COMMUNITY SNOWBALLING IN PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS: FROM PRE-ALPHA TO 20 MILLION AND COUNTING IN EARLY ACCESS

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Introduction

• Sammie Kang a.k.a poopieQueen
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Takeaways

• “How an Unfinished Game With No Marketing Came Out of Nowhere to Dominate the Internet” – May 2, 2017, New York Magazine
• How to create a snowball effect before/after launch
• How to market your indie game with a $0 budget
PUBG Corp.

- Previously Bluehole Ginno Games
- Less than 30 people
- Part of the team that developed <Devilian>
- 10+ years of experience in developing and managing online games
- “Let’s fail fast and learn quickly”
PLAYERUNKNOWN’S BATTLEGROUNDS

• Project BRO
  • 8x8 km / openworld / realistic / serious
  • The first standalone Battle Royale game
• PLAYERUNKNOWN
  • Gave birth to the Battle Royale genre through his mods
  • Joined the PUBG dev team in March 2016
Community Snowballing?
Community Snowballing

• Develop(grow) a close-knit, vibrant tester community

• Make them an insider: Provide exclusive access to tests/resources and share non-disclosable information

• Strengthen relationships and build loyalty: Get them involved in the development process, listen to their feedback, reward them

• Iterate to make the snowball larger
Our Snowballing Strategies

• Engage and work with low, mid-tier streamers
• Seek to grow and expand together
  • Growth of their viewership/communities = Increased visibility & awareness of our game
  • Find ways to help grow their communities
  • Offer exclusive benefits to empower them
Closed Pre-Alpha

- First play test after 4 months of development
  - 8x8 km map / Basic gameplay
  - Under NDA
  - 1,100 registered testers, 600 participated
  - Total of 6 hours in 2 days, 52 games
Closed Pre-Alpha

Calling all testers!

Thank you very much for both the support and interest shown in our announcement of PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS! While we are still at a very early stage of development, we still want to share a lot of what we are working on, and have a strong community of testers to help us in making a good game.

By applying to become a tester, you agree to participate in playtests, and provide feedback about bugs, and issues you find with the game. You will be playing the game in a very early stage of development, so you will be required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement which will be lifted at some time in the future.

We will be sorting your applications over the coming weeks, and we will inform those that have succeeded via email. At this stage we don’t need massive amounts of testers, so the initial group will be limited, so if you don’t make it, you are still on a list and may be invited when we expand the test group in the future.

Key requirements to become a tester are:

- A public Steam account that is at least 1-year-old;
- No VAC/BattleEye bans on your account;
- Windows PC that meets the minimum system requirements listed below.

- OS : 64-bit required, Windows 7, Windows 8.1, Windows 10
- Processor : Intel Core i5 2.0 GHz
- Memory : 4GB RAM
- Graphics Card : GeForce GTX 660 / Radeon R9 270
- DirectX : Version 11
- Network : Broadband Internet Connection
- Storage : 20GB available

Please note that little optimization has been applied to the game and the system requirements will be changed as we move forward.
To Test or Not To Test?
Closed Pre-Alphas: **Key Points**

- To test or not to test?
  - “We are not a AAA developer/publisher” - no pre-launch hype, no marketing resources
- Make it a privilege; Exclusivity is key
- Help testers understand that it’s an early version with plenty of bugs and crashes, as well as some missing features
Alpha 1

• “We need C-130 in PUBS.”
• NDA lifted... Panic mode!
• Longer testing window
• Performance on Twitch
  • 128 Twitch streamers participated
  • Peak CCV: 44k
To Lift or Not To Lift?
Alpha 1: Key Points

• NDA: To lift or not to lift?
  • “Our testers are going to be disappointed”
  • “Will this get our testers to trust our dev team?”
• Reinforce sense of exclusivity: “You are the chosen one”
• Drive up initial interest of potential testers: “I wanna play but I can’t?”
Alpha 2

- 4 weekends (Mid-November - Early December)
- Bigger tester group
  - Identified, invited more testers & streamers
- #5 on Twitch / 800+ streamers participated
Alpha 2: Key Points

• Should you hire an agency or keep thing in-house?
  • The answer is “no”: They want to talk to you, not your PR rep
  • Build relationships that last, at least with core targets
  • Become their true supporter

• Streamers look for new/better content to build their business on
  • Your game could be the new opportunity to grow their business
  • Give all streamers/content creators a chance to leverage your game
Closed Beta

- Reach a larger target market
  - Casual gamers / Top-tier streamers / Variety streamers
  - Cold emails / Twitter / Referrals / Discord key distribution bot
  - Hand out cards at meetups and conventions
- Focus on maximizing Twitch/YouTube coverage during CBT
  - Invited 30K additional testers
  - #2 on Twitch / Peak CCV: 80K
Closed Beta

PLAY BATTLEGROUNDS @PUBATTLEGROUNDS - 12 Mar 2017
At #PAXEast2017? Need a closed beta code? Hit up our booth now to get yours, but be quick as we have limited numbers to hand out!

PLAY BATTLEGROUNDS @PUBATTLEGROUNDS - 11 Mar 2017
All servers are now ONLINE for the 3rd weekend of closed beta testing! We have lots happening all weekend at #PAXEast2017, so stay tuned!
Closed Beta: **Key Points**

- Reward loyal testers and streamers, strengthen relationships
  - Distributed beta keys through Twitch streamers; help them attract new viewers
  - Give loyal fans and streamers exposure (e.g. CBT Highlight Video)
  - Act on their feedback but also acknowledge it to empower them
Early Access

- EA Launch: March 23rd 2017
- “Fastest time to sell a million units on Steam Early Access” - In 16 days
- Launched PUBG Partner program
Early Access: **Key Points**

- Bigger benefits/rewards to true ambassadors
  - Give them bigger exposure (e.g. Early Access ad)
  - In-game graffiti event
  - Access to custom games

- Create events to celebrate and highlight the ambassadors
  - Twitch Charity Inivtational, May 2017
  - PAX East mixer
Other Programs & Activities

- Developer livestreams
- Rewards to all Alpha testers
- Offline community meetups
- “What is it like to be a streamer?”
- “What is it like to be a viewer/fan?”
Recap #1

- Start with a small exclusive community of hand-selected members
- “By invitation only” - Scarcity, exclusivity
- They become genuine ambassadors for your game
Recap #2

• Give them exclusive content, insider information and benefits that help them feel they are part of a special community
  • One of those “in the know”
  • Allow them to shape your game
  • “How will they gain from being part of this community?”
• In-game badges / activity point program / multi-tiered reward program
Recap #3

- Content creators/streamers and Twitch should be a part of your marketing plan but they are not marketing tools
  - Understand their business, they are your business partners
  - Start small
Recap #4

• Directly talk to your players, connect with your most loyal fans/testers
• Foster a greater level of intimacy
• Directly communicate how their input is actually being put to work
• Not ready to scale fast / maintaining the level of transparency and frequency of communication