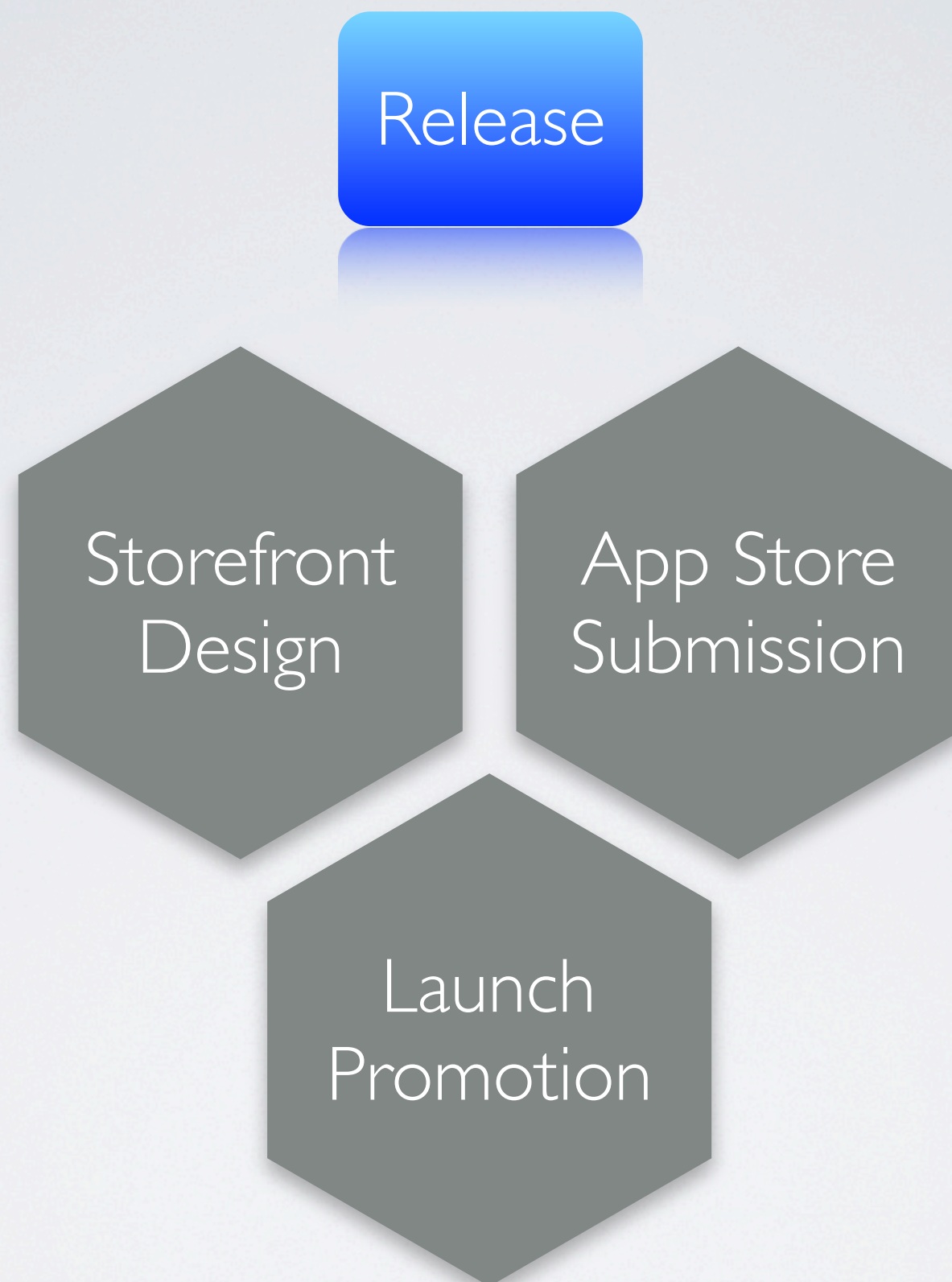
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A few quick words on App Store submission



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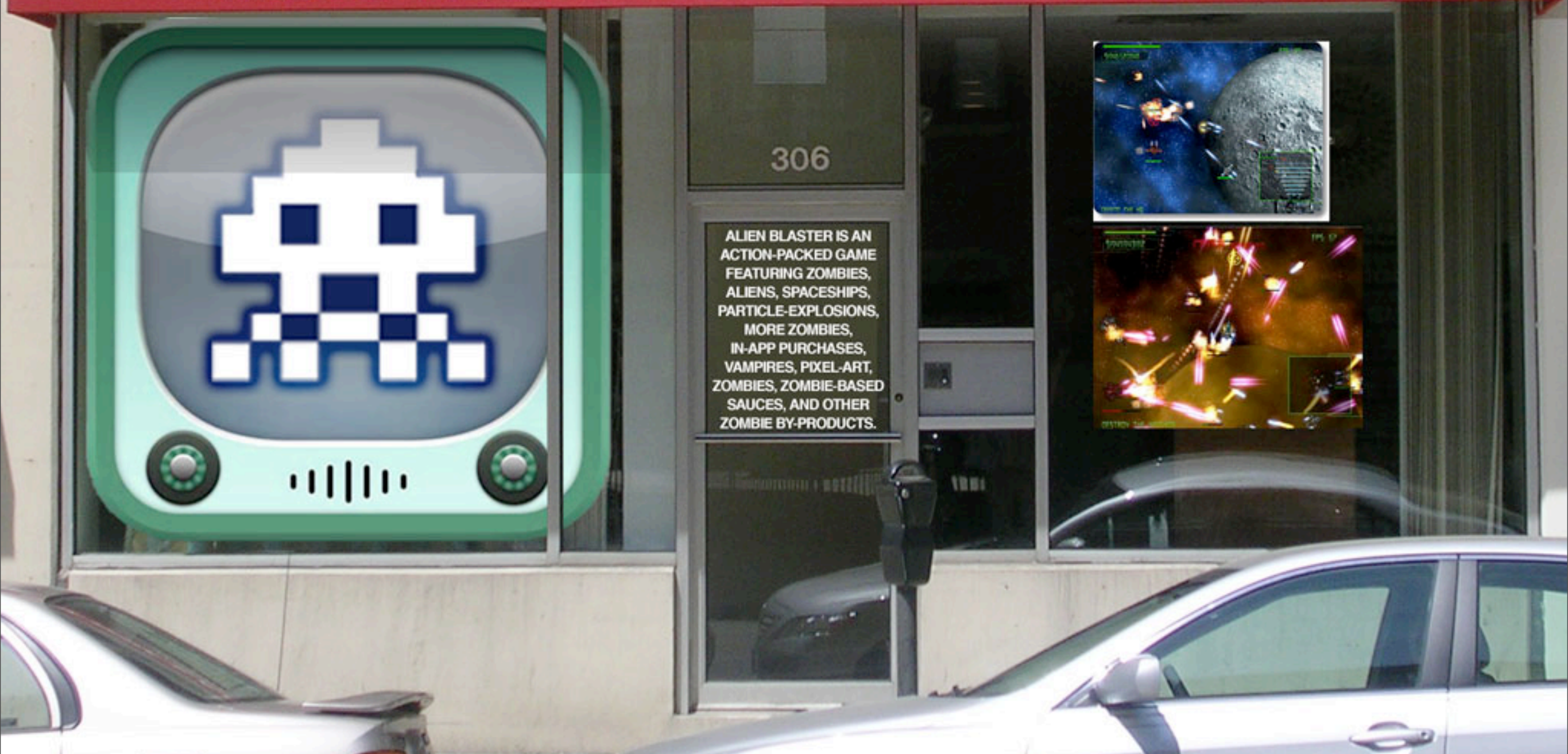
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ALIEN BLASTER

JOE'S APPS'N'MORE



"I AM SO CONTENT WITH THIS GAME" - ELI HODAPP, TOUCH ARCADE



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I made this quick mockup -- an analogy to a real-life store, for your app.

- This is you on the App Store, in terms of how users see your app.
- Title and icon take priority, and everything else follows.
- Notice that the description is the smallest bit on here -- users almost never read it, and they have to already click on your app to get there.
- Screenshots matter more for hooking them.
- Quotes from Eli Hodapp are nice.



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Mega Jump

Bright colors, smooth surfaces, large elements with simple shapes. Fine detail kept to a minimum. Character art is eye-catching. Humans enjoy looking at faces on a primal level.



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Scoops
Simple is good. Keep things simple.



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Realistic materials really help this icon pop. I liked this better before it had the plus+ logo. Jury's out on whether that really makes your icon more effective. Starcraft, Battlecruiser Hull



Trenches
More character art. Notice the popping out of borders.





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Battle Bears

Get the gun in there. Guns... Every 14 year old's dream.



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TIMING -- HALFWAY POINT

Our first icon. We figured cute and cuddly would be huge, and was our big selling point originally with the sheep.

Turns out, this was big in Japan and not so great everywhere else. Also not enough contrast.



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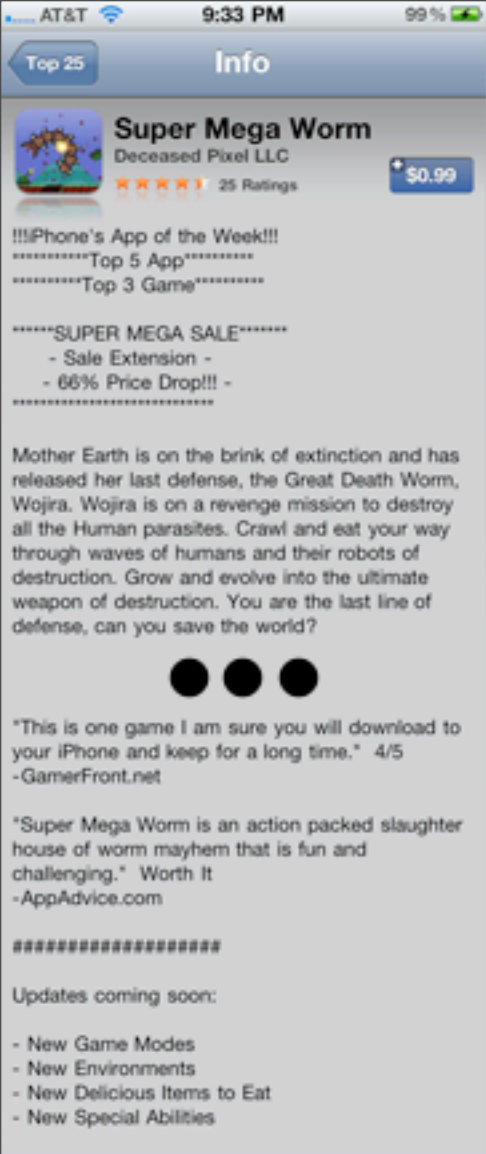
47

Remember what I said about guns? It worked for us too. Make it exciting, and retarget for the demographic... Mostly guys. What's better than a gun? A cannon.

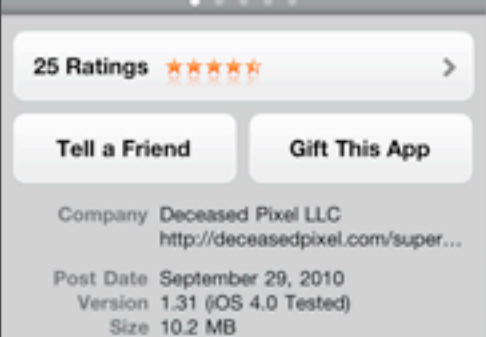
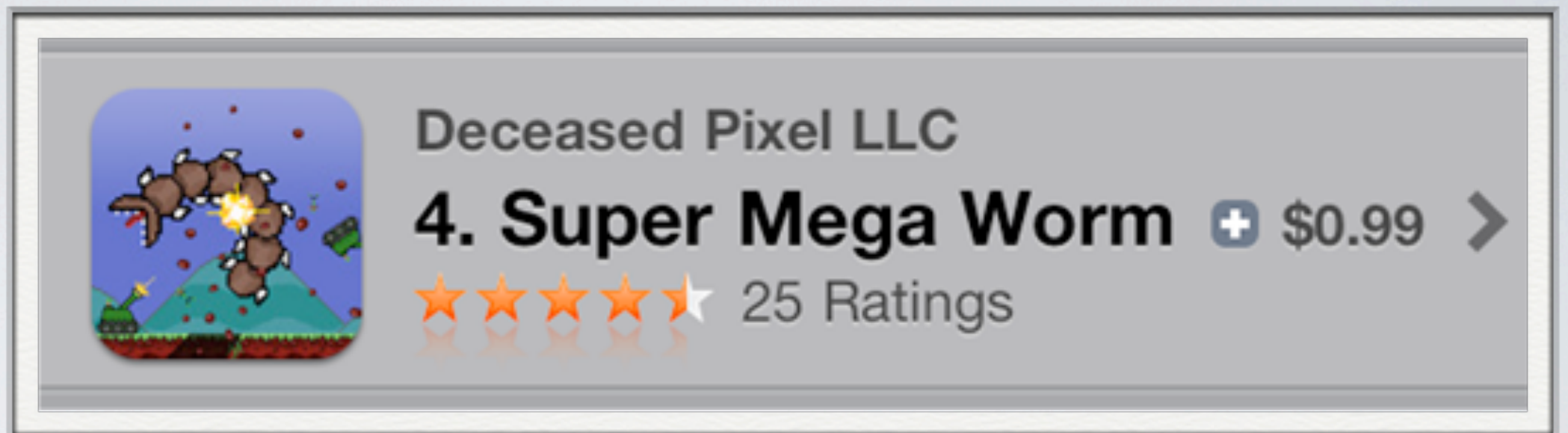


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Bringing in more colorful effects pushes the game more towards a wider demographic. Sunbursts are common, and they really work to absorb the eye.



STOREFRONT DESIGN



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Screenshots are like mini free ads for your game – treat them like gold.

Submitting the App (I think in this area you really need to beef up the "why" You should also be sure to link it back to the points you made about the app store being a unique environment – this directly relates.

- Keywords
- Very important, you have a 100-character limit on these so make them count
- You can be rejected for using other people's trademarks in your keywords (eg: Doodle Jump), or irrelevant keywords ("Bomber" in a card game)
- Icon
- Make sure 512x512 icon is crisp and clear. Up-sampling your icon is unacceptable. Next to your name, the icon is the single most important first impression users get of your app.



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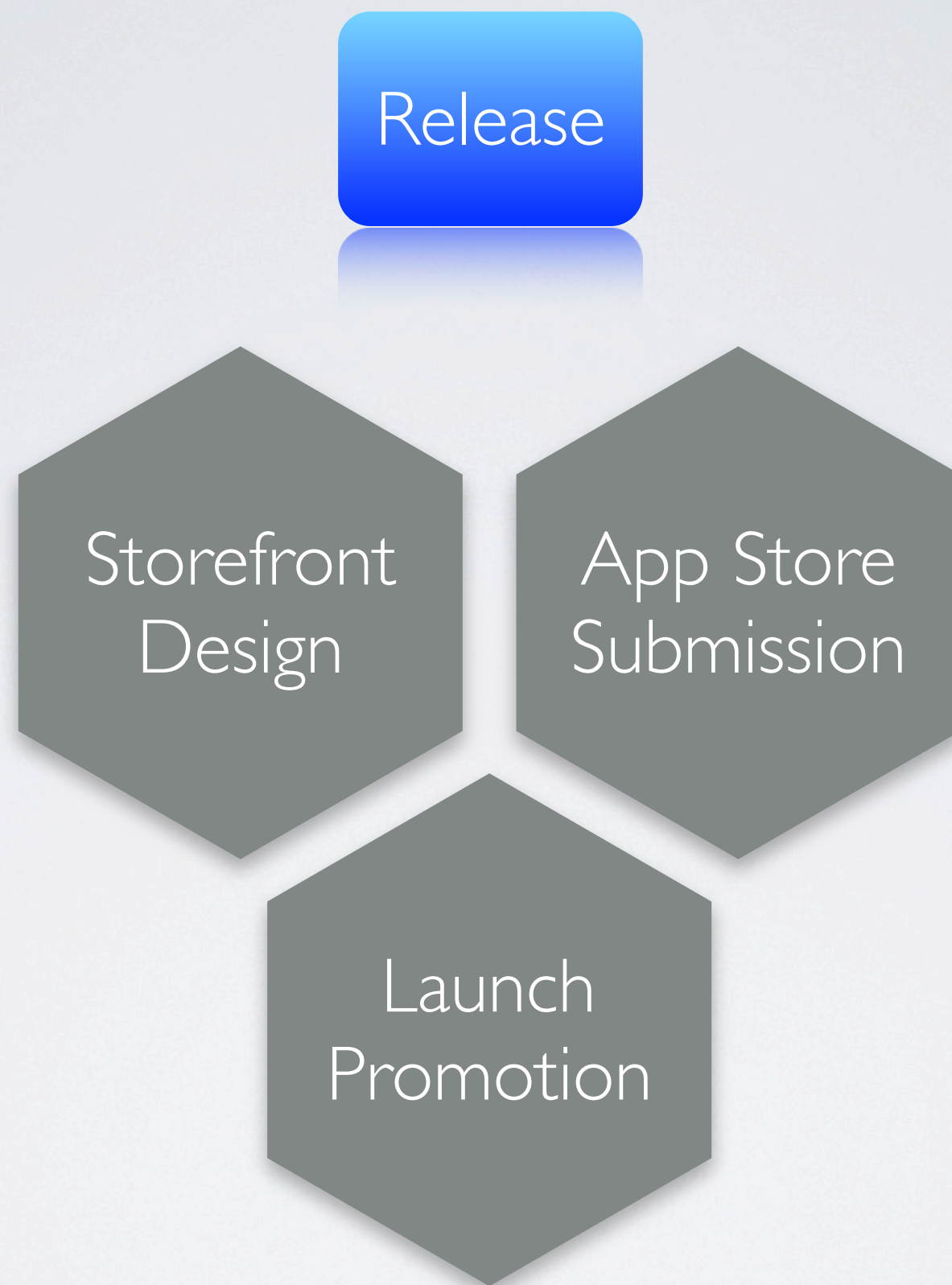
Take your boring screenshots, and take advantage of customizing them into...



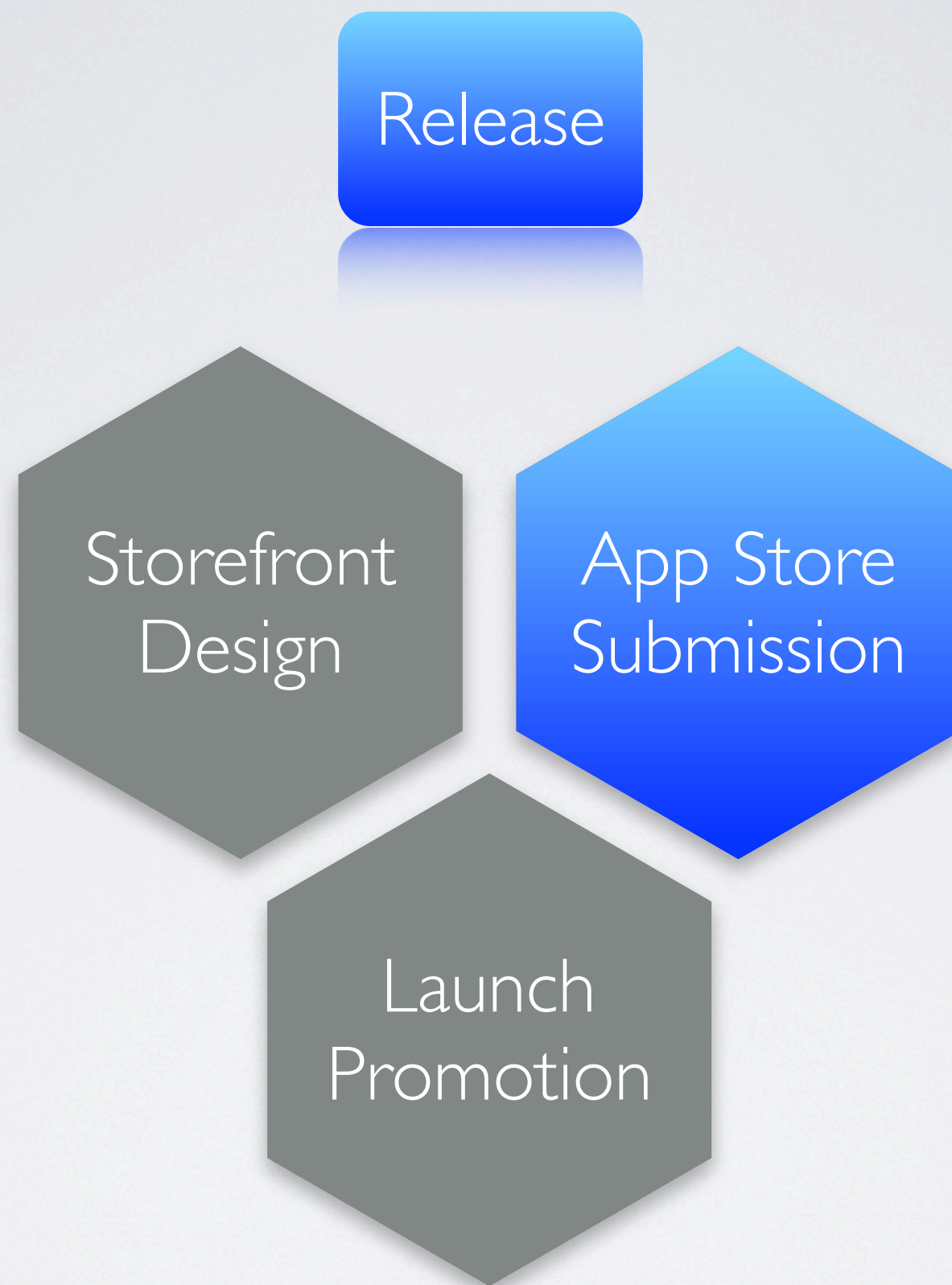
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Collages! Text! Really sell the game with these, and this text is much more likely to be seen/read than in your description.



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APP STORE SUBMISSION



Application Loader

or



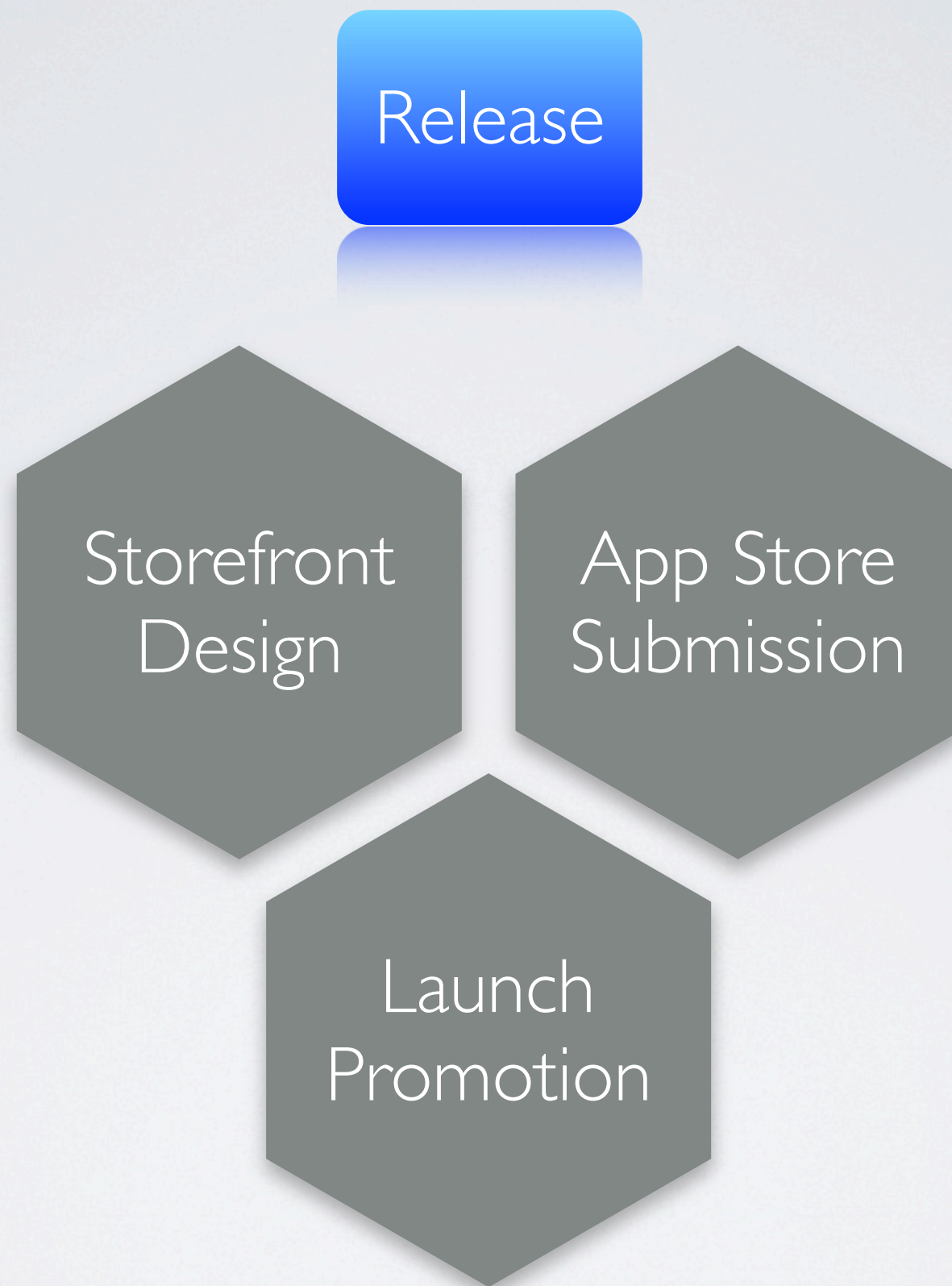
Build and Archive

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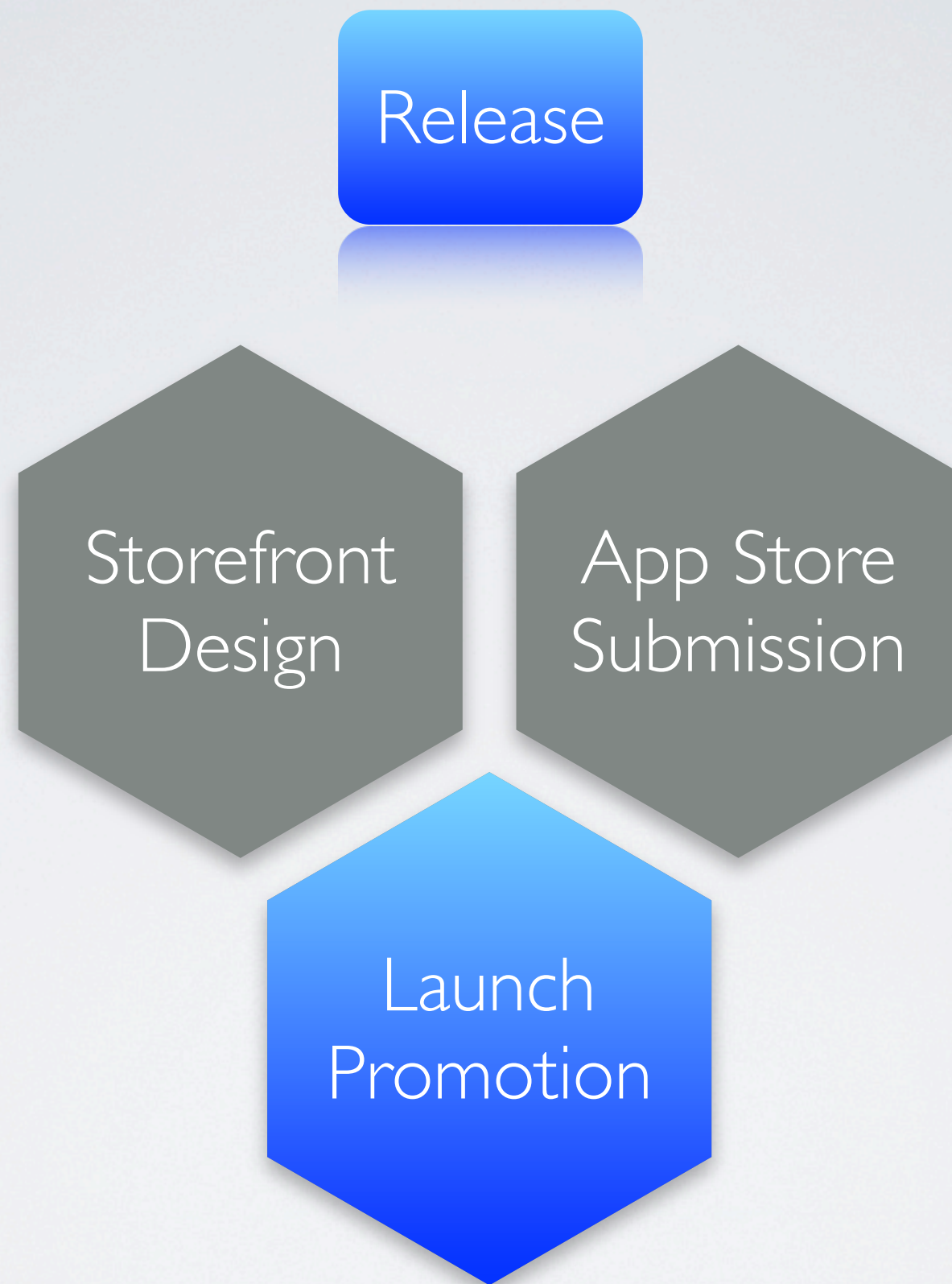
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- Using B&A in Xcode will save your debug symbols alongside your release
- Approval waiting times fluctuate
- Requires new binary:
 - Screenshots, App Name, Keywords, Icon

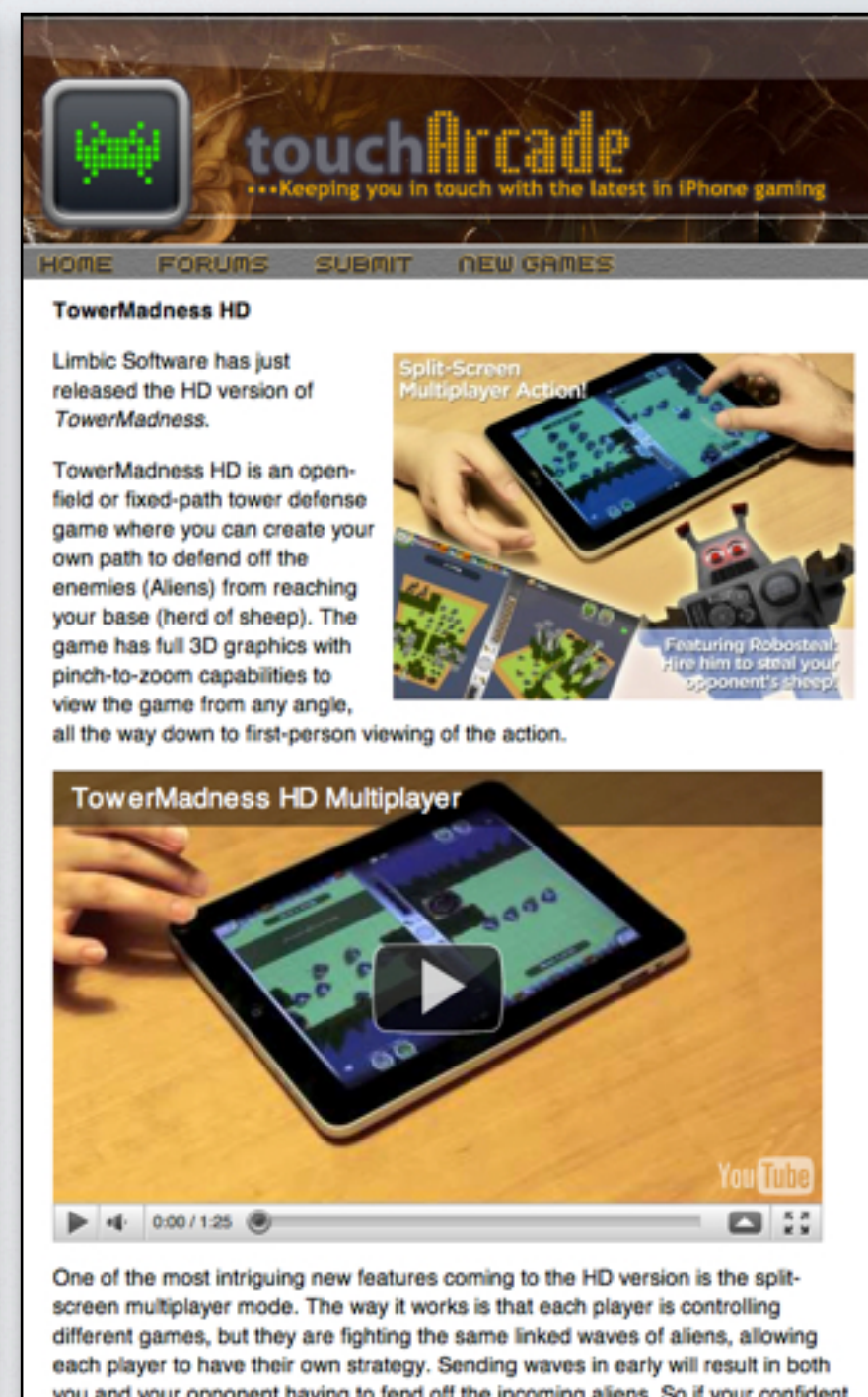


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LAUNCH PROMOTION



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Big launch momentum, Set release date, Announce everywhere, Get launch press going early

FAAD

- An overview slide here might good wrapping up all of this information into the philosophy of big launch momentum and trying to get to a sustainable critical mass and then generating ongoing momentum. Maybe something about how what drives a lot of things is "new" -- that is why features and ranking and press are all critical - it is community driven by "new".
- Your release date CAN be controlled. Setting a firm release date at some point after when you expect approval is helpful for consolidating your marketing and having a focused blast. (deliver a why - because then you can better synchronize your launch etc.)
- Use Promocodes to distribute your app to reviewers when it's approved but not yet on the store
- Give the press advance notice of your submission. It maybe helpful to provide pre-release copies to publications that you would like to post reviews of your app on launch day.
- But then, where do these people go to find out about you and your game....?

LAUNCH MATERIALS

Website

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Press Kit - Logos, Screenshots, Quotable one-pager about your app. Make writers' jobs easy.
Game website - Important central hub - Make sure you top Google
Videos/Trailers

Make sure to mention the timing for all of this - much of this needed to start if not be completed well before you submit the game to the app store.

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GETTING FEATURED

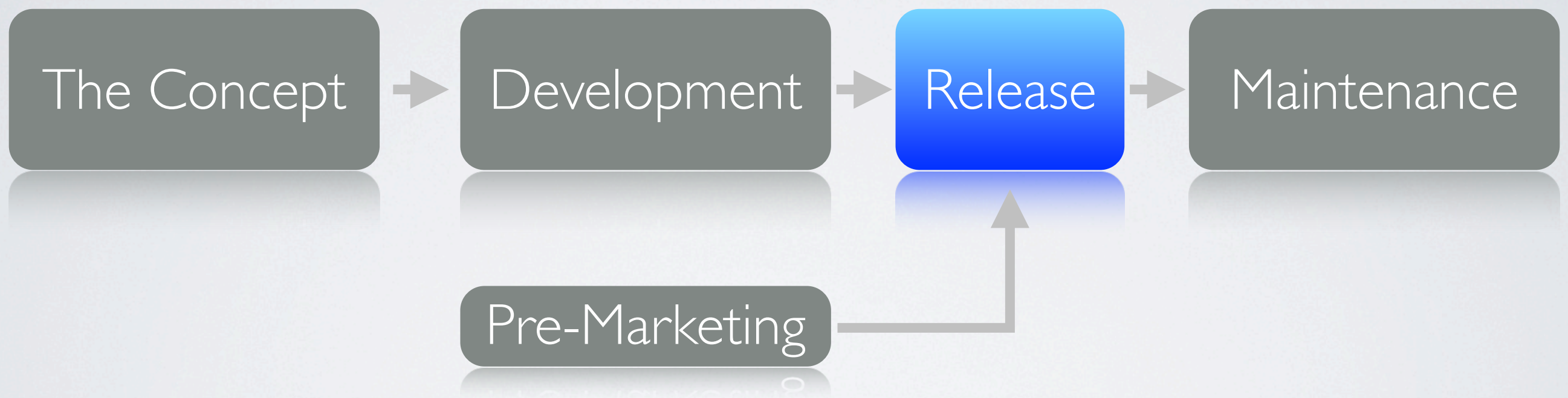


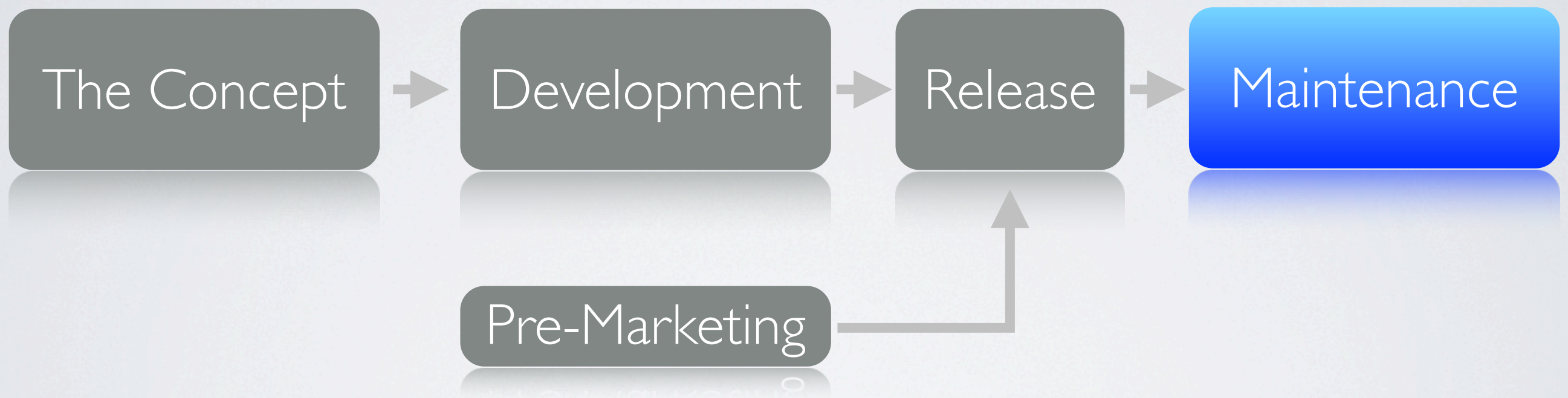
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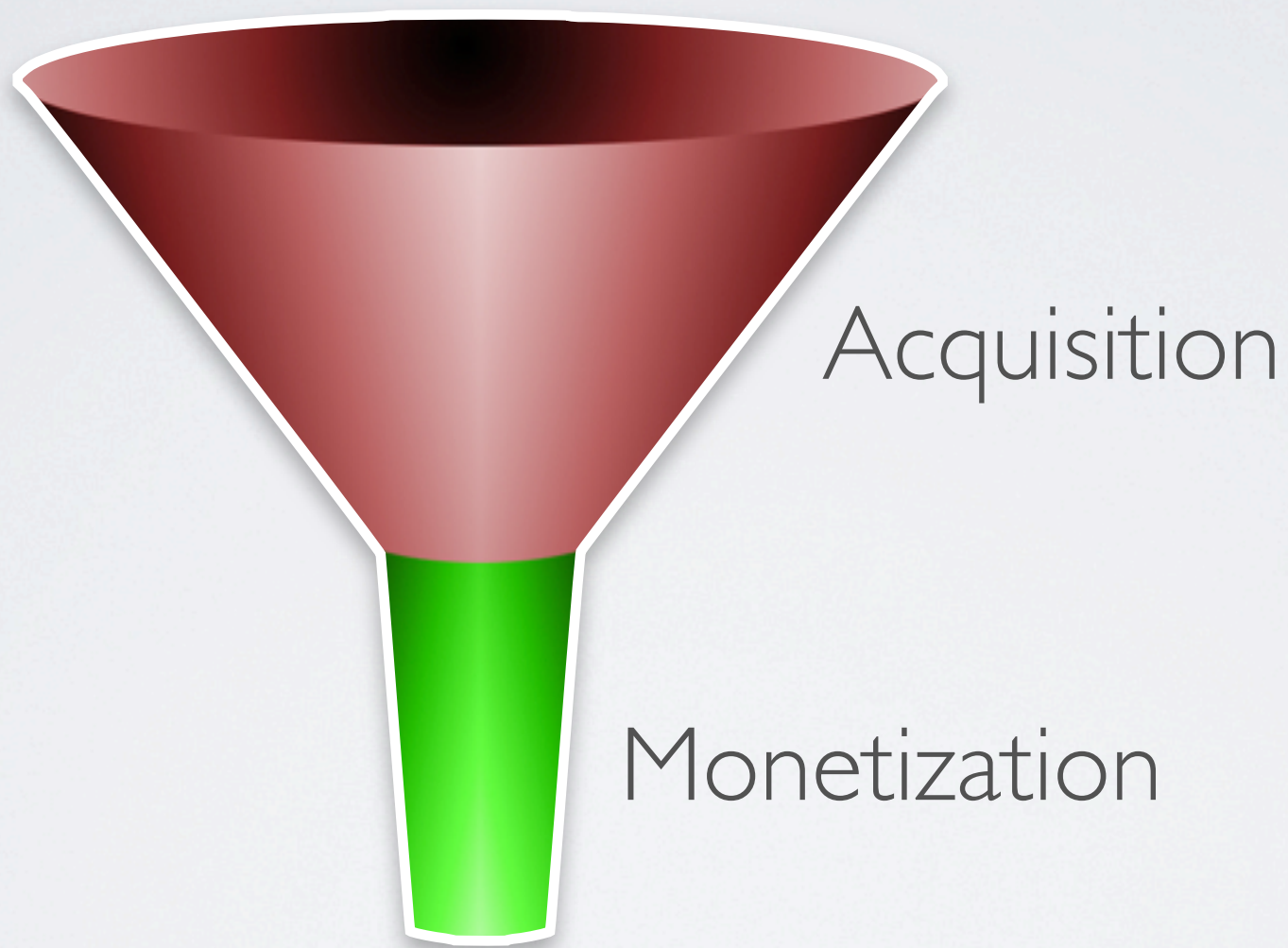
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- **Not the holy grail, but it definitely helps. (the tone of this section should be "how to try to...")**
- Talk to Apple, Use their new tech, Be ready**
- **If you know anyone that works at Apple, make sure they know about your game.**
- **Using the latest Apple-pushed tech helps, eg: new Gyro, amazing 3D graphics, Game Center, etc.**
- **Just in case, prepare your Apple Featured Materials Pack (tell the traveling in London story and having to scramble to make it)**
- **Title Treatment, Hi-res**
- **900 x 530 px layered .psd Background Image**
- **Helps to have this stuff in your press kit anyway.**





MAINTENANCE



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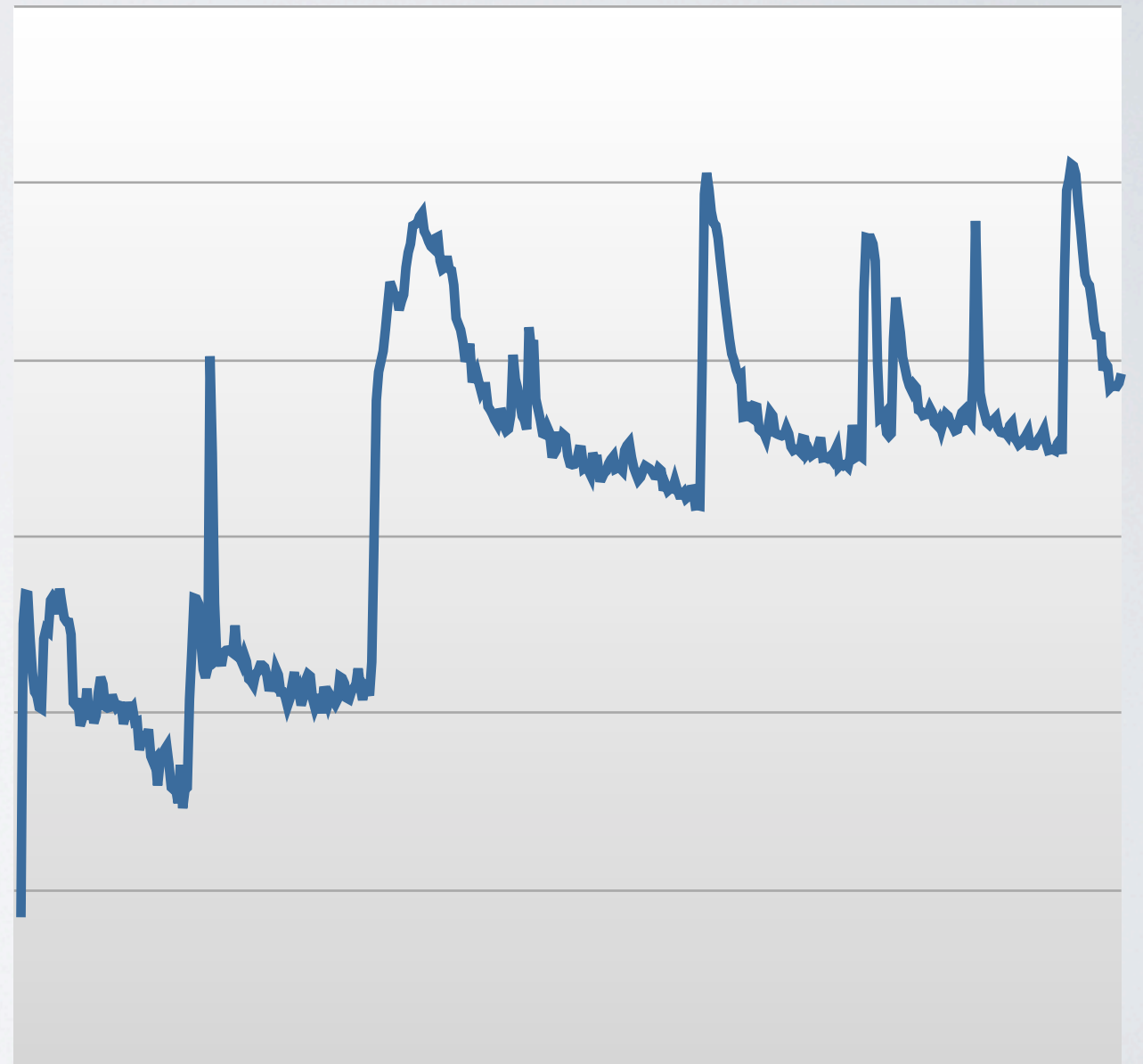
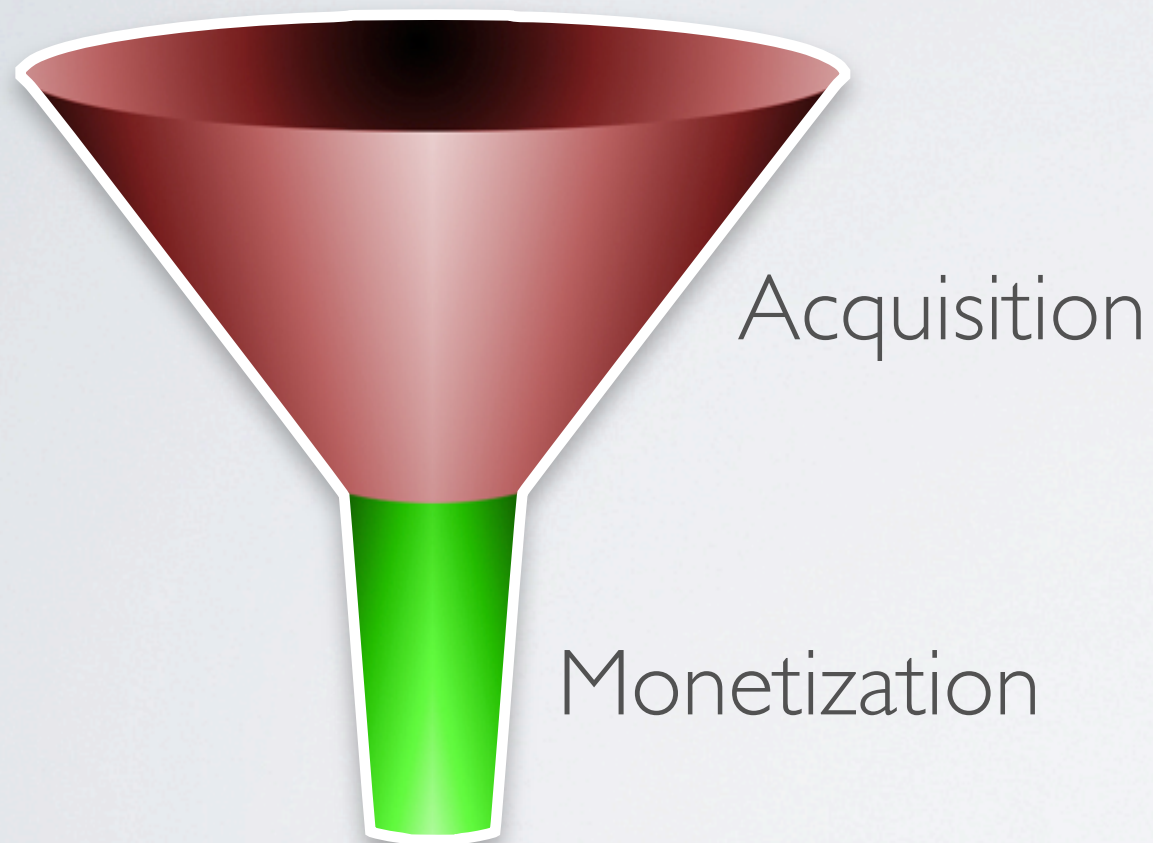
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Maintenance of your game has two parts:
Continuing and growing user Acquisition, and
Continuing and growing user Monetization

The growth of the residuals in the graph at the beginning of this lecture represents this at work.

MAINTENANCE



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UPDATES



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- **Updates are the most effective way to remind your players that your game exists.**
- **Notification bubble on App Store icon**
- **You might also use push notifications to announce your updates**
- **Give old players a reason to play again, rediscover, and share**
- **Adding content will keep players playing forever. (old business axiom is true here too - harder to get new customers than to farm existing. You can either keep running programs to get more and more users indefinitely or you can find cheap ways to keep people playing longer and in the process create a greater attachment to your game - great investment)**
- **Try to add a feature to every update. "Minor Bug Fixes" is not compelling for most users.**

UPDATE MESSAGES

Thanks to everyone who supported us by purchasing the Flamethrower and Marsh Madness Map packs. As an extra thanks, we've decided to add a BONUS map to Marsh Madness, "Bayou". We've also taken all the feedback we received regarding the Flamethrower on our Facebook page and tweaked the range and damage, and decreased the cost. Plus, as an extra bit of love for all our fans, we're releasing a new FREE map ahead of schedule: "Necropolis"!

Enjoy!

– The TowerMadness Team

★ Join us online: ★

<http://facebook.com/TowerMadness/>

<http://twitter.com/TowerMadness/>

★ Changelist: ★

- Added a NEW FREE MAP
- Added a NEW MAP to the Marsh Madness pack
- Decreased the cost for the FLAME THROWER
- Increased the range for the FLAME THROWER
- Increased the damage for the FLAME THROWER
- Significantly increased the PLASMA stun probability per level
- Increased the cost for the final FLAME upgrade

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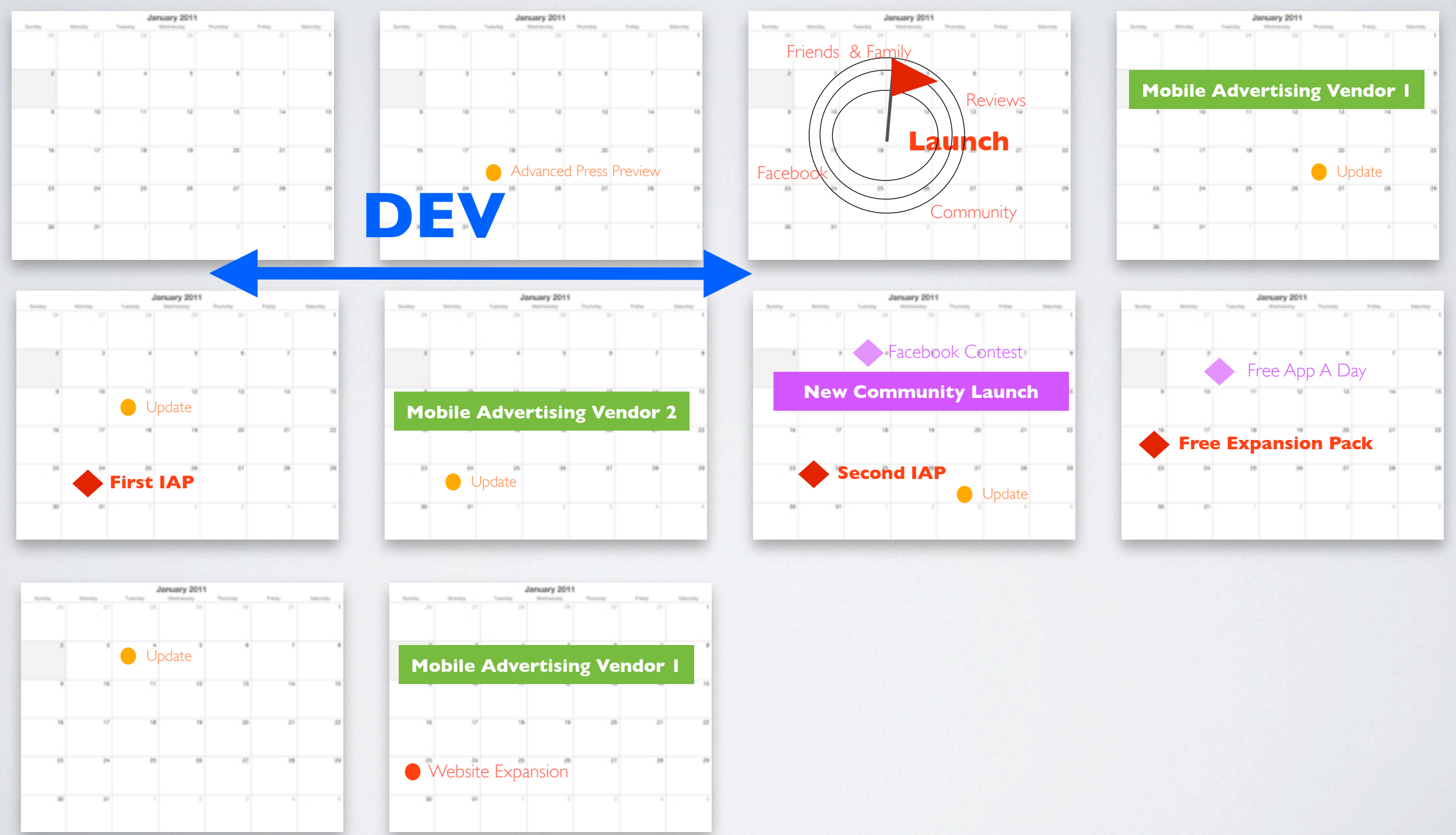
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- Update Messages

- This is an opportunity to write a message to every single customer with your app installed on your phone.
- The message does not have to simply be a list of "what's new". Update messages are a chance to thank your players, refer them to other games, have them join your facebook page, etc.
- You can even ask players to leave you a review in your update, with a link to your iTunes page.

make sure to hit the “why’s” - for IAPs, more ad impressions so more ad revenue, more times they see your title means more likely they will recognise you when you release your next game, more likely to be seen by someone playing and act as a referral

CONTINUOUS MARKETING



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CONTINUOUS MARKETING

Marketing Beyond Launch

Mobile
Advertising

Sales

Going Free

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Marketing beyond launch

Mobile Ads

Sales

Freebie Fridays

- Don't just market at launch and stop. Marketing must be a continuous process, just like development.
- There are always more fans to gain, and channels that have not yet been filled.
- Mobile Ad Networks (\$\$\$)
- Effective short-term, but cost-per-acquisition can be prohibitive. May make sense for certain apps, but is not a panacea. A walk-through of major players, how and what to negotiate for, and understanding the power of customer data.
- Going on Sale (- make sure to talk about boosts to new plateaus and trading in shortterm purchase revenue for longterm potential IAP revenue - the calculated bet)
- Can increase volume short-term, and timed properly, can be very effective. eg: if Apple features your app, going on sale right away will make better use of that opportunity. Sales also can hurt ratings.

ADVERTISING YOUR APP



GREYSTRIPE

Google
admob



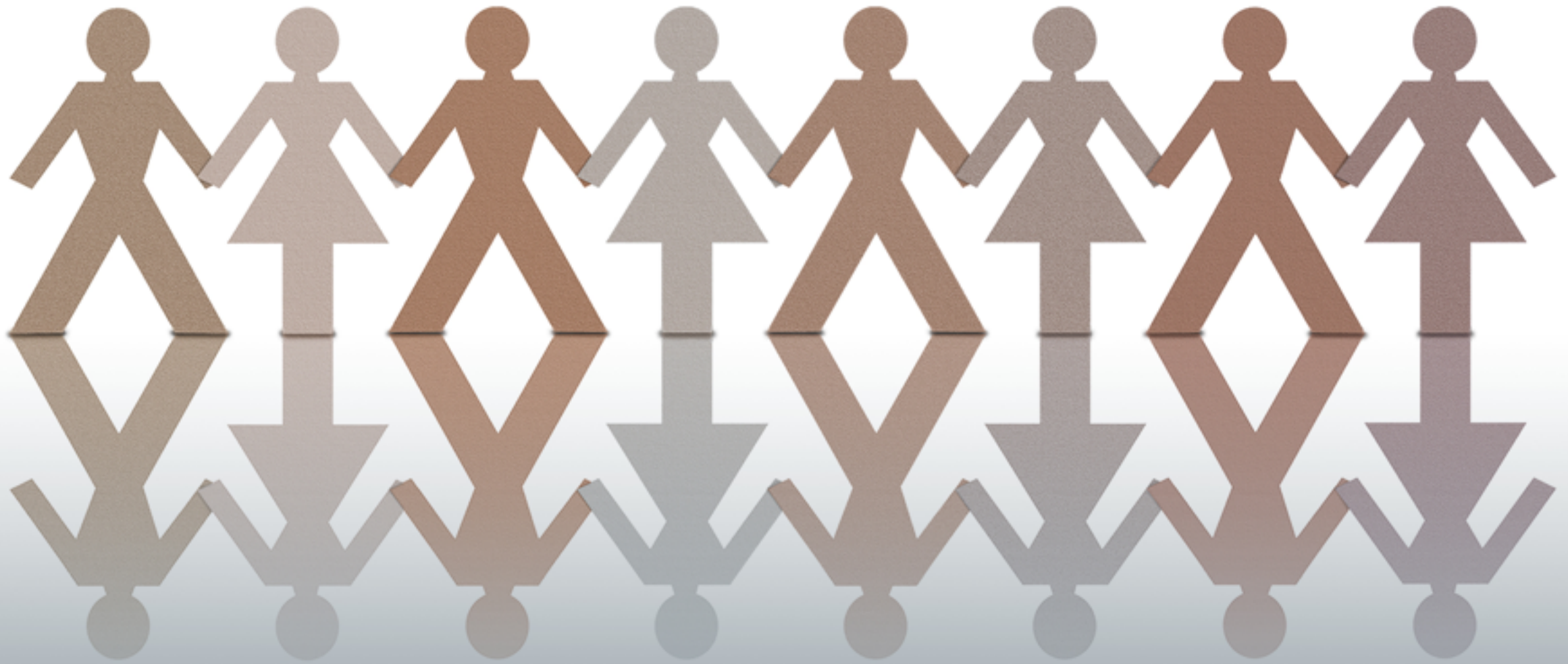
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Cost per acquisition can be prohibitive in some cases, but this is very useful if you're on a rank cusp (10, 25, 50)

BUILDING COMMUNITY



(and maintaining it)

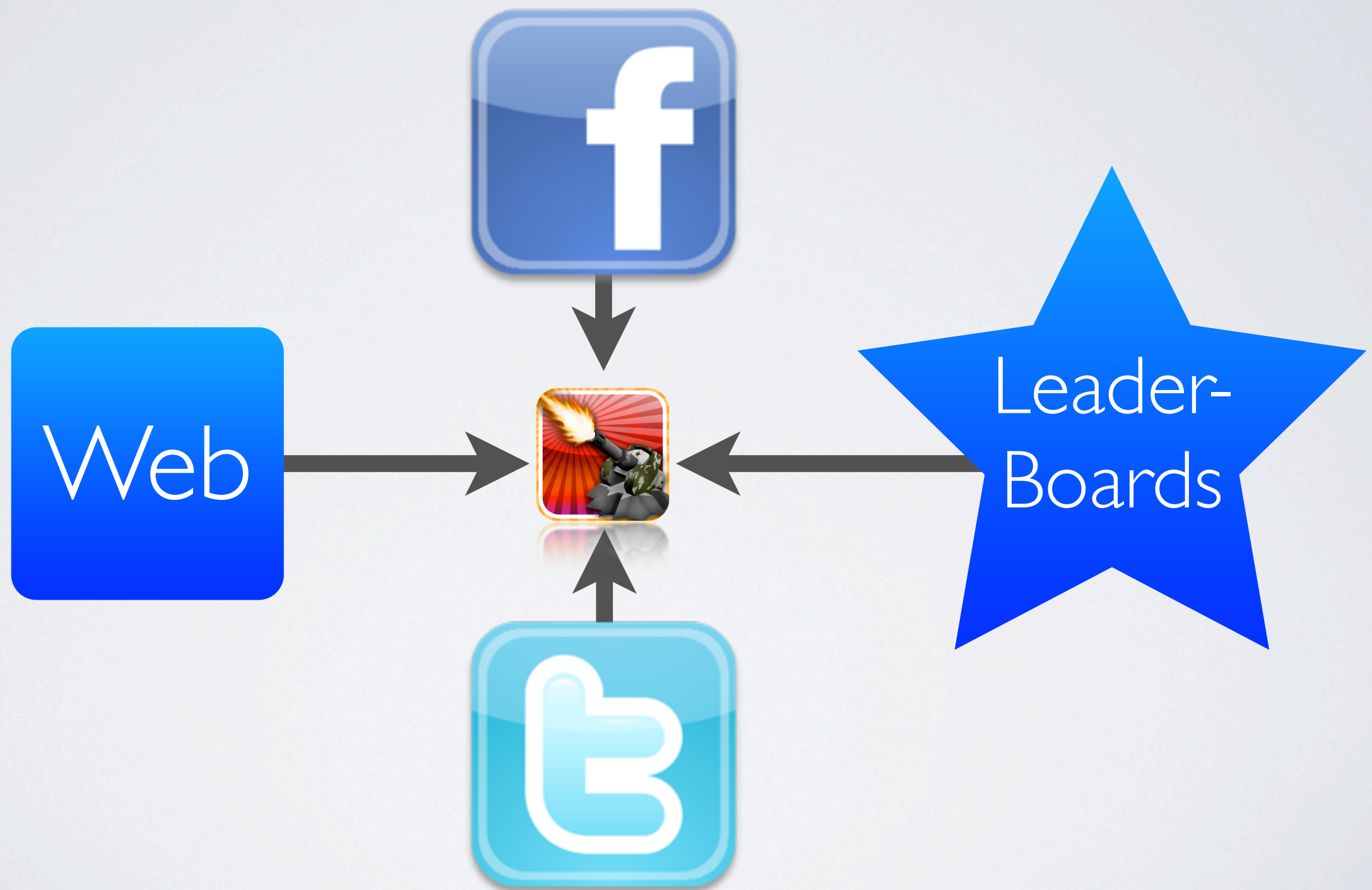
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Give your players love, Listen to their ideas, Support, Competition, contests

- Flamethrower, requested by players, sold 200,000 of them.
- Support, answer all, provide non-scalable service
- You'll be surprised how excited fans get when they hear from you, the developer/cofounder/designer. This will turn your fans into your evangelists.
- Support can be outsourced, but it would be a shame to sever your connection to your fans and lose insight into how you can improve.
- Read and consider reviews. Push your happiest users to write reviews by asking on the 10th launch, etc.
- Facebook. Try to build critical mass (~5000). At this point, it becomes self-sustaining. Questions by fans are answered by other fans, and discussions are lively.
- Becomes an excellent resource for posting teasers of upcoming updates, screenshots, surveys, etc.
- Competition

TM COMMUNITY



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Screen shots of Facebook page, web page, leaderboards, etc - all of the touch points you have with customers

Order of Value / Impact:

Facebook - Really powerful engagement, lots of sharing, feed is the main conduit

Twitter - Good if you can build a lot of followers, but difficult and not very sticky... no real community of people discussing with e/o

Leaderboards - Give users a place to brag, allow to link to leaderboards from other networks

Web - Everything else. FAQs

COMPETITIONS/CONTESTS



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Talked about this earlier... making tournaments official

**Twitter/Facebook Contests
Leaderboard Competitions**

Mention same-guy-from-Japan

MONETIZATION

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MONETIZATION



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CONTINUING MONETIZATION

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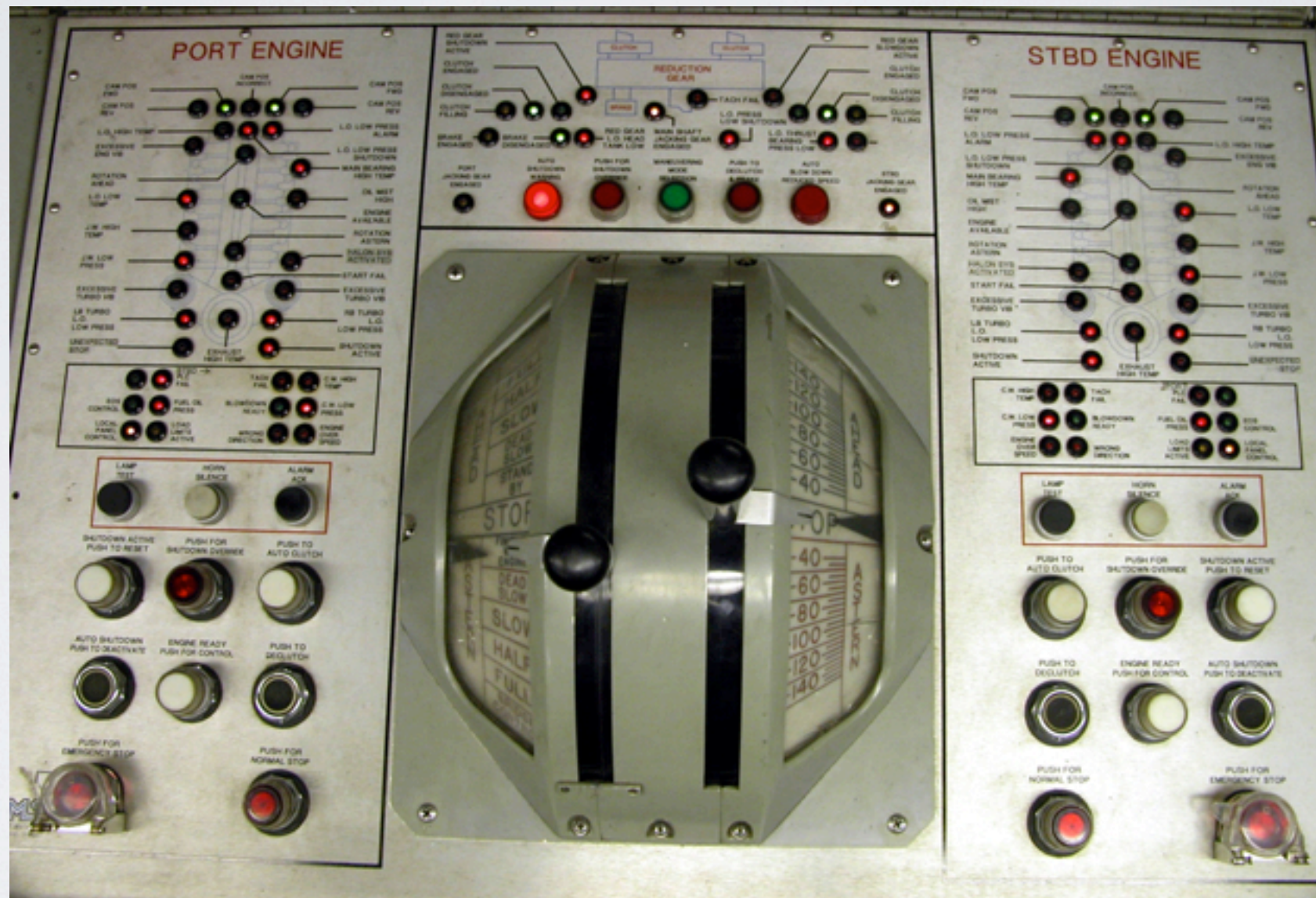
CONTINUING MONETIZATION

- How to avoid your revenue looking like this:



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CONTINUING MONETIZATION



Technical Marine Service

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Lots of Levers to play with
Experiment and diversify revenue

Free versions, with ads
In-App Purchases

IN APP PURCHASES



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a whole slide here on why we think it is awesome and really was a major shift for us and our business.

Possible points include:

- Balance - how many and \$--- about “value”**
- your history of IAP and free updates and why you think that balance is important**
- types of IAP that make sense: (ie that make the game more fun, offer new challenges, extend the playtime)**
- types of IAP that are bad: ones that throw off the general balance and playability of the game, ones that create unfair advantage, ones that change the tone of the game, ones that appear to offer real changed functionality or ability but really are just cosmetic.**
- they are not right for every game but really think about what you could add to make your game more enjoyable - think about IAP as a way to cater directly to people that you KNOW like your game**

ADVERTISING REVENUE



GREYSTRIPE

Google
admob



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Familiar slide? Ad networks work both ways.

A lot of developers have had success going this route, but you need to show ~100 ads per session to make it worthwhile.

CPM = Cost per mille, aka pay per show

CPA/CPC = Cost per Acquisition/Click

INTERPROMOTION



Player Sharing



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Running a cross promotion with The Creeps, another Tower Defense game. TM in Creeps, Creeps in TM, everyone wins.

Ecosystems & User sharing are paramount for growth.

Push notifications (Don't be annoying, might get you deleted)

CONCLUSIONS



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Experiment!
Every app is different.
Above all, make a good game, and give it the love it deserves.
Don't stop!

Experiment! What works for one app may not work for another. As an indie dev you have the freedom to try all the crazy ideas you can imagine.

QA

Here's how to reach me:

arash@limbicsoftware.com

Twitter: @akgfx

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