



# Returners and retention

*How to win back and keep lapsed players*



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GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

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*Introduction*

# About this talk

- What are **'returners'** and why are they important?
- How can I get and keep more of them?
- Primarily for designers of live games
  - **Warning:** contains some marketing!





*Introduction*

# About Me

- RuneScape studio head @ Jagex
- Worked in game design for 17 years
  - 1998 - Bullfrog / Electronic Arts
  - 2001 – Sony
  - 2006 – Climax
  - 2011 – Jagex



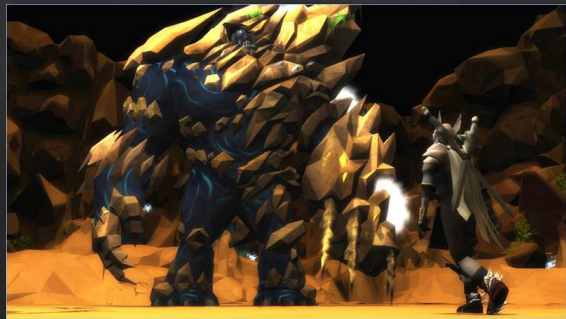




## *Introduction*

# About RuneScape

- Traditional fantasy MMORPG
- Launched 2001 - updated weekly
- Hybrid of F2P, subscription and microtransactions
- 160 development and publishing staff
- Franchise: Old School, Companion, Chronicle, RS Next



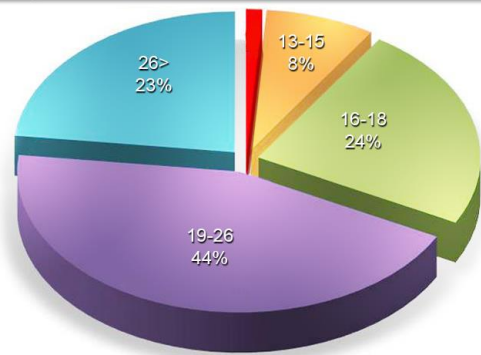


*Introduction*

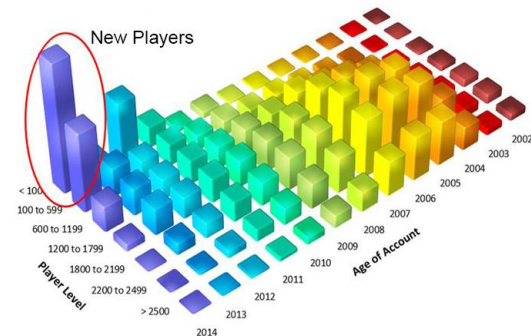
# About Our Players

- Mostly English speaking males 16-26
- Over half have played 6+ years
- 90 minute average session
- Active video & streaming community

Runescape Players - Age Breakdown



Runescape - Account Age/ Level Breakdown





*Introduction*

# RuneScape Key Stats

- Revenue to date: \$750M~
- Daily actives: 500-600k
- Monthly actives: 2M
- Subscribers: 600k
- Concurrent users: 60k av, 90k peak







## Introduction

# What is a 'returner'?

- Someone who comes back to a game after a sustained lapse from regular play
- RuneScape uses a lapse duration of >3 months
  - RuneScape measures lapse based on *subscription*
- Most games will use a lapse duration of >1 month
  - Most games will measure a lapse by *activity*



*Introduction*

# Why are returners important?

- They can be easier to acquire than new players
  - Their expectations match what's on offer
  - They understand the fundamentals
  - They may have paid in the past
- Paid re-acquisition could be cheaper
  - For us ~25% less e.g.
    - Cost-per-payer for returner: \$3
    - Cost-per-payer for new player: \$3.80







*Introduction*

# Why are returners important?

- Their relevance grows as product ages
  - Onboarding new players gets tougher...
  - ...But lapsed population grows

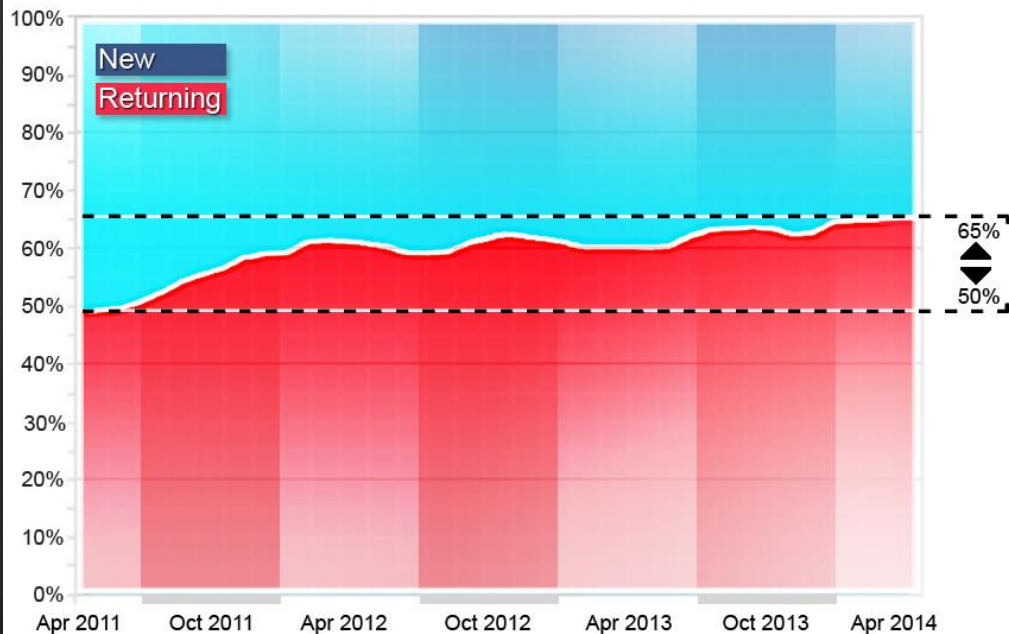


*Introduction*

# Why are returners important?

- Proportion of returners will rise as a game ages
- RuneScape returner rates climb from half to two-thirds in 3 years

Incoming New and Returning Members



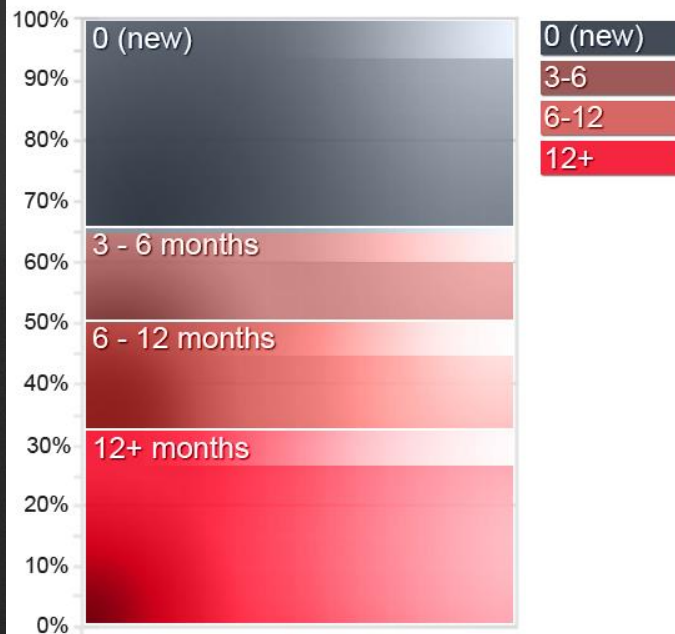


*Introduction*

# Why are returners important?

- Long term lapseders are still viable
- Half of the RuneScape's returners have come back after a lapse of over 1 year

## Incoming Members 2014





*Introduction*

# Why are returners important?

- 65% active RS members had absence >3 months
- Returners are key to longevity







# Challenges

1. **Communicating** with lapsed players
2. **Motivating** them to come back
3. **Reacquainting** them with the game
4. **Engaging** their interest for the longer term
5. Developing a **mindset** that considers returners





# 1 *Communication* Reaching out to lapsed players

- Email is limited
  - Low engagement, high friction
  - Risks around poor deliverability & blacklisting



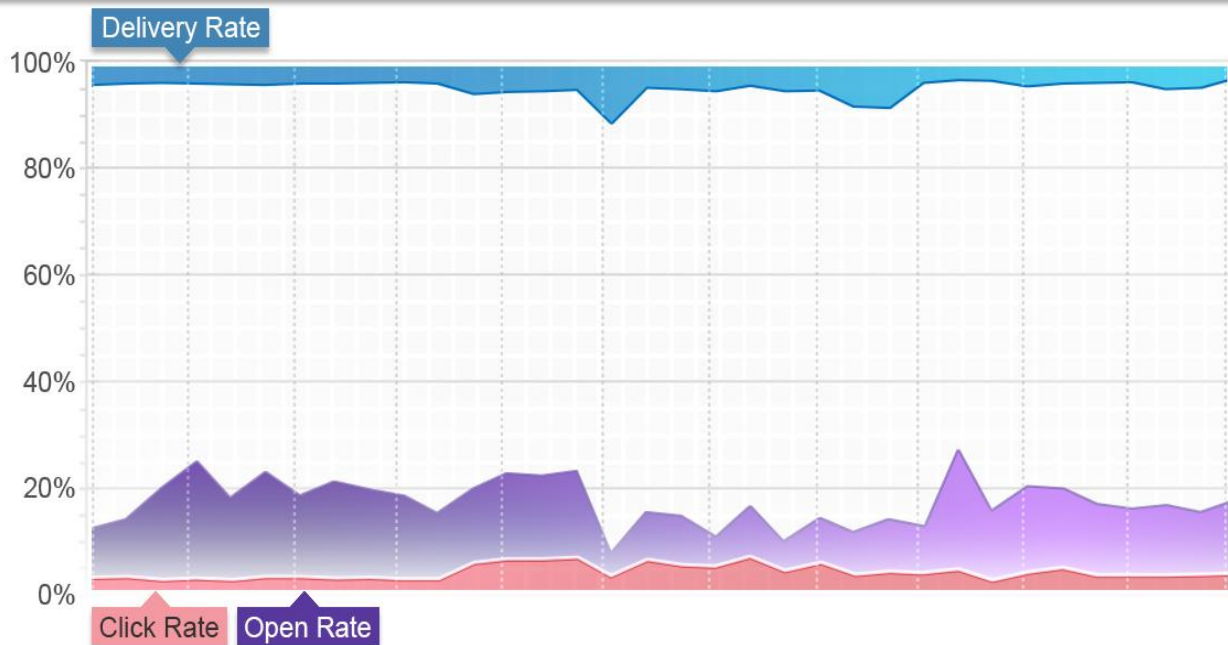


# 1 *Communication*

## Reaching out to lapsed players

- **Example:**
  - 98% delivered
  - 16% opened
  - 1.7% clicked
  - (vol ~900k)

Engagement with RS winback emails







# 1 *Communication* **Capitalize on social media**

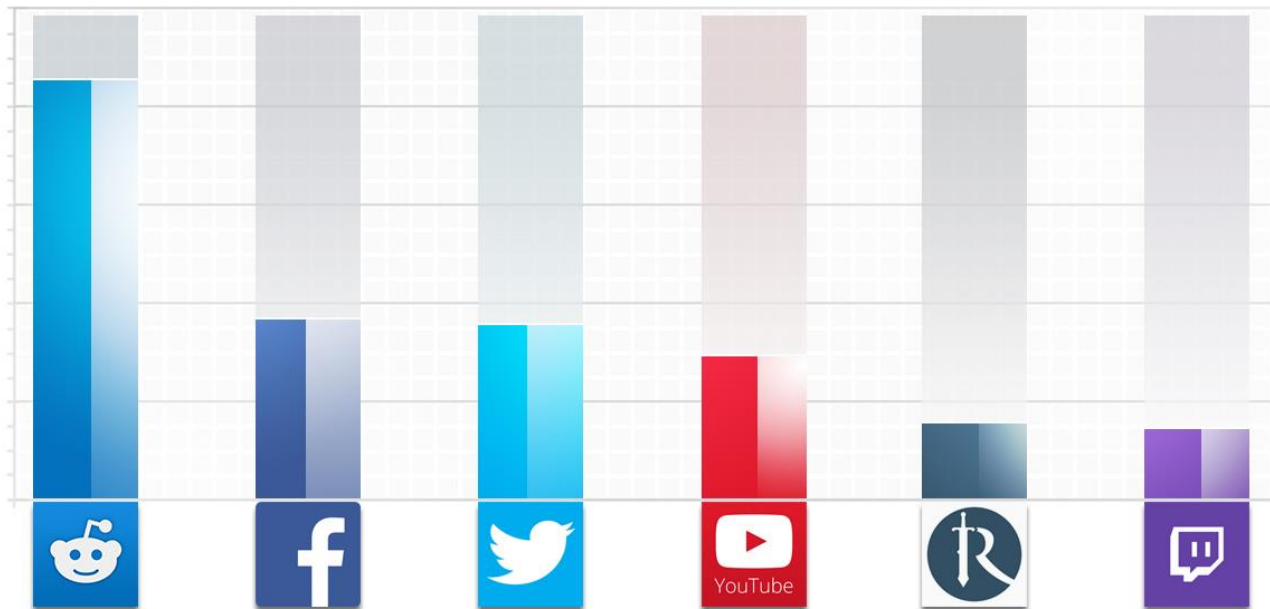
- Embrace *passive* communication
  - Allow players stay in touch on their terms
- Build social channels for lapseders
  - Don't oversaturate: low quantity, high interest
  - Facebook and YouTube are ideal





# 1 *Communication* Capitalize on social media

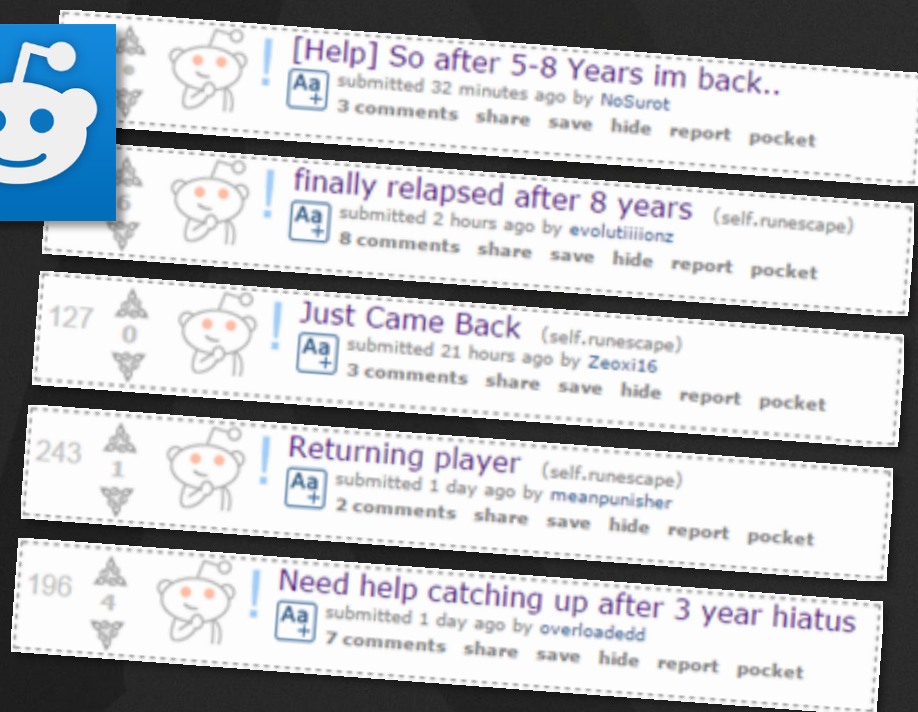
Runescape.Com Visitor Referrals in 2014 (non-cookie'd visitors)





# 1 Communication

## Capitalize on social media



### /r/runescape Subreddit Wiki

#### Wiki Table of Contents

##### Subreddit Rules and Guidelines

- Rules and Guidelines of /r/runescape
- Frequently Asked Questions of /r/runescape
- Official RuneScape Account Help Information
- Official RuneScape Account Help Tips
- Topics to Avoid Posting

##### Helpful Links for Returning Players

- Big List of Major Updates
- Summary of Combat Changes
- Best Equipment for your Levels
- Story Progression to the Sixth Age
- Scam/Lure Avoidance

##### • Other Clans

##### Gameplay

- Fansites
- Friends Chats
- Guides

##### Security

- Phishing Avoidance
- Scam/Lure Avoidance

##### /r/runescape Subreddit Wiki

##### Wiki Table of Contents

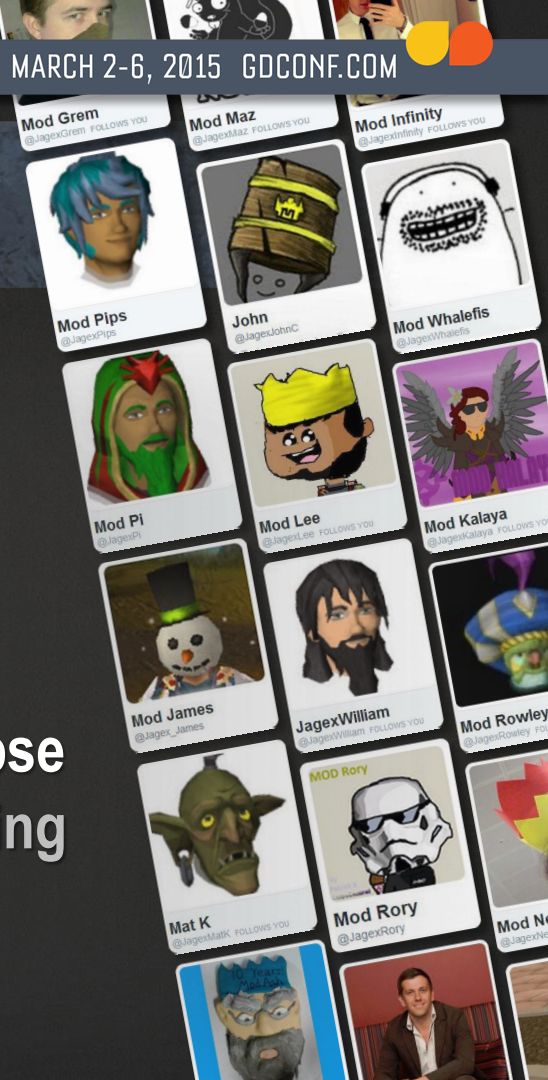
- Subreddit Rules and Guidelines
- Helpful Links for Returning Players
- Clans
- Gameplay
- Security



# 1 *Communication*

## Put yourself out there

- Dev team on social media
  - Generates buzz and builds trust
  - Don't just be a brand or a company
  - Show your work, discuss your ideas
- Players more likely to stay in touch when they lapse
  - Lapsers stay following devs they find interesting





# 1 *Communication* Build features for sharing

- Help your players make and share content
  - Increases your game's reach
- Go beyond the obvious
  - Provide tools for making personal content







# 1 *Communication* **Build features for sharing**

## Orb of Oculus







# 1 *Communication* **Build features for sharing**

## Bestiary Greenscreen





# 1 *Communication* Build features for sharing

## Twitch.tv integration



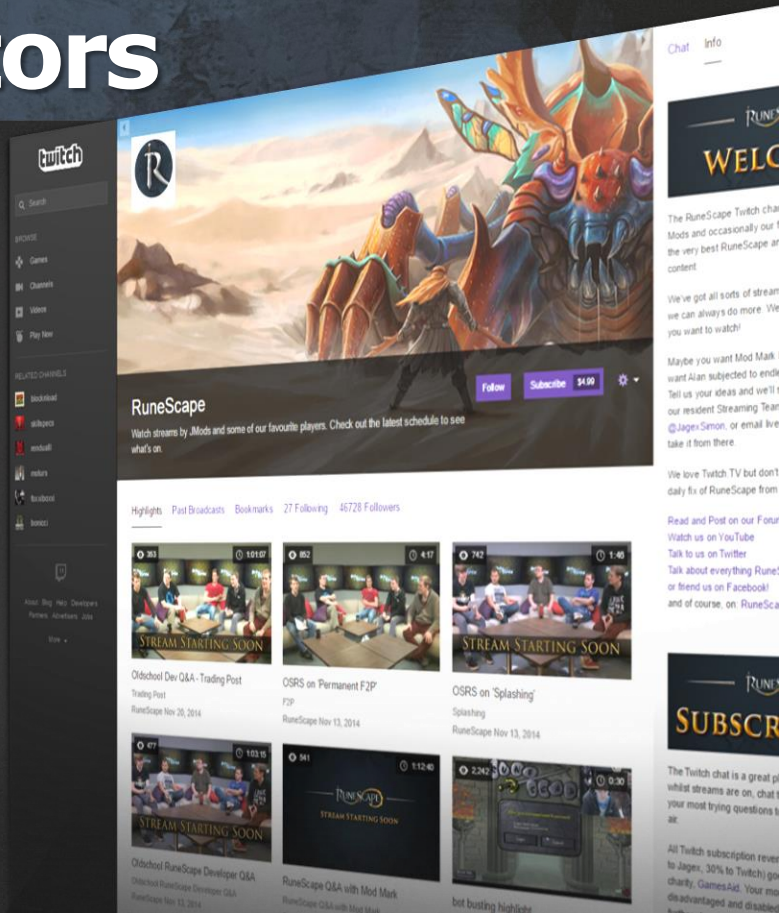




# 1 *Communication*

## Support your creators

- Lapsers follow player content creators
- You can offer:
  - Exposure & traffic
  - Content previews
  - Safe CM tools
- Design gameplay that's fun to spectate!







# 2 *Motivation* Motivating lapsed players

- Design content which appeals to lapsed players
- Use iconic content players will remember
- Address their reasons for leaving
  - Boredom or frustration can be overcome
  - Use analytics and surveys for inspiration





# 2 *Motivation* Example: Resolve a cliffhanger

## Lost City of the Elves – September 2014

- Finale to a long running quest series
- Fabled city finally revealed







# 2 *Motivation*

## Example: Fix a problem

### Legacy Mode – July 2014

- Old-style combat & UI inside the modern game
- Returners didn't have to learn new systems







# 2 *Motivation* Example: Big and bold

## World Events – July & December 2013

- Large scale, time limited content
- Gods battle amongst popular cities
- New territory capture gameplay





# 2 *Motivation* Example: Play on nostalgia

## “Old School” RuneScape retro server – March 2013

- Early version restored and re-launched
- Authentic ‘golden age’ experience
  - Simple, sparse, difficult







# 2 *Motivation* Choosing the right moment

- Capitalise on seasonality and activity trends
  - Find the optimal time to publish content for returners







# 2 *Motivation* Choosing the right moment

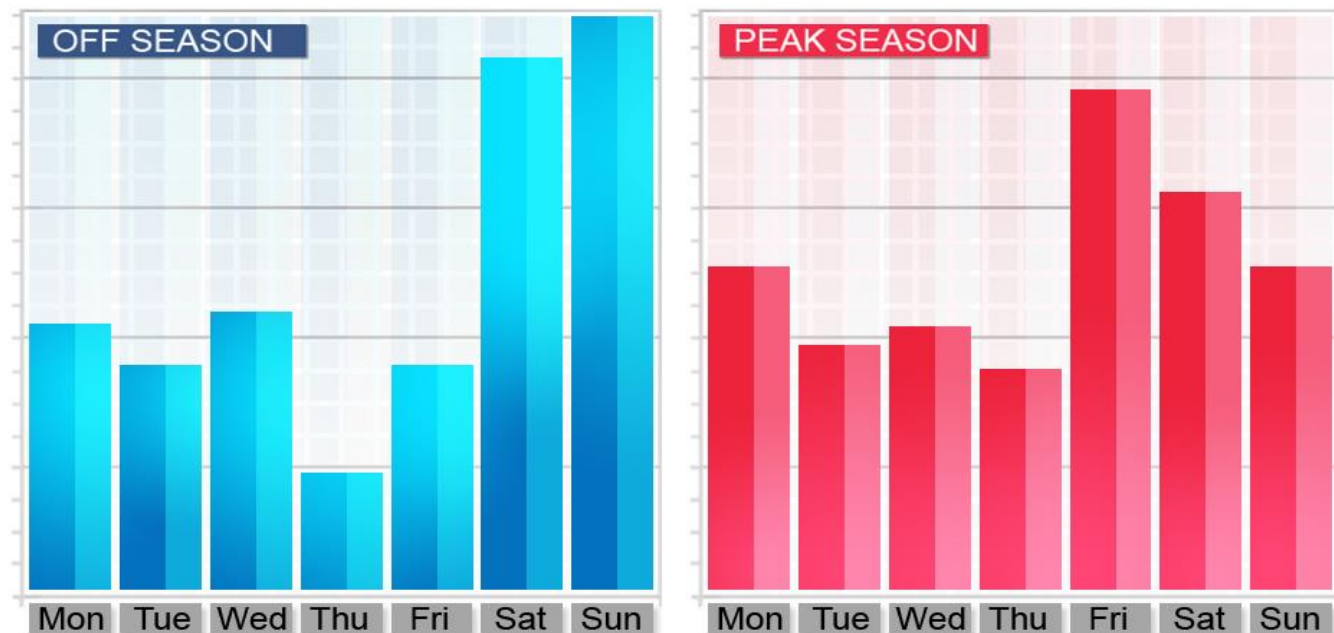
Return Rate - Annual Average





# 2 *Motivation* Choosing the right moment

Runescape Returners by Day of Week





# 2 *Motivation* Choosing the right moment

- Capitalise on seasonality and activity trends
  - Find the optimal time to publish content for returners
  - Design events with returner activity patterns in mind
- Holiday events
  - Christmas, Halloween, Easter







# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Reacquainting lapsed players

- Returners need to overcome a loss of mastery
- Their learning needs vary based on length of absence





# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Help systems for returners

- Give them *some* sort of help system





# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Help systems for returners







# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Help systems for returners

**ADVENTURES**

Featured Quests Challenges Minigames Path Beasts

**LATEST CONTENT**

**Event**

Prifadinas

**RECOMMENDED CHALLENGES**

**Combat**

Rampage Mk XIV

**WHAT'S NEW?**

To get up to speed with what's changed in the world of Gielinor, take a look at the links below.

**Equipment: Gear Guide**

View recommended gear appropriate to your level and play style.

**Content: Major Updates**

A summary of significant updates to RuneScape you may have missed.

**Combat: Active, Passive & Legacy Modes**

Take full control with active or passive combat abilities, or choose Legacy Mode's traditional combat and interfaces.

**Lore: RuneScape's Sixth Age**

Guthix is dead; slain by the Mahjarrat Sliske. With his death, the edicts have fallen and the gods have returned to Gielinor.

Visit [RuneScape.com](http://RuneScape.com) for all the latest news and updates.



**Runescape Rewind - Part 1 - General Changes!**

35,171 views 3 months ago



**Runescape Rewind - Part 2 - Skilling!**

33,160 views 3 months ago



**Runescape Rewind - Part 3 - Combat!**

28,684 views 3 months ago



# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Help systems for returners

- Personalised help systems
  - Use their last-login for dynamic catch up
  - Help should be relevant, visual and entertaining







# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Lowering barrier to payment

- Make payment easier with a tradable premium currency
  - E.g. RuneScape Bonds, Eve Online's PLEX, Wildstar's CREDD
- High spenders (effectively) subsidise other players
- Returners use old wealth to get premium services

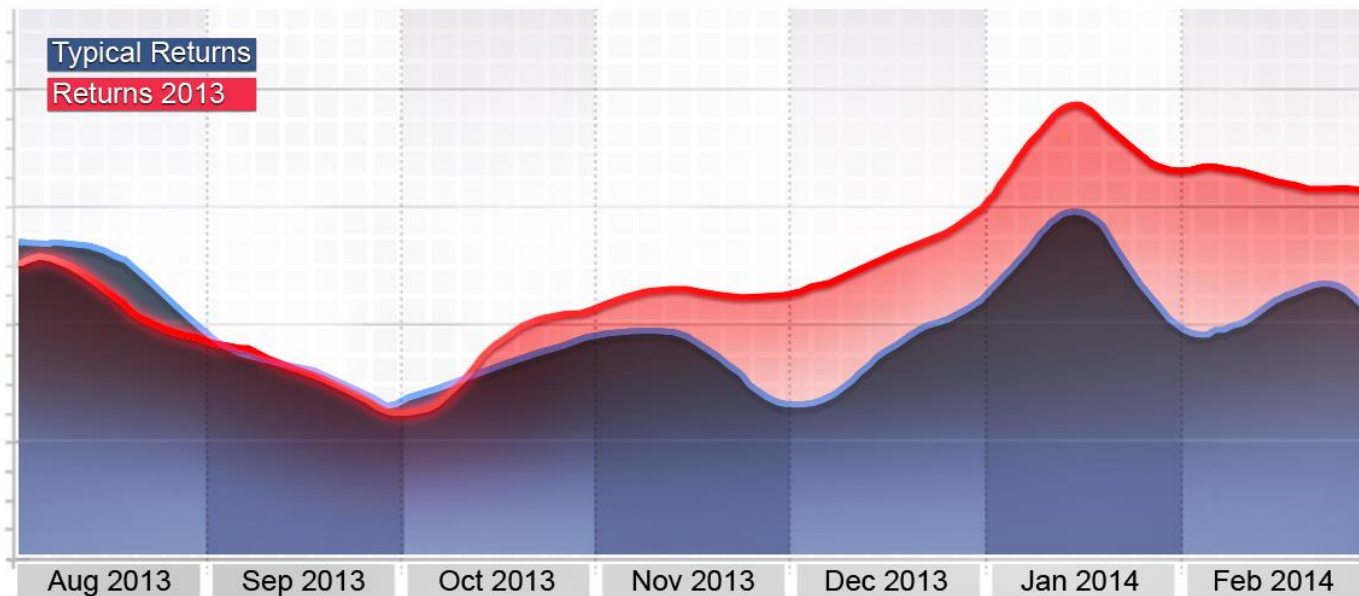






# 3 *Re-acquaintance* Lowering barrier to payment

Effect of Bonds on Member Return Rates





# **4** *Engagement* **Building long term interest**

- **In-game events have many benefits**
  - The world feels more lively & busy
  - Sense of urgency to participate
  - Focal point for socialising
- **Returners are especially responsive to events**





# 4 *Engagement* Events for returners

- Design events around the needs of returners
- Enrichment events – deepen engagement of time-rich players
  - Extra content, social interaction, variety
  - Ideal during peak season (holidays)
- Upkeep events – reduce disengagement of time-poor players
  - Low requirements, high value, daily login incentives
  - Ideal during off season (busy IRL)







# 4<sup>Engagement</sup> Example: UP TO SNOW GOOD

Enrichment event - December 2013

- Task: Earn points in social minigames
- Reward: Winter outfits & XP bonuses
- Meta: Teamwork to optimise score
- Uplift: +9% 3 month retention \*



*\* comparing returners of similar activity profiles but which differ on event engagement*



# 4 *Engagement* Example: BALTHAZA'S BIG RAFFLE

Upkeep event - September 2014

- Task: Login daily to get raffle ticket
- Reward: Fixed quantity of prizes per draw
- Meta: All-in or spread bet
- Uplift: +11% 3 month retention \*

*\* comparing returners of similar activity profiles but which differ on event engagement*





# 4 *Engagement* Events for returners

- Our optimal quantity for events is 1 month in 3

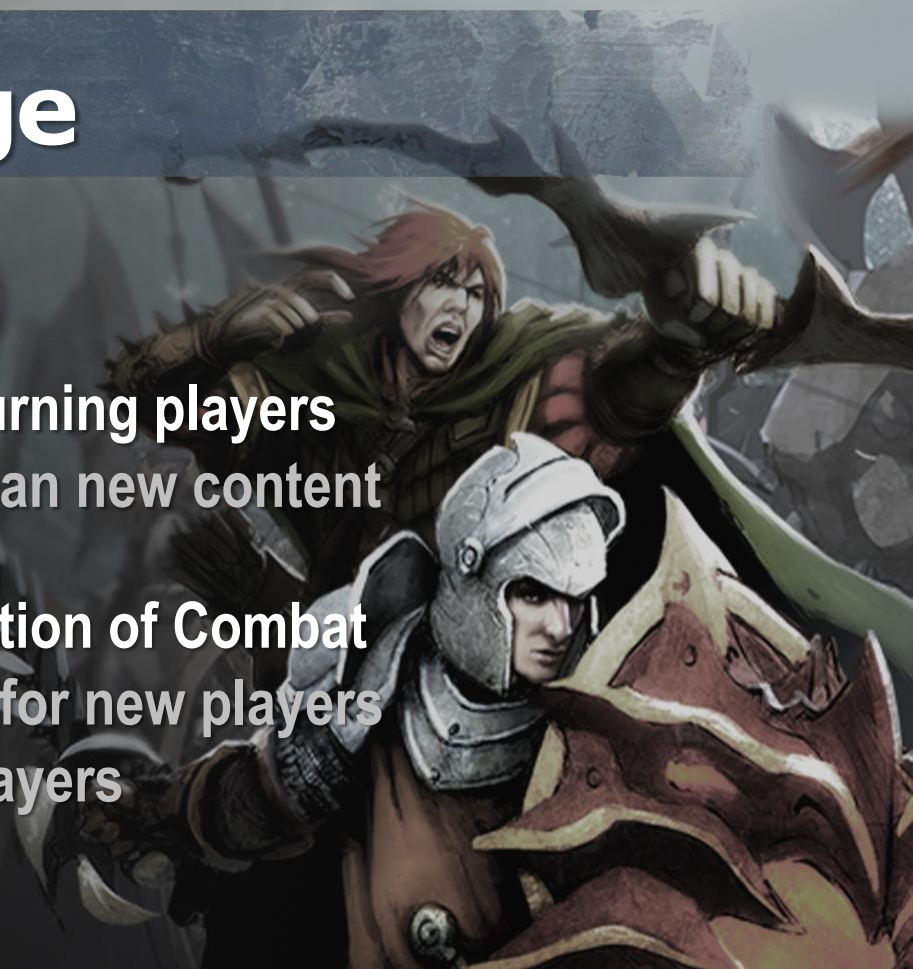






# 5 *Mindset* Managing change

- Modernisation vs. Familiarity
- Too much change can alienate returning players
  - Core systems are higher risk than new content
- Example: RuneScape's 2012 Evolution of Combat
  - Combat had been a weak point for new players
  - But we overlooked returning players





# 5 *Mindset* Managing change

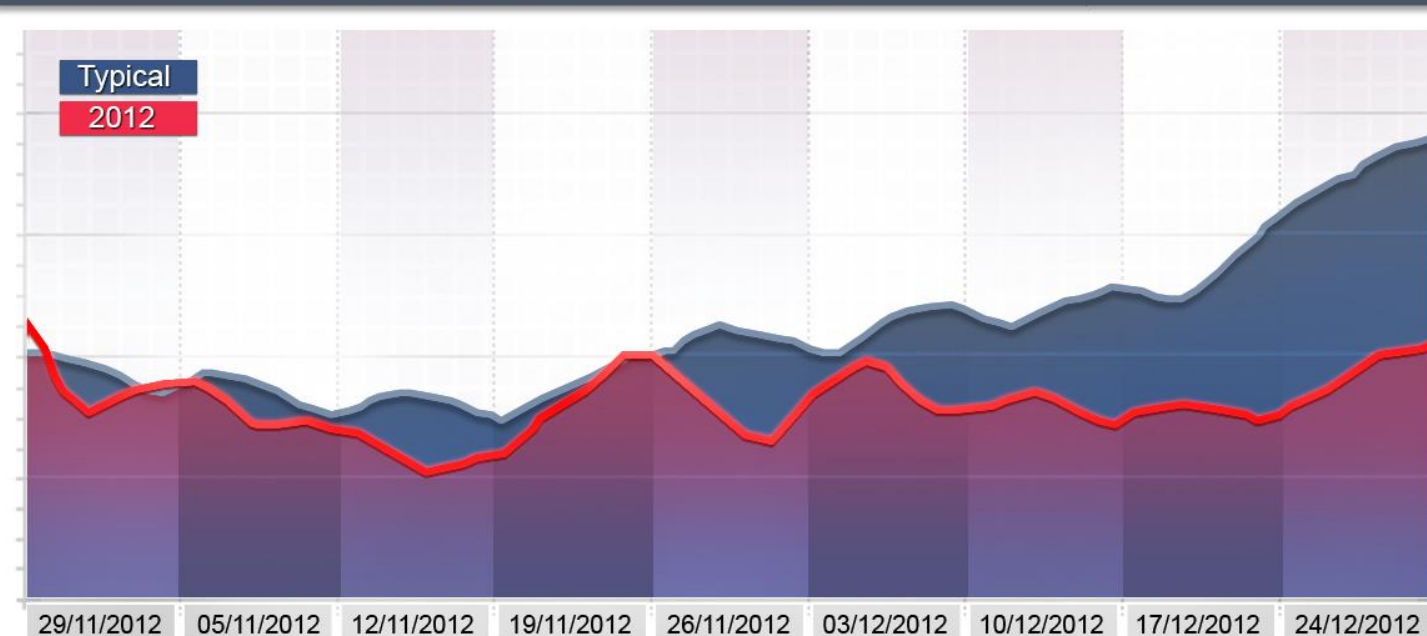






# 5 *Mindset* Managing change

Evolution of Combat Launch - Return Rate







# 5 *Mindset* Managing change





# 5 *Mindset* Managing change

- “Squeal of Fortune” mystery box feature
  - Daily login incentive via free spins
  - Micro-transactions to buy more spins
- Received complaints but no behavioural impact
- ...because it didn't change core gameplay







# 5 *Mindset* Managing change

- Alter core gameplay at your peril
- Perform thorough research and testing
- Watch for cumulative change
- Consider backwards compatibility







# 5 *Mindset* Community sentiment

- **Player satisfaction impacts returners**
  - Poor sentiment inhibits word of mouth
  - Toxicity harms re-engagement
- **Track on-going player sentiment**
  - Use to calibrate design decisions








# 5<sup>Mindset</sup> Weekly sentiment reports

## Snowverload, Dominion Tower and Patch Notes

It's been 24 hours since the update, please find below sentiment and verbatim. The verbatim for the Snowman boss appears to be a little more mixed now:

- Players aren't happy with the rewards
- Players aren't happy with the amount of times he is spawned in game (even though Jmods are able to spawn him - I don't think they've quite caught on yet)
- Players aren't happy that the cracker takes so long to generate for them to pull

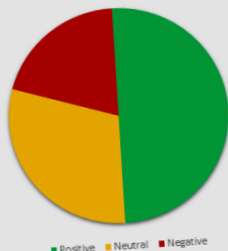
	Snowverload	Dominion Tower	Patch Notes
Gage			
	Positive	Positive	Positive

## Snowverload and Dominion Tower

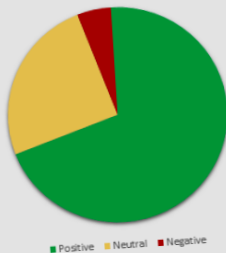
### Key Wins

- A few players excited about Snowverload
- A lot of players excited about the Dominion tower update

## Snowverload



## Dominion Tower



### Action we've taken

- Fixed the barrows override we were having issues with
- Spawning Snowverload at the Jmod in-game event and let the players know
- **NEW: Snowverload now spawns every 3 hours**

### Action we could take

### Player suggestions:

- Let iron man accs take part in the Dominion Tower update
- I have a suggestion, Why wont you add a conter for snowverload's respawn time in the minigame tab, or in some npc dialoge (i.e santa)?

### NEW:

- Make a snowverload F2P (maybe not as often as P2P)?
- Could we possibly have a trade-off, where maybe every 100 rumble kills rewards a pair of gloves or dreadnips? I feel like it would bring more attraction to rumble mode considering once I unlock the title and extreme medallion I'm likely never touching it again.
- Jagex, can we keepsake the dominion medallion please? It would look cool with my current look, is all I'm saying.

### Verbatim from the Forums:

#### Snowverload

- Every 14 hours?
- Nice, going straight to Solomon's for Retro Ahrim's! Happy Winter Solstice to all. ^^
- Rumble mode "can be done single player" THEN WHY ISN'T IT ENABLED FOR IRONMAN. I already have the dominion marker 3, dreadnips etc, but I cannot access today's content.
- Yess! Thanks Jagex. Been waiting for this package since replicas went out C.

### Bugs brought to our attention:

- The Barrows override - This has now been fixed



# 5 *Mindset* Customer satisfaction analysis

## Member Satisfaction

1.1	74	Game 'Look and Feel
0.9	72	New Content Appeal (freshness, imaginativeness)
0.9	73	Combat
0.9	84	Member Attitudes
0.7	80	Interaction (UI, chat, bank etc.)
0.5	82	Game Information (website, wiki etc.)
0.4	55	PvP*
0.4	61	Treasure Hunter – Value
0.4	71	Challenges
0.4	87	Member sign up – Process*
0.3	72	Skills
0.3	83	Treasure Hunter - Access
0.2	74	Player Polls
0.2	75	Member Sign Up - Product Range*
0.2	77	Communications
0.2	79	Quests

Customer  
Satisfaction  
Index

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## Future Behaviours

Recommend to friends / family	68	4.9
Say good things on forums/social media	69	4.8
Be a player in 12 months	75	4.4
Be a member in 12 months	72	4.3
Be a player in 3 months	80	4.1
Be a member in 3 months	80	3.9
Image	74	3.9





# Recap

- **1. Utilise social media to communicate with lapsed players**
  - Empower community advocates with features & assistance
- **2. Design updates around the needs of lapsed players**
  - Release those updates during seasonal highs
- **3. Help returners regain mastery with personalised catch up**
- **4. Maintain their interest with special community events**
- **5. Cautiously manage change to core gameplay**
  - Track community sentiment and keep it positive



# Thank you

*any questions?*

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