



September 8, 2014

Agenda:

- Article of the Week – *“Do Something With Your Ideas To Get More of Them”*
 - <http://www.hobbygamedev.com/int/do-something-with-your-ideas/>
- Project Lead Applications
- Game Design Documents
 - GDD on Aurora website
 - Examples on Aurora website
- Unreal Engine 4
- Dues
 - Dues are due by Sept.
 - \$30/ Semester // \$50/Year
- Reminders
 - GA Fall Game Jam is Sept.
 - SIEGECON 2014

Do Something With Your Ideas To Get More of Them By: Chris DeLeon

It Takes Work

Creativity is rarely like tuning into a radio station to find finished music hidden in the air, just waiting to be picked up and played. It takes a ton of trial and error, at various layers of the work, to find something appropriately at the intersection of what you're currently prepared and positioned make, what you actually want to work on (a critically important consideration if this is not your job), and what other people want to play.

Ideas are buried layers deep, not just underneath other ideas but behind locked doorways, the keys to which can only be uncovered by exploring what's already tying up attention. The first ideas are always rough, the first iterations are always rough, but the solution is no more to simply iterate further on the first ideas than it is to simply accept the first iteration of a later idea. Getting to the really good stuff involves digging deep on both.

Surface Ideas are Shallow Ideas

Thoughts on the surface are almost always junk, a reflection of current popular media and recent global events that millions of other people are already thinking the same things about. While there are upsides to being topical, for the most part the people capitalizing on those moments and topics were the ones who were already working on them before they became relevant, and got somewhat lucky when the winds of change turned public attention their direction.

How to Get Better Ideas

How can someone get better ideas? The most reliable and universal way to do so is to do something with the current set of ideas.

At the very least *write your current ideas down – not to remember them because they're so valuable, but to get them out of your limited attentional loop so that you're free to move past them* on to the next thoughts without worrying about what you're going to lose. Maybe you'll come back to the jotted thoughts, 99% of the time you won't, but if it's not at least written down it can clog the front of your imagination for the better part of a decade.

Carry a notepad and a pen. Ideas can happen anywhere. It's important to be ready to get them down to move past them to the thoughts that follow. This avoids that easy trap of trying to remember a thought from earlier, later fooling ourselves when we can't recall it into thinking it must have been a great one. Writing it down helps make clear to our future self: nope, not there yet, keep digging.

Try the Shoe On

If you feel like there's something there more than just a fleeting thought, take it a step further. Make a Photoshop mock-up of it. Get down a bulleted list of what your surrounding thoughts are around it. While your headspace is still fixated on it, journal the context it's in. We can't wait until we get back home from a trip to take photos of the journey, it's got to be documented while we're there; while your mind is still at a particular conceptual place, take the moment to capture it.

Even better though, if it makes sense to do so: do something with it. Prototype it. Try making a version that works as a proof-of-concept, to convince yourself first and foremost more so than to convince anyone else. If you don't already have a good setup for prototyping – even if you're well set up for full-size projects – it's worth figuring out a lighter weight development environment or work process (like a lightweight template with core functionality pulled from the simplest of your recent projects to clone as a starting point) to have a way to do something with small seed ideas as they come up.

Even Outside the Idea Phase

Not having an outlet can even become a problem when you're well out of the ideation phase, into mid-development on a medium or large project. Without a good outlet for ideas to be put down or prototyped apart from the main project, they can wind up shoehorned into places they don't belong, forced into projects where they don't make any sense and serve only to distract from what a game's about. In game design as in many design fields ideas aren't so often good or bad in isolation as much as they do or don't work well together, and what might be a great idea for application in a different kind of game may detract from the sort of game you're currently making. Focus matters, and when a game comes out focused it isn't because the developers just happened to never think of anything else interesting, it's because those other thoughts were allowed to vent, perhaps documented, but then acknowledged as irrelevant and moved past.

Don't Horde Secrets

Talking about ideas with others can help develop them. Even more often, it can expose problems and issues in the seams. If nothing else, it's another variation of the "jot it down to move past it" tip emphasized above: getting it out of ourselves, even if only verbally, is often enough to free us from getting stuck on it.

The main reason to be careful about information is to manage outside expectations – if you're not certain you'll be able to figure out and fit in multiplayer mode, don't go around trumpeting that you're going to have a multiplayer mode. That's not about having a secret or big idea though, that's just a matter of your mouth not writing checks your fingertips and schedule can't cash.

Most other people capable of doing anything worthwhile with ideas have no shortage of their own that they're trying to juggle, and aren't very likely to be interested in implementing yours. The devil's generally in how the details get figured out in any given implementation, anyhow.

Move Past Ideas to Get More Ideas

Write it down, mock it up, prototype it, or at least talk through it, not with the goal of capitalizing on it as-is but instead with the goal of getting further down the road it leads down. As more ideas pop into the place of old ones that have been externalized, some new ones may fit naturally together with earlier fragments, some may illustrate issues with the previously promising thoughts, some may point in other new directions.

Buried among the larger set of explored ideas will inevitably be some starting points and combinations that are better than others. It's just the [Photographer's Algorithm](#), however instead of being applied to level designs, rapid prototypes, or wedding photos, it's applied here to thoughts. Being able to curate necessitates having a large enough collection to meaningfully exclude a majority while leaving a coherent set, and

accumulating a large collection of decently original thoughts means keeping them flowing.

Keep doing things with thoughts to keep getting more of them.