



Focus on the Future

Guest Predictions: Studio Cypher

Guest Predictions is a regular feature in which we ask leaders in a number of professions questions that affect us all.

Started in 2003, Studio Cypher is operated by three young friends from Bloomington, Indiana: Ian Pottmeyer, Nathan Mishler, and Will Emigh. The Studio Cypher team is well versed in both the hardware and software aspects of creating a memorable gaming experience. They design and implement Internet connected terminals for games and educational experiences that start on the client's show floor and extend into the internet where a worldwide audience can take part in the experience. They also devise specialty hardware access, such as multi-touch screens or infrared motion sensors.

Q: What changes in your professional environment in the past 3-5 years have you found to be the most beneficial?

A: Until recently, the video game industry was dominated by large publishing houses with thousands of employees and multiple locations. In more recent years, online digital distribution of games has bypassed brick and mortar stores. This makes it possible for small teams to make killer games and find a paying audience for them. The proliferation of high-speed Internet and social networks like Facebook has also allowed computer games to become more social.

Q: What changes have been the most troubling to you?

A: The rise of portal or aggregator sites for smaller games has recreated the studio dynamic on a smaller scale. These aggregator sites push prices down by offering free-to-play games supported by ads, which are only feasible on a large scale.

Q: How will globalization (e.g. the emergence of new global powers, such as China and India) affect your professional area in the near term?

A: In the near term, China's recent trend of strict regulation of online gaming – and online censorship for its citizens – is creating a very interesting situation for online game creators. It is now a hard market to get into, while their products freely flow into the west. Asian gamers also tend to pay for games with a micro transaction model where they buy small in-game items for low prices but don't pay to play. This is slowly becoming a more popular model as Asian games become available in the rest of the world.

Q: What significant challenges might be anticipated in your professional area in the next few years?

A: The face of internet gaming is undergoing significant change in terms of usage and payment strategies. In the past, the market was dominated by games run by a monthly payment but now it is becoming saturated by free-to-play games that give additional perks for pay. Soon customers are going to expect most games be structured that way.

Q: What are the greatest challenges confronting young professionals in Western culture today?

A: Externally, the greatest challenge for young professionals is the increasing globalization in many industries. If a potential client can hire a cheap programmer out of India, young Western professionals can no longer compete on cost. This makes it doubly important for them to figure out early on what differentiates them.

Internally, young professionals need to realize that technology is moving back towards a communal, social space. People no longer just use computers to work on documents or spreadsheets in isolation; computers are used as a connection tool. The sooner that professionals look at the human aspect of a technology, the better off they'll be.