

FINAL FANTASY XIV
ONLINE



A REALM REBORN™

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GDC

FINAL FANTASY XIV: “Behind The Realm Reborn”

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SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD.

Corporate Executive, Producer and Director FINAL FANTASY XIV

Naoki Yoshida

GDC

Who am I?



- ☛ 19 years experience in the game industry
- ☛ Joined Square Enix in 2005
- ☛ Previous positions include designer & director
- ☛ Worked as chief designer on Dragon Quest X
- ☛ Took over FINAL FANTASY XIV producer and director duties in December, 2010
- ☛ A Final Fantasy (and Dragon Quest) fanboy
- ☛ Favorite Final Fantasy job is black mage
- ☛ Favorite games in the series are III and VII

Overview

- ✚ The history of FFXIV 2010~2014
- ✚ Why the original FFXIV failed
- ✚ How FFXIV was reborn
- ✚ Free-to-Play vs Subscription
- ✚ The future of large-scale MMORPGs

The History of FINAL FANTASY XIV

What has come before...



Original Launch Date:

Official service begins on Sept. 30, 2010

Player Response:

Decidedly poor

Media Response:

Metacritic average = 48

- Unstable servers (upwards of 400 crashes/day)
- Extreme lack of content, broken battle system
- Instanced-based maze-like maps
- Unfriendly user interface
- Lack of story from a series built on storytelling

What has come before...

Dec 3, 2010: FFXIV dev team restructured (Yoshida made producer/director)

Dec 12, 2010: Minor updates begin to address critical issues with current version

Jun 2011: Major updates begin (battle system overhaul)

Sept 2011: Major content updates begin (Ifrit battle, etc)

Sept 2011: First live Producer Letter airs

Oct 14, 2011: A Realm Reborn is announced

Oct~Dec 2012: FFXIV:ARR alpha test conducted

Feb~Jul 2013: FFXIV:ARR CBT conducted

Aug 16~19, 2013: FFXIV:ARR OBT conducted

Aug 27, 2013: FFXIV:ARR official launch



The first MMORPG ever to both rebuild and relaunch

ARR was developed in a mere 2 years and 8 months...
while also continuing service and updates for the original game.

Why the Original Launch Failed

Great Success

Can Breed Great Failure



By making developers...



- ☛ Succumb to the pressure to succeed a second time
- ☛ Stubbornly adhere to outdated policies
- ☛ Ignore past successes while incorporating change for change's sake
- ☛ Allow past successes to foster a false sense of security

For Square Enix, FFXI was
that great success.



8 years of XI left us unable to...

- ☛ Recognize changes to the MMORPG market
- ☛ Break free from our fixation on graphic quality
- ☛ Adapt to genre-wide game design changes
- ☛ Keep up with changes in user needs

**Creating a successful MMORPG
sequel is harder than it looks.**



Here's an FFXIV riddle...



The loveliest flowerpots the realm had ever seen...
But how many lines of shader code did they need?

Original Version Graphic Quality



The flowerpot had a around
1K polygons and used **150 lines of shader code**.
In other words, the same as a single PC!

PlayStation®2 Success



PlayStation®2 Success



During the PS2® era, Square Enix employed teams of highly talented “meisters” to “craft” their masterpieces.

PlayStation®2 Success



This was effective while the time required to craft each single work was relatively short.

Until the evolution of console and PC hardware brought with it...



- ☛ A lack of development resources
- ☛ Longer development periods
- ☛ An inability to incorporate new technologies



Impact on the JAPANESE MMORPG Market

- ✚ Massive teams are required for development
- ✚ Work is divided and spread across team
- ✚ Assets are unable to be created at sufficient pace
- ✚ Development process grows unsuitable for MMORPGs
- ✚ Companies avoid risk of developing MMORPGs
- ✚ Domestic MMORPGs fade from existence
- ✚ Fewer people play MMORPGs
- ✚ Fewer developers understand MMORPGs

Three Easy Steps to Failure

- ☛ An unhealthy obsession with graphic quality
- ☛ A surprising lack of MMORPG knowledge amongst development team members
- ☛ The mindset that the solution to every problem could be patched in a future update

The decision was made to retain the FFXIV name in order to regain fan trust

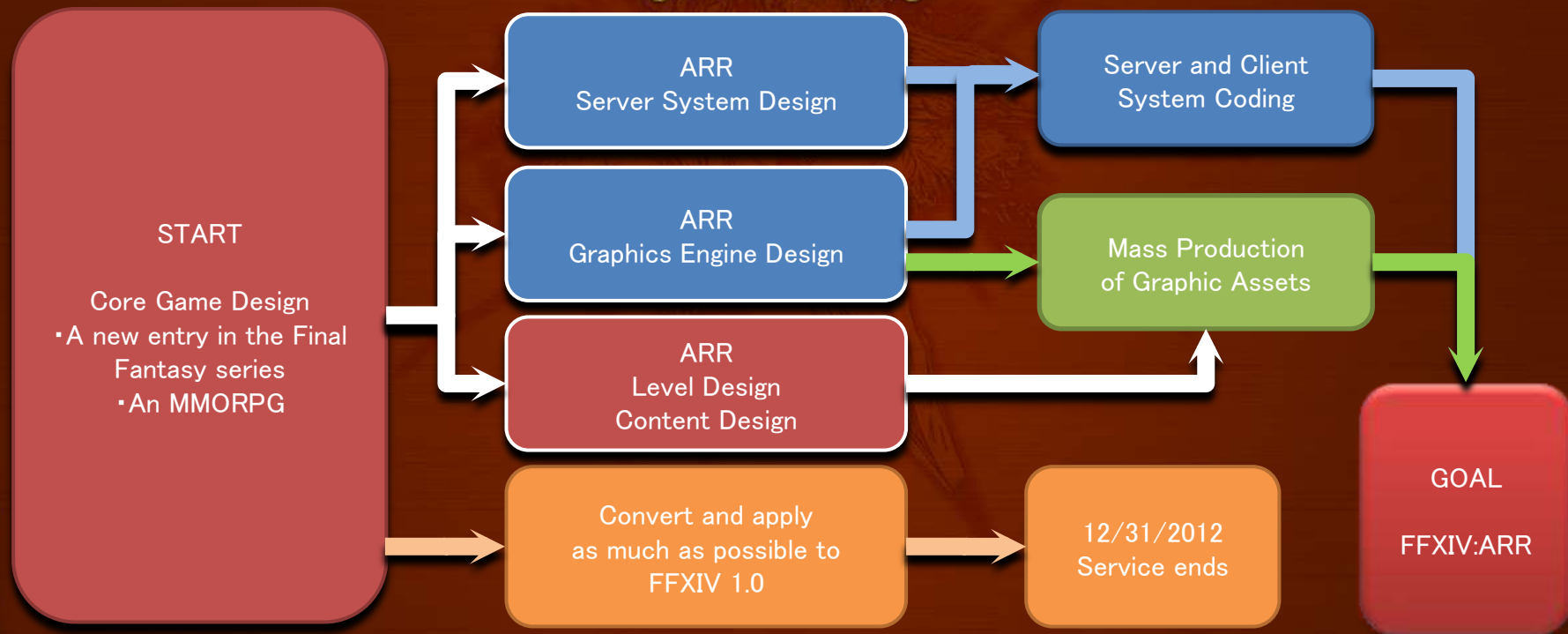
Rising from the Ashes: A Tale of Rebirth

A Race Against the Clock

- ☛ Facing waning interest in the FFXIV brand
- ☛ Watching as the lifespan of the Playstation 3 grew ever shorter
- ☛ Maintaining regular updates to the original version while developing a completely new game
- ☛ Working within limitations on what could be accomplished within the original FFXIV architecture



Can it Really Be that Simple?



Accelerating Decision-making Speed

START

Core Game Design

- A new entry in the Final Fantasy series
- An MMORPG

☛ **400 fundamental design decisions made by me**

→ Eliminating time lost waiting for design approval

☛ **Details left to designers (checks to follow)**

→ Entrusting lead positions to those with MMORPG experience

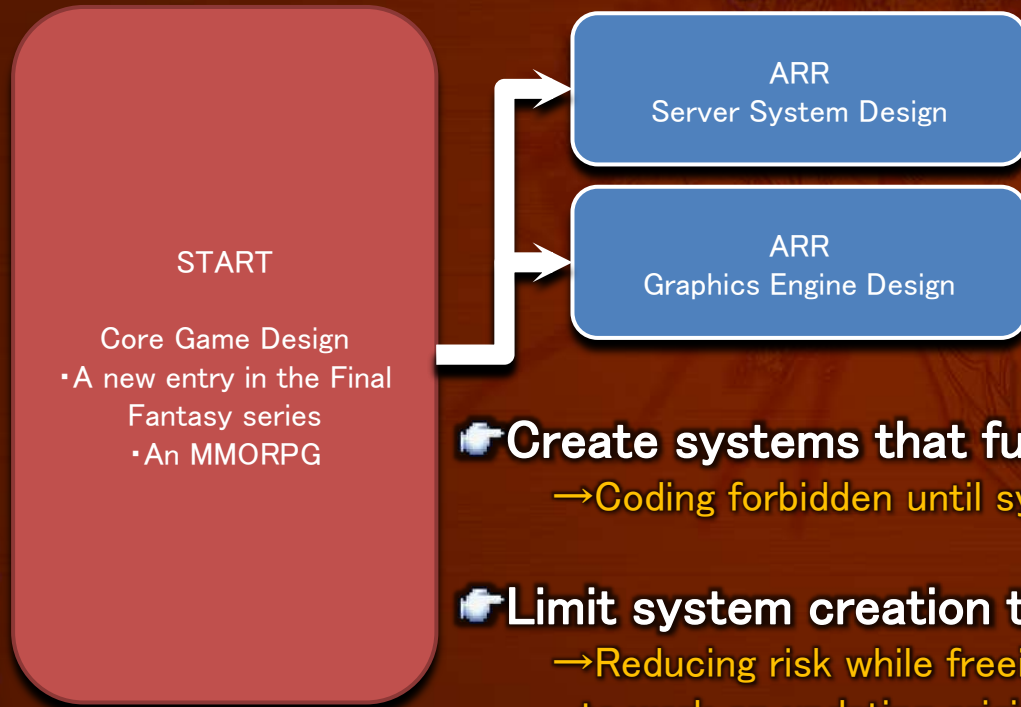
☛ **Standards emphasized over innovation**

→ Covering all basic MMORPG features

☛ **Tried and tested features actively implemented**

→ Reducing time and risk

Planning is Everything



👉 **Create systems that fulfill design needs**

→ Coding forbidden until systems are complete

👉 **Limit system creation to select members**

→ Reducing risk while freeing remaining programmers to work on updating original version

Strengthening the Design Team

START

- Core Game Design
- A new entry in the Final Fantasy series
- An MMORPG

✚ **Getting back to game design basics**

→ With a focus on gameplay experience

✚ **Knowing the MMORPG competition**

→ The more you play, the more you learn

ARR
Level Design
Content Design

✚ **Conducting a trial run with the original FFXIV**

→ Solidifying work flow while providing valuable operations experience

Continuing XIV Operations

START

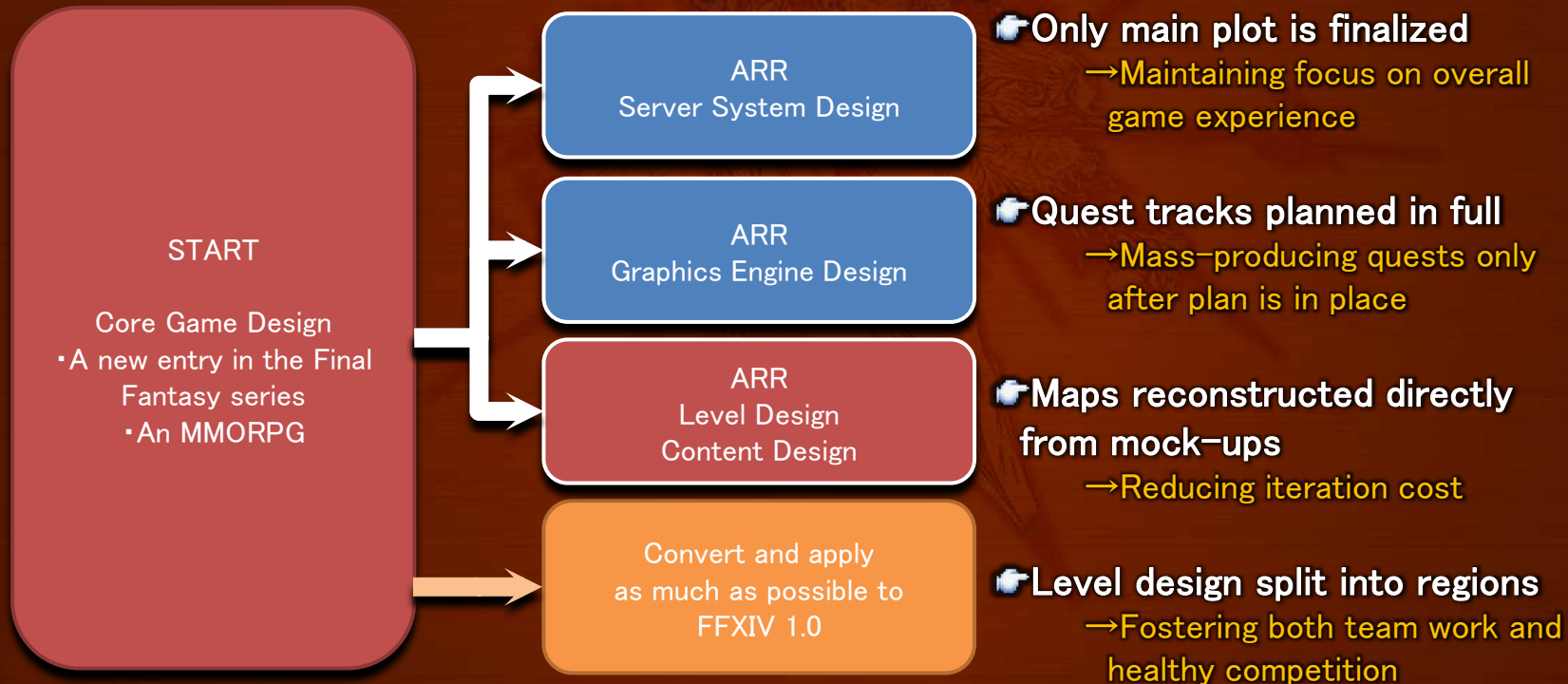
Core Game Design

- A new entry in the Final Fantasy series
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- ✚ **Adding facets of ARR design to the original FFXIV**
→ Providing a testing ground for new ideas and features while minimizing cost
- ✚ **Sharing concepts and designs with the update team**
→ Maintaining overall direction of the project
- ✚ **Gaining invaluable operations experience**
→ Establishing optimal flow before ARR release

Convert and apply
as much as possible to
FFXIV 1.0

Commitment to Level Design



Communication with the Players



Project announcement

→ Cultivating project interest while fostering fan trust

Real time updates

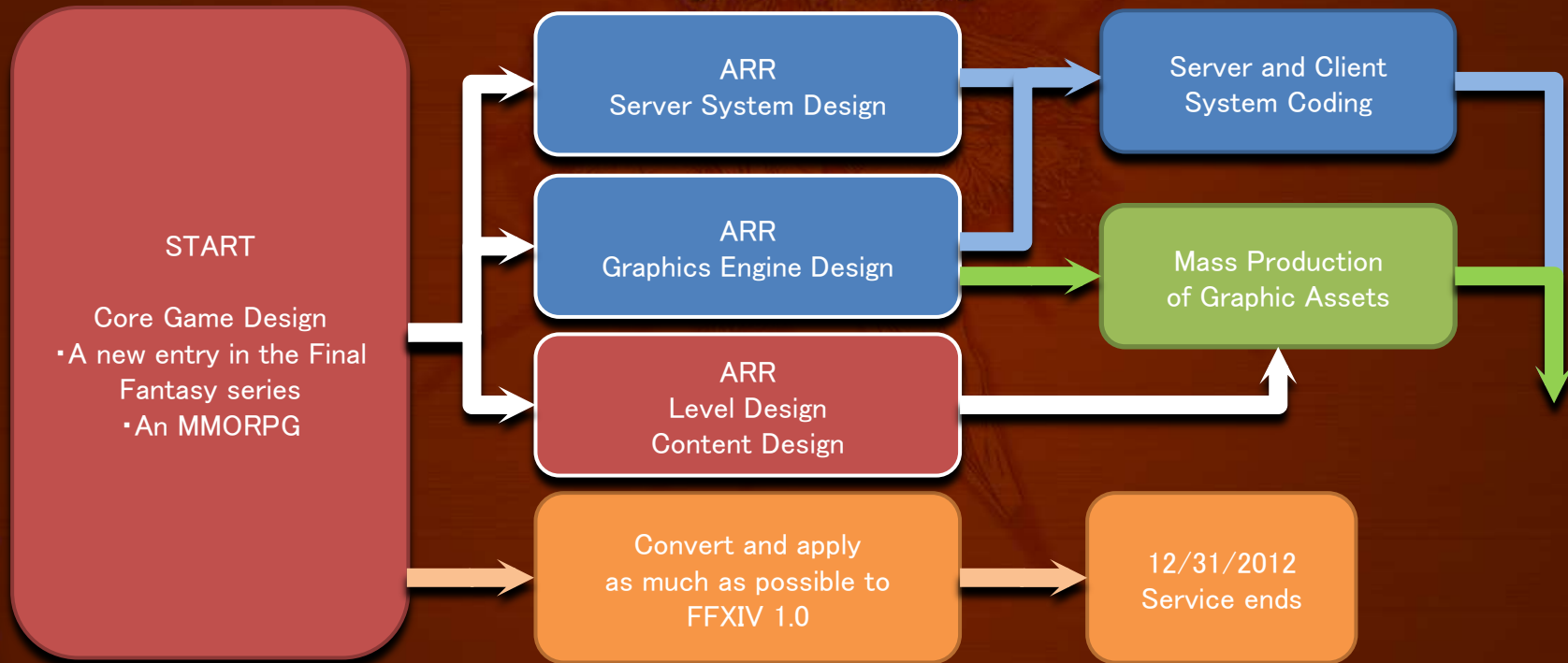
→ Live streaming to public

Regular internal updates

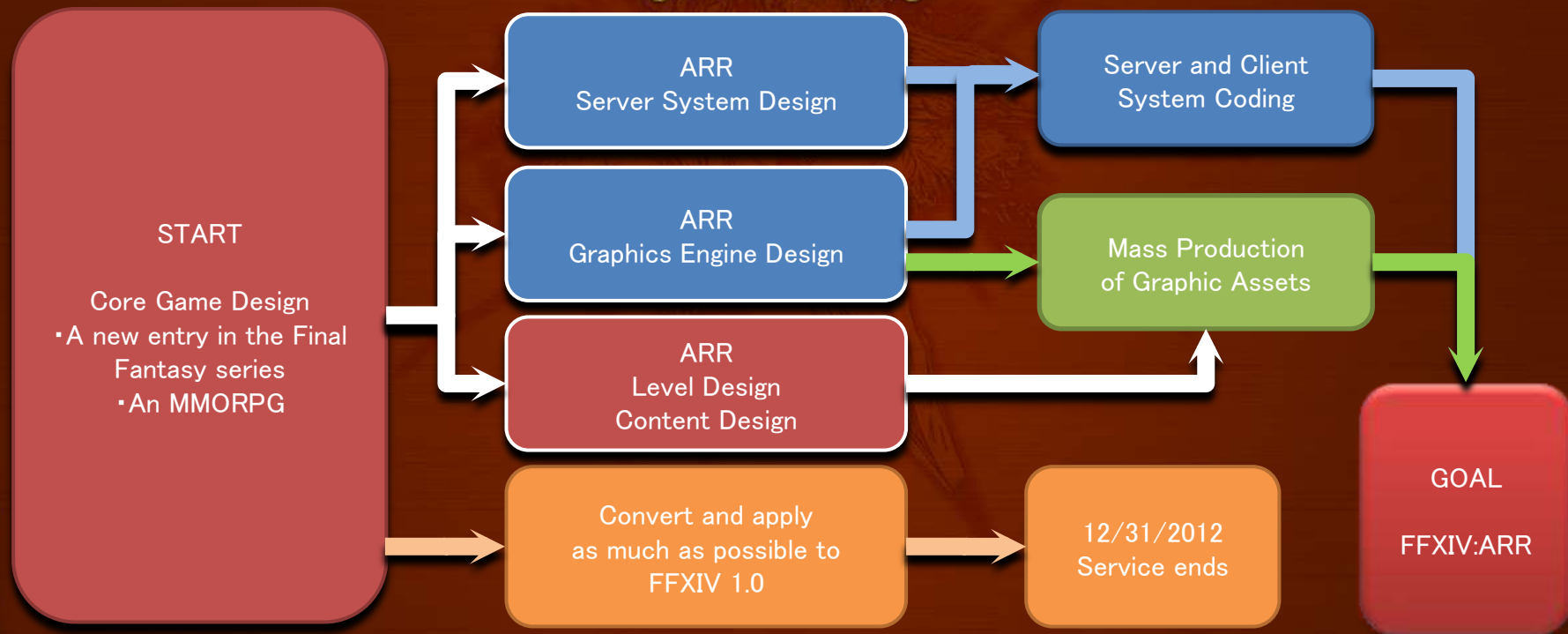
→ Fostering team motivation

Time Spent: 9 mo.

And a Realm is Reborn



And a Realm is Reborn





A Tale of Two XIVs





A Tale of Two XIVs





A Tale of Two XIVs



Free-to-Play vs Subscription

Free-to-Play ~~Subscription~~

The Models Can Co-exist!



- Both have their merits and demerits
- The model chosen should fit the game
- Commitment to either is unnecessary
- The model chosen should meet customer and market needs
- Implementing both is also an option

**Don't let the model dictate
the game!**

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The Future of Large-Scale MMORPG Development

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What is the most important factor in
developing a successful MMORPG?

Ease of Updating



Login server stability. Lobby server stability. Highly customizable character creation. A nearly endless variety of gear options. Intuitive yet information-heavy user interface. Game balance.

A strategic battle system. An engaging class system and character progression. An easy, yet non-mechanical crafting system. Numerous dungeons. Massive public areas. An engine capable of generating stunning graphics. An engaging storyline. An endless number of quest tracks. Public quests available to everyone. Reams of item data. Monthly seasonal events. Expandable, yet precisely balanced PvP content. Fully customizable housing system. High-level raid dungeons. A player matching system. An auction system to support in-game economy. Forums to collect player feedback. 24-hour GM support in all regions. A secure payment system.

And the list goes on...

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

World of Warcraft

Final Fantasy XIV ARR

VS

What MMORPG Developers Must Always Be Asking Themselves:

- ☛ What can other titles do that yours cannot?
- ☛ Do you have enough content?
- ☛ Is anything lacking with the UI?
- ☛ Have you prepared enough rewards for the players?
- ☛ Do you have a long term update plan?

**Innovation begins with
proper planning and design.**

Running an MMORPG is Like Running a Country

Running an MMORPG is Like Running a Country

1. If a dev team is the government, then players are the citizens.
→ If citizens disapprove of your policies, they'll move to Canada



Running an MMORPG is Like Running a Country

2. Clarity, vision, and willingness to listen are keys to success.

→ Without these, the government devolves into a dictatorship



Running an MMORPG is Like Running a Country

3. Learn to listen and adapt. A complaint is worth twice a compliment.

→The silent always leave first.

If citizens are complaining, it means they still care.



Running an MMORPG is Like Running a Country

4. Creators must be players in their own realms.

→ If the leaders don't live there, why would their subjects?



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What We Have Learned



1. Never forget the fans

→ Without them, there would be no 'us'

2. Fun comes first

→ If it isn't fun, you're doing it wrong

3. Never back down

→ Always aim to amaze

4. Don't forget your roots

→ It's what fans crave



Thank You!