

President's Letter

by Andrew Welch

haven't been doing "serious coding" for several months now, and often people ask me "What exactly *do* you do, then?" As Ambrosia has been getting bigger in terms of the number of projects we're working on, the number of developers we work with, etc., someone has had to manage it all. That someone is me.

My role has been moving towards "producer" and away from "programmer" of late. What exactly does this entail? Read on...

But first, I'd like to interject a side note quickly. I've been itching to get back into working on a real programming project, something that I'll be bringing to fruition soon. Most of what I have been working on in terms of programming over the past months has been supporting tools for our programmers, as well as debugging products. The low-level experience I have (read: many days of torture) allows me to drop into MacsBug, and do a decent job finding sticky problems. On the tool side of the fence, Ambrosia has created a number of well-documented tools for things like sounds, graphics, registration, networking, etc. that serve as building blocks for the product we create. These two aspects of my job are interesting, but I have the desire to work on a "full project" again. And soon.

Now then, when I am wearing my producer hat, I take on a role that is analogous to what a movie producer does (albeit with not as much fame, money, or as many women... hmmm... I need to think about this for a bit, I think :). The first thing that happens when we are looking at working with a developer on a product is we evaluate it. Yes folks, that means in the case of a game, I get to play it. It sounds odd to say, but my experience playing and writing games gives me some ability to recognize games that I feel have potential; often this isn't as easy as it might sound, because we look at products when they are still quite rough.

Assuming we decide the game has potential, the next step involves negotiation and contract-signing with the author, getting them familiar with how we do things here, and providing them with our development tools (and the inevitable questions/support that this entails). I then begin negotiations with a number of artists and

musicians that we work with in order to get the ball rolling on those fronts. Throughout the development of the game, I often act as an intermediary, coordinating the work of the artists, musicians, and developers, and making sure we're all moving ahead full-steam.

As the product progresses, there are a number of peripheral tasks that must be accomplished, such as setting up a web site for the product (for instance), creating the beta testing mailing list and acquiring testers for the product, projecting release dates based on the state of the product and the experience of the developer, and deciding what information to give out on the product, and when. Jason handles our marketing, and David handles our technical support, but both work with me to coordinate what they are working on, such as ads, documentation, etc.

The largest chunk of time, however, is spent actually evaluating the product, suggesting features/gameplay ideas, and keeping the project on-track. Yes, I play games for a living, to an extent, but it goes much further than that. The number of hours that I have logged playing Cythera, for instance, and logging suggestions/bugs/ideas for the developer is rather staggering, and necessary, because it's impossible to ask a developer to work in a vacuum.

One aspect of the work that I find extremely enjoyable is playing Foley artist; that is, creating sounds for our games. One day I brought in a number of vegetables from our local grocery, a mop handle, a bucket of water, and other various sundry items. I then shut my door, and began swinging the mop handle around like a madman to record the sound of a sword swing for Cythera. Even better, when working on sounds for Bubble Trouble, I was screaming, yelling, and making all sorts of crazy sounds (yes, Virginia, I am the voice of Binky). A bank representative happened to come in during the middle of my "performance" and was rather amused.

Of course, on top of all of this, I play "businessman" and make the decisions about less interesting things (such as the purchase of our new servers, setting them up, mirror sites, colocation, blah blah blah). Hopefully the attention we pay to our products is evident in the final result. That's the idea,

anyway.

Executive summary: Help me, I've become a pencil pusher!

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