



GDC MOBILE
SUMMIT

DON'T CHANGE A THING! - The Challenges of Evolving Solitaire

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GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® | FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





...about me...

- Russ
 - Producer / Designer
"Vision Holder"
 - Old (14th GDC)
 - Fun!
 - Games for Everyone



mobilityware



...about it...

- Solitaire

- Over 270 years of play time...
...every day
- Over 200 Million downloads
- #2 installed game on iOS¹
- #3 played on iOS (Spider Solitaire is #4)²



(1)App Annie (2) AppQuest.io



...more about it...

- Solitaire Suite

- 5 games
- 16 SKUs
- 2 Teams
- 3 Development Environments
- 40 Update releases in 2016





...about my job...

"Isn't Solitaire already made?"

"What do you actually do?"



- Add Features!
- Add Users!
- ...and don't mess up the revenue!



Challenges

Revenue increasing
changes

vs

Revenue risking
changes



...about her...

- Lisa
 - Late 30s
 - Not a “gamer”
 - LOVES Daily Challenges
 - “DON’T CHANGE A THING!”





Challenges

Making Changes

vs

Players who resist
change

Revenue increasing
changes

vs

Revenue risking
changes



Addressing the Challenges

1. Players *resist* change
2. Companies *only* want positive changes

How do you handle these challenges?



Addressing the Challenges

Focused effort to:

1. Protect the **Player**
2. Protect the **Revenue**



Protecting the Player

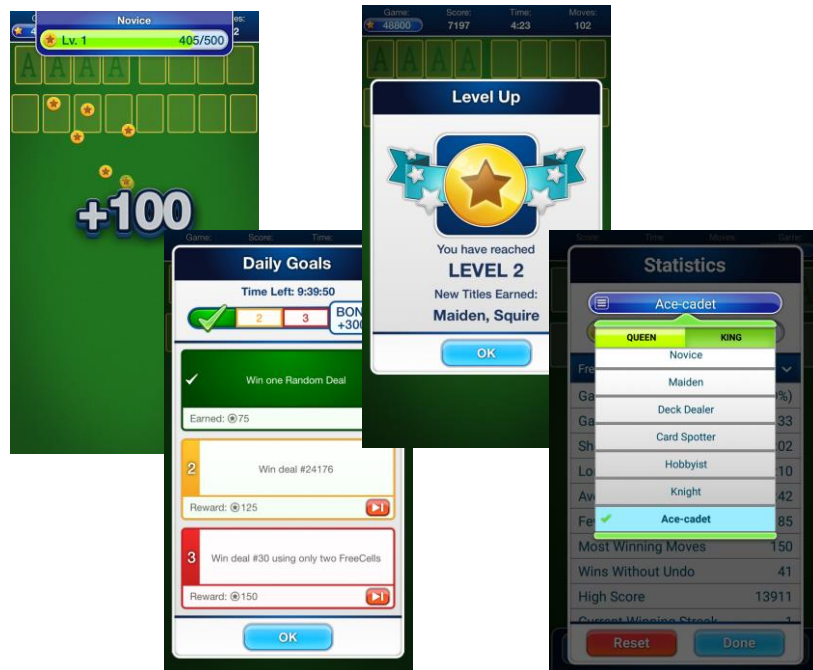
1. In-Game Surveys





Solitaire Examples - Progression

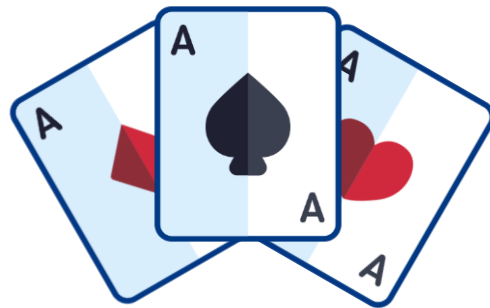
- Key Features:
 - XP rewards
 - Daily Goals
 - Bonus for completing 3!
 - Levels!
 - Titles!





In-Game Surveys

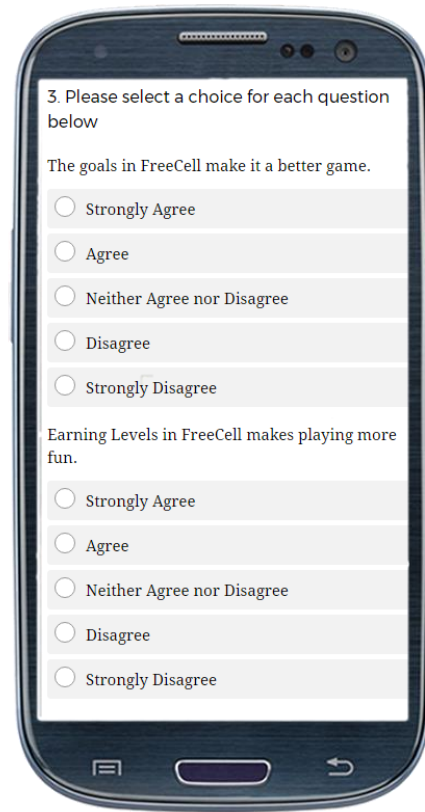
- **Unfiltered** from the player
- More Information (**6x!**)
- **Targeted** Questions
- **Easy** to do





In-Game Surveys

- What we did:
 - 4 Likert Scale Questions
 - 2 Progression / 2 on New UI
 - 1 Comment Box



In-Game Surveys

- 2 Weeks of **Data**
- **Analyzed**
 - Trends & Opportunities
- **Team Meeting**
 - Problems, Ideas, Plan
- 2 Weeks of **Development**





In-Game Surveys

- Aug 4th
 - 80% "Liked" new features
- Sept 15th
 - 90% "Liked" new features





Protecting the Player

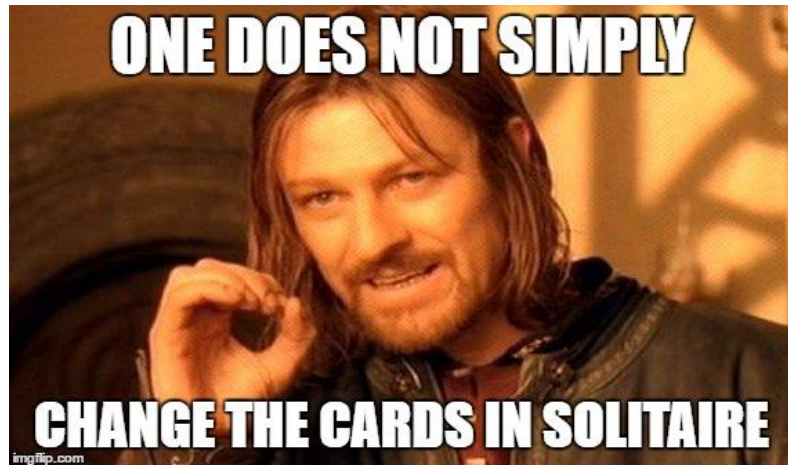
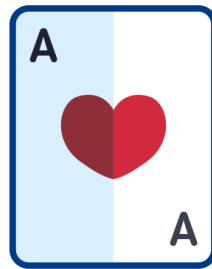
1. In-Game Surveys
2. AB Testing





AB Testing

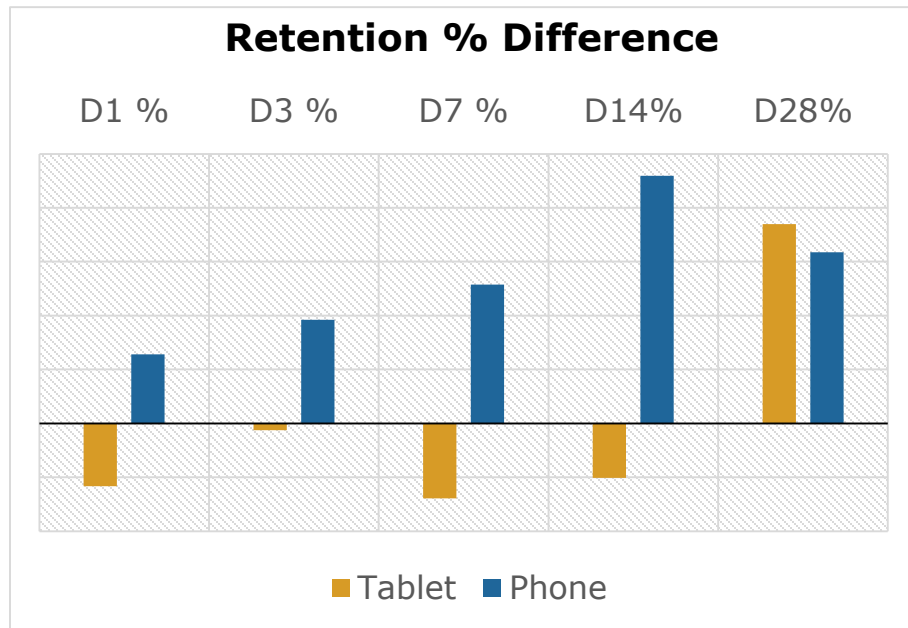
- “Easy Read” Card Front
 - “Hard to Read”
- Cards are the character of our game





AB Testing

- Our Test:
 - 50|50 of **New Users**
 - Android
- Results:
 - Weird Tablet Data
 - Make Default on Phone





Protecting the Player

1. In-Game Surveys
2. AB Testing





Addressing the Challenges

1. Players *resist* change
2. Companies *only* want positive changes



How will this make a developer feel?

3. Developers *fear* & play it safe



"You have to be careful when you talk to management about changes."

"You can't change anything on Solitaire."

"We once changed the font by 1 pixel, all the players complained..."



“In a fear-based, failure-averse culture, people will consciously or unconsciously avoid risk. They will seek instead to repeat something safe that’s been good enough in the past.”

- Ed Catmull, *Creativity Inc.*



“...copying what’s come before is a
guaranteed path to mediocrity...”

- Ed Catmull, *Creativity Inc.*



Two Challenges

Making Changes

vs

Players who Resist
Change

Making Changes

vs

Fear of Failure



Addressing the Challenges

1. Protect the **Player**
2. Protect the **Revenue**
3. Defend the **Developer**



Addressing the Challenges

If you:

Protect the **Player** & the **Developer**

You will:

Protect & Grow the **Revenue**



Defending the Developer

1. Guardrails





Guardrails

- AB Tests
- Multiple Applications
- Multiple Platforms

Result:

Confidence & Freedom





Defending the Developer

1. Guardrails
2. Success through Failure
(Failing Forward)





Failing Forward

- The Cross Promo Crash Bug
 - Late in testing
 - Tried to “save” it
 - Poorly implemented



How do you respond?



“Failure isn’t a necessary evil. In fact, it isn’t evil at all. It is a necessary consequence of doing something new.”

- Ed Catmull, *Creativity Inc.*



Failing Forward

Instead of:

- People **fearful** of making mistakes

We want:

- People **focused** on making things right



Create Culture

- Say it explicitly!
- Thick Skins & Soft Hearts

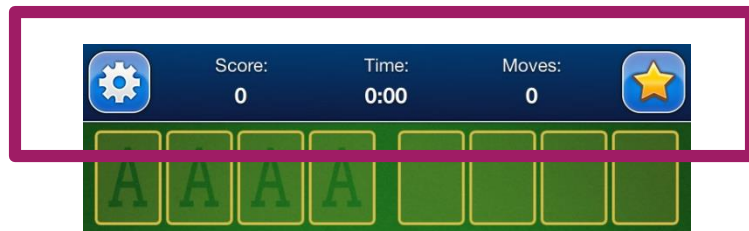
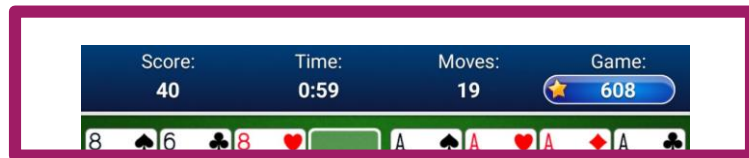
"I hate the update.
HATE it. You
absolutely ruined my
enjoyment of playing."

"MY OLD HIGH SCORE
RECORDS ARE GONE!!
VERY DISAPPOINTING!"



Create Culture

- Say it explicitly!
- Thick Skins & Soft Hearts
- Win/Lose Together
- “Failures” are opportunities





"I just love it. I love to do my daily goals. Brilliant game. Thank you. Xxxxxxxx"

"Now I have got used to the new FreeCell it is ok."

"I actually really enjoy the goals. Wish there were more!"



Summary

- **2 Challenges:**

- Player *resistance* to change
- Developer *fear* of failure



- **1 Resolution: DO CHANGE THINGS!**

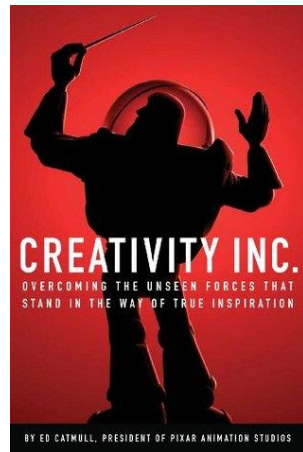
- Use what players *say* & *do* to guide changes
- Use *guardrails* to make testing safe
Encourage "failures" as part of learning



Cool Stuff!

References to check out:

- *Creativity Inc.* - Ed Catmull
- *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* - Daniel Dennett
- *Make Good Art* - Neil Gaiman :
<http://www.uarts.edu/neil-gaiman-keynote-address-2012>



Be in touch:

- Russell Carroll / rcarroll@mobilityware.com



We're looking for **people who want to change** things

- Passionate about Customers
- Love trying new things
- Enjoy an atmosphere of **fun** and **sun**

<http://mobilityware.com/careers.php>



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Thanks for Coming!

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