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Marketing in indie game companies

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Tiivistelmä

Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli analysoida ja kehittää parannuksia nyt käytössä oleviin markkinointimenetelmiin ja monetisaatioon pelialalla. Kattava kokonaisnäkemys pelialasta saavutettiin tutustumalla alan toimintamalleihin, tutkimalla aikaisempia tutkimuksia ja analysoimalla pelialan nykyisiä käytäntöjä.

Tutkimusvaiheessa haastateltiin useita pelialan vaikuttajia ja liiketoiminnan osaajia. Tutkimusvaiheessa tutustuttiin myös aikaisempiin tutkimuksiin aiheesta ja tutkittiin Kuura Playhouse Oy:n keräämää tietoa asiakkaistaan. Tärkeää pohjatietoa alasta hankittiin osallistumalla pelialan konferenssiin Pocket Gamer Connects Helsinki 2017 sekä Slush 2017 tapahtumaan. Tapahtumat keräävät yhteen alan osaajat ympärimaailman ja antaa kattavan kuvan pelialan tilasta.

Taustatutkimuksen perusteella voitiin havaita useita tapoja kehittää yrityksen mahdollisuuksia menestyä markkinoinnin ja monetisaation avulla pelialalla. Indie peliyritykset ovat varovaisia laittamaan rahaa markkinointiin. Havaittavissa on myös, etteivät yritykset tee tarvittavan kattavaa tutkimusta markkinoinnista johon ovat tähtäämässä.

Avainsanat
Markkinointi, indie, peliyritys, monetisaatio, lokalisaatio, start-up, pelitoimiala

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Abstract
My goal in this thesis was to give new insights and improvements to current marketing and monetisation schemes of the game industry. I achieved my goals by researching and analysing the current markets in the industry. At the research stage, I interviewed many people with game industry and business backgrounds. I also looked at past research on the subject and investigated Kuura Playhouse Oy data. I went to a conference (Pocket gamer connect, Helsinki 2017) and gathered information there too by listening to the speakers and by interviewing them. Then I analysed the data I got from the research and made appropriate charts and calculations based on them. I also refined and reported the data in the more understandable format by calculating. Then I published my data results and started to think of some new ways to market and monetise. I got the result that there are still multiple things a company can do to improve its success through marketing and monetisation of the games. Indie companies are either too weary and scared to invest much money in marketing, and they do not do appropriate research on the market they are aiming at.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAC	Customer Acquisition Cost
LTV	Lifetime Value
FFF	Friends, Fools, Family
DLC	Downloadable content
DAU	Daily Active Users
ARPDAU	Average Revenue Per Daily Active User
DARPU	Daily Average Revenue Per User
CPI	Cost Per Install
CTR	Click-through rate
PPDS	Productivity per dollar spent
CR	Conversion rate
Beta tester	Second phase software tester
WAU	Weekly Active Users
DS	Daily Sessions
TPT	Total Play Time
LOP	Life of Product
KPI	Key performance indicators
ROI	Return On Investment
PTP	Person To Person
iOS	Operating system for mobile devices by Apple
CAP	Customer Affinity Preference
Gdpr	General Data Protection Regulation

1   INTRODUCTION

Kuura Playhouse Oy (later referred as Kuura) is a company founded in 2017 by Marko Haaja. Kuura is currently developing mobile games for android mobile devices. The first game Kuura is developing is developed using Unity and is planned to be released in January 2018. The author oversees the marketing, monetisation and the future release of the game. Kuura attended the events Slush 2017 and Pocket Gamer Connects 2017.

The thesis is conducted so Kuura will get more information how to approach the markets with their game. It is also conducted to show the current market trends and strategies used in game industry.

The goal of the thesis was to research and analyse games and specifically mobile game marketing strategies. This was conducted by gathering information from the market and by applying the author's knowledge of the subject. The author gathered the knowledge through attending the events mentioned before and by researching online. Kuura got accepted and attended a local accelerator program named Levelup Startup Accelerator.

The game industry has multiple ways to monetise products of companies. The inspection of monetisation options was conducted to figure out the most efficient and profitable way to collect revenue. Designing of new ways to monetise games and specifically mobile games were conducted to improve Kuura's games success rate on the highly competitive market.

The thesis will also work as a base study of markets and monetisation for future indie game companies, for them to get the most money for a minimal marketing budget.

2 RESEARCH

The game market of $108.9 billion is divided into three major industries, mobile, console and Pc from which 42% is from mobile games (McDonald 2017). This is important for Kuura because Kuura develops and self-publishes mobile games on Android devices. This means that Kuura has tapped into a $45,7 billion market. From the 2.2 billion gamers roughly 50% are mobile gamers (McDonald 2017). This will bring a stable player base and comparison with other industries game market is the most significant entertainment market (McDonald 2017). Figure 1, Game market forecast chart based on data from McDonald's website shows how the market has grown in the past years and predicts how it grows.

2016-2020 Global games market

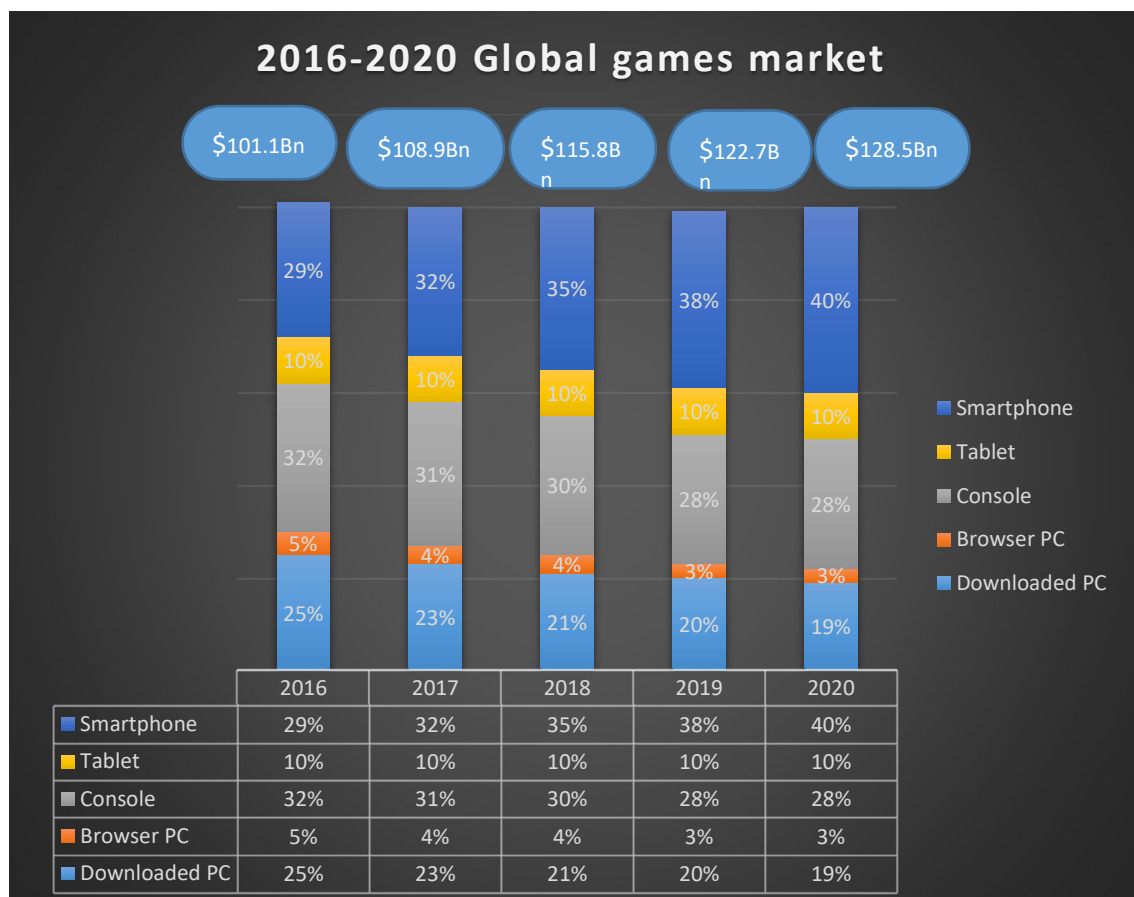|	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Smartphone	29%	32%	35%	38%	40%
Tablet	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Console	32%	31%	30%	28%	28%
Browser PC	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%
Downloaded PC	25%	23%	21%	20%	19%

Figure 1, Game market forecast chart based on data from McDonald's website.

Mobile games gave the possibility for new unique monetisation ways that weren't visible in other gaming platforms. Mobile games are also quicker and easier to release than in the other platforms which also means it is the most competitive market due to the number of developers developing games.

2.1 Levelup startup accelerator

At the research stage, Kuura attended a local accelerator program called Levelup start-up accelerator. The goal of the accelerator was to give the knowledge how to make a successful start-up. The accelerator also offered lectures and introduced Kuura for people in the field of marketing and game development.

The Levelup program gave Kuura a chance to talk to Anna Einola who is currently working at NitroID and her profession is a futurist. She told that social media is the leading marketing channel for game businesses because of the age of the players. Players also seek for information about the indie developers lives to relate to them more. She told that giving the "companies are human" vision to the gamers is essential since the small and local company boom is on. This information got from her was important to create a stable, loyal customer base.

Through the program (Levelup) Kuura talked with Antti Villanen who is currently working at Nitro Games as a founder and executive chairman of the board. He answered a question about his thought about the most important things to remember in video game marketing. He told a story of his first game in Nitro games, which was the game called East India Company. What they discovered after the launch of the game was that they had a massive fan base in the gay community, which they could not explain by any analysis why this was the case. They were also featured in a gay magazine. If a company analyses the market thoroughly, the company still cannot predict 100% which people the game of the company appeals. Then he answered what is in his opinion an essential marketing channel now. He answers that in his opinion it is influencer marketing. Watching another person playing the company's game will make the customer more excited about the game. This is important knowledge for Kuura to analyse

the possible customer base realistically and to be ready for rapid market changes.

Kuura attended sales training in Helsinki that was organised by Troy Woodson who is the sales and pitching mentor at xEdu. He is also the managing partner at CBW global Oy. The author talked with Troy about Finnish marketing and selling strategies. He explained that Finnish people are so good at marketing that they have had 100% market penetration by marketing the fact that Finnish people are awful at marketing. He told that the problem with Finnish companies is that they either aim too low or too high. He told that a lot of Finnish entrepreneurs are trying to push their product for the whole world and ignoring the fact that a company must penetrate the market first in the home country of the company. Information about this is important for Kuura so that Kuura does not penetrate too big of a market. By doing that Kuura could compromise the first impact advantage.

2.2   Doctor James TerKeurst, Southampton Solent University

Dr James TerKeurst is a Course leader in computer games at Southampton Solent University. He has a PhD in Mass Communications at the University of Iowa. Dr TerKeurst told at his lecture that electronic gaming is a fast-growing global business, and one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Also, to be a pervasive component of global culture, the electronic game industry is a dominant financial force in the UK. This justifies the size of Kuura's market share.

During Dr TerKeursts course the author practised pitching about imaginary game company to investors and customers. Pitching is an important skill to master for game companies, who are looking for funding their project/company and attracting customers.

2.3   Pocket Gamer Connects, Helsinki 2017

The event Pocket Gamer Connects was important for this research so Kuura could attend the speaker's lectures who have worked in the industry and moreover at marketing for multiple years.

At the Jussi Tähtinen from Nitro Games lecture "Turning a mobile game from highway to hell into stairway to heaven", Tähtinen talked about the importance of early analyse the market. By doing an early analysis, the company can better develop their game to fit the customers' needs and desires. Tähtinen also stated that the user would play the game for 60 seconds before deciding to continue. The company can make the player stay on the game more longer by giving the user something the user expects, for instance, a tutorial that guides the user for the game mechanics. Moreover, something that the user does not expect, like a new niche feature that the user has not experienced before. Also, if the user only witnesses new features the user will get bored, and the user will not stay longer than 60 seconds. Tähtinen also told that the marketing costs of mobile games are growing every day. He also pressured the importance of market potential measurement from the launch date of the game. The market potential measurement is calculated by measuring the potential customer base, Daily Active Users(DAU), Average Revenue Per Daily Active User (ARPDAU) and Daily Average Revenue Per User (DARPU). Market potential measurement gives the company the information it can use to evaluate the potential of the game and if the company should put more money into marketing of the game. Tähtinen also pointed out that a game should have a good metagame to keep the users active from start to end.

At the lecture "Building brands over time" by Petri Järvilehto, Järvilehto pointed that company should invest money in marketing of a game world rather than in a game as a product. By this, he meant that by marketing and advertising companies product as a bigger game world company can give the users more interesting background. This also opens the possibility to market using a game character that appeals to the users, which lowers the marketing costs. A Finnish game company named Rovio developed a game called Angry Birds and in the

game, there were characters that all people knew. Järvilehto also told that if a company invests more time than money in social media marketing and content they will get more loyal customers. Järvilehto meant by this that users are more appealed to a company that appears funny and open. Järvilehto also told a story when they bought billboards next to the road in the United States of America. Järvilehto told that the Cost Per Install(CPI) was the smallest of all the other marketing methods they used. Järvilehto stated that guerrilla marketing and influencer marketing would have more impact on modern gamers than other marketing methods.

Eric Seufert from N3twork told on his lecture on "The three stages of game marketing lifecycle", that smartphone users spend half of their time on their favourite app. For a company, this will be problematic because as Seufert continued smartphone users spend around one hour each day on their apps.This is problematic because if the company's product is not the user's number 1 app, it means that company will be competing of 30 minutes a daytime with other apps. Seufert also showed a graph like be seen in Figure 2, Mobile UA based on Eric Seufert presentationthat shows that the most users in mobile are categorised under hyper-casual, and the most revenue is generated on casino mobile games. This data shows that if a company wants to appeal to the most people that generate the most revenue, the company should develop games to be hybrid-casual or combine two categories into one. For example, hyper-casual casino

game could potentially have quite a good audience with good a monetisation status.
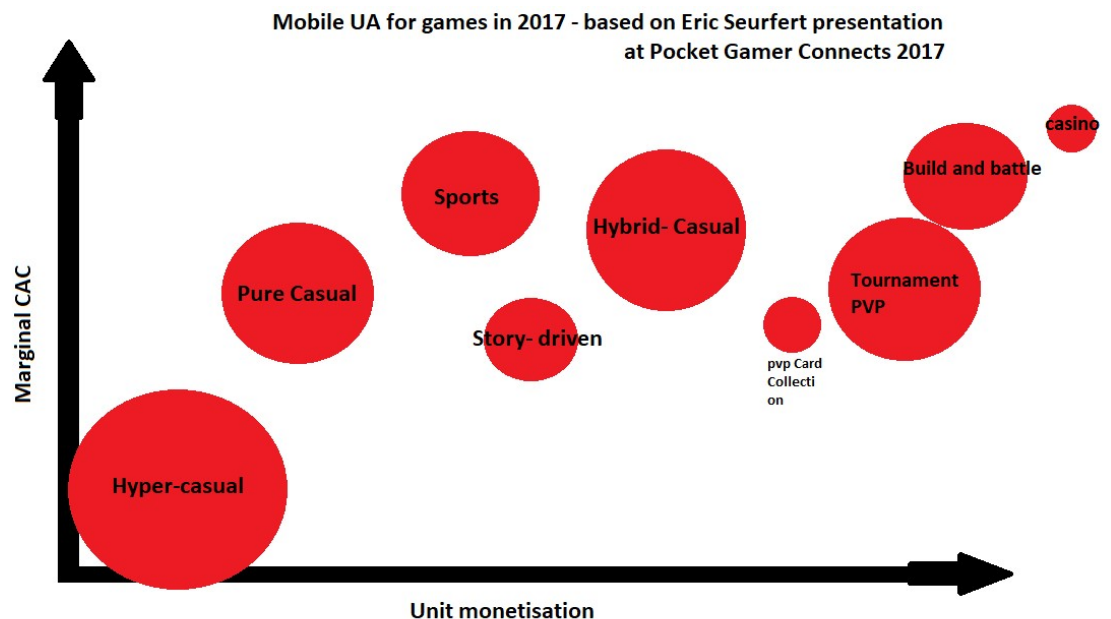

Figure 2, Mobile UA based on Eric Seufert presentation.

Seufert also categorised life cycle of mobile games into three categories; Honeymoon stage, growth stage and strategy stage. Seufert described the honeymoon stage so that it is the stage with the highest Click-through rate (CTR). This means that users will click the add more often because it is new. Seufert advised Kuura to market only in the top tier channels for maximising Productivity per dollar spent (PPDS). Seufert then described the growth stage to be the stage when the company's games have reached their maximum possible profitable volume. Seufert meant with that that the games UA should have now reached the stage it will begin to be automatic. The Growth stage is the stage where the company should not spend any more money on new users and focus on improving Conversion rate (CR). The final stage Seufert mentioned to be the strategy stage where marketers should only invest in influencer marketing and guerrilla marketing for new users. At the strategy stage, new users are not responding anymore to direct marketing.

2.4 Marketing strategies in game companies

Marketing can be roughly divided into two categories. Old school and new school marketing. Old school marketing was the older version of marketing, and it was left on the back after the release of the new school ideas. Both marketing tools are still in use and can be mixed as the company wishes.

There are clear trends that apply to current game markets. These are easily discovered by playing and looking at the selling platform's regular base. These trends change more quickly than in other entertainment markets, such as the movie industry. These quick changes force the company to investigate the markets daily and apply quick changes to their products.

2.4.1 Marketing trends by platform

The game industry can be roughly divided into three sectors:
- Mobile industry
- Console industry
- PC industry

Mobile industry

In the mobile industry, the current trends are decided by the top grossing games, top rated games and top-selling games. People usually download the top listed games and only the people who play mobile games regularly, download from further down off the list. People also tend to download games that have a similar icon to the ones found on the top 10 lists of each category. Some people in the industry call this the "yelling man" effect. The name comes from the game Clash of Clans that was a huge success in the mobile game industry back in 2012 (Slide to Play 2017). After the game hit the top spot and stayed there, developers started to imitate the icon for downloads (Figure 3, Play Store top crossing screenshot from 25.11.2017)(Figure 4, App store screenshot Top grossing 25.11.2017). Also, there is the phenomenon in Apple App store called "app developers jackpot" which is the featuring on their opening page. The featuring means that the companies' games will be on the front page of the App store for a specific period defined by Apple (Figure 5, App store screenshot of feature

25.11.2017). Getting featured guarantees high visibility for the games, which will generate revenue for the companies.
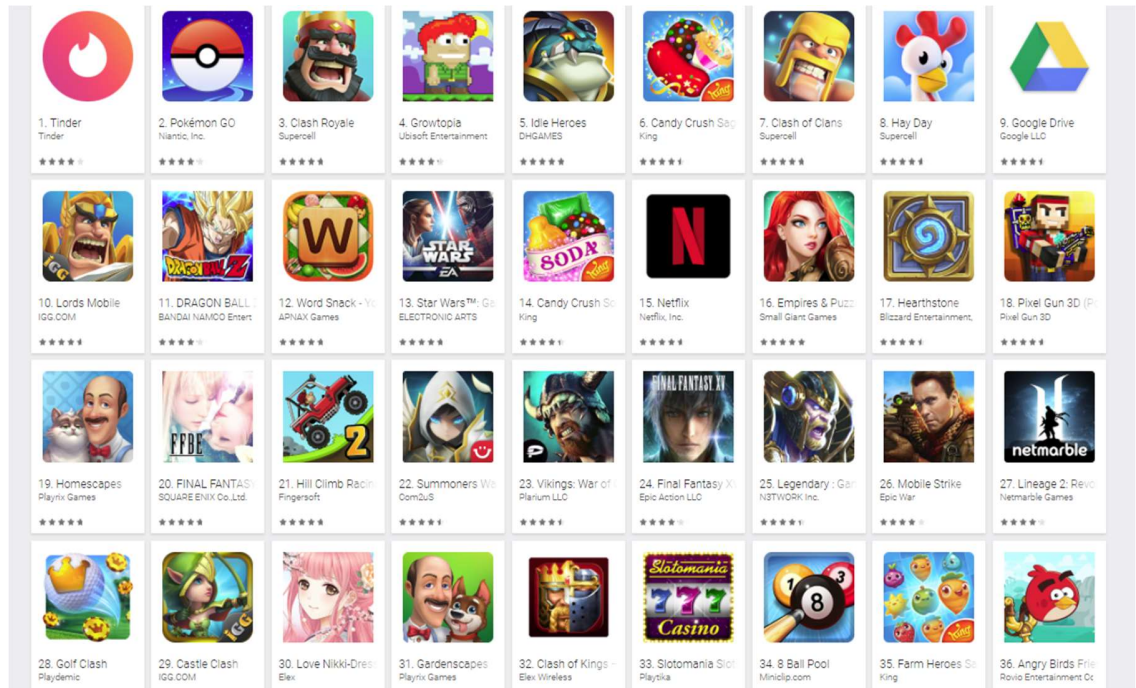

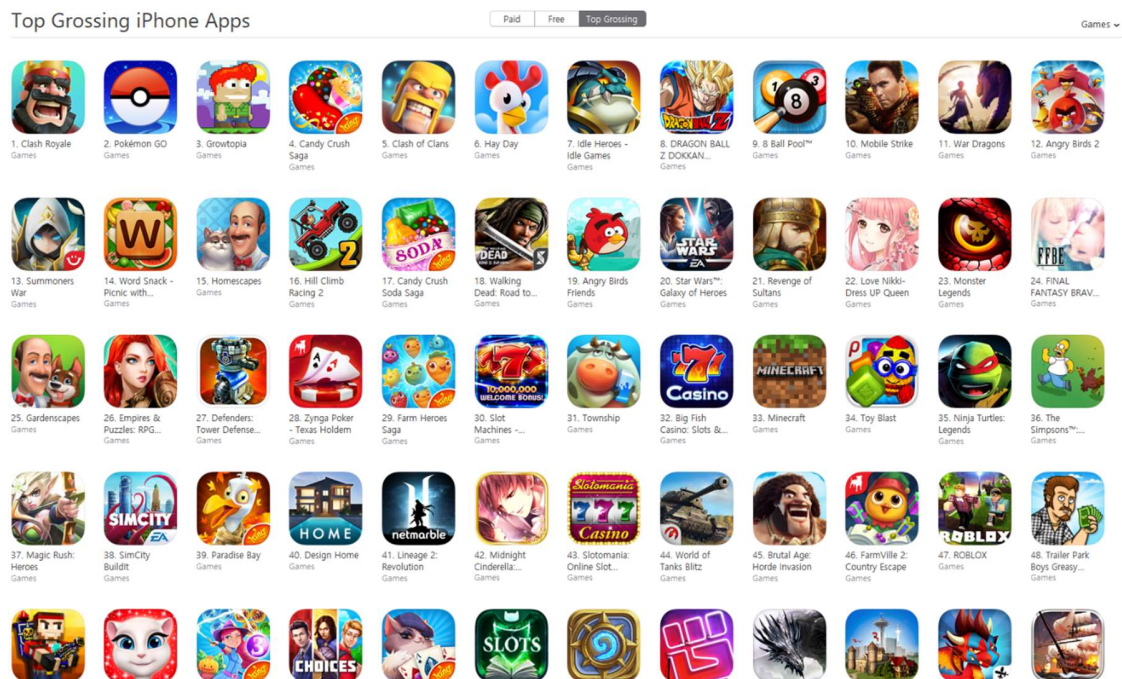Figure 3, Play Store top crossing screenshot from 25.11.2017.

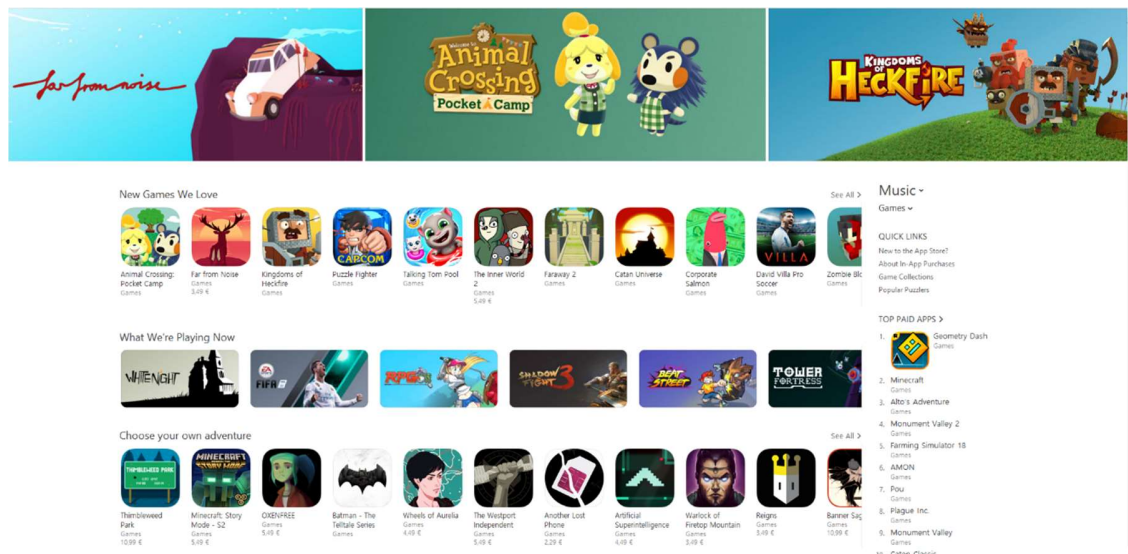Figure 4, App store screenshot Top grossing 25.11.2017.

Figure 5, App store screenshot of feature 25.11.2017.

The top 10 products on both distribution platforms are bound up with the big mobile game companies like Supercell. Moreover, the position changes for newly published games from top 20-100 is quite slow. So, there is a high chance that the games will never end up on top 100 list. There are 3,169,511 active apps currently in appstore (Pocketgamer.biz 2017), and the top 10 revenue games generate 70% of the mobile game market (Pocket gamer connects 2017 2017).

Console

The console market is entirely different from the mobile and pc markets. It is quite rare to see indie studio games in the console market. The reason for this is that the costs of publishing and marketing a game for consoles are high. Also, the console games are dominated by the "game giants" like EA studios and Ubisoft, as can be seen in Figure 6, Xbox one Top Paid Games 25.11.2017 and Figure 7, PlayStation 4 Most sold games 25.11.2017.

Figure 6, Xbox one Top Paid Games 25.11.2017.

Figure 7, PlayStation 4 Most sold games 25.11.2017.

Console and PC games also highly rely on Downloadable Content(DLC). Early stages of DLC were to create more game content for players after finishing the product. DLC in the modern day gives the company a possibility to release games early and add content to games for payment from the users. DLC has proven to be an effective way to collect revenue on the console, for example, EA studios sold $1.2 billion worth of DLC in 2016 (Forbes 2017). Through DLC also came the season pass concept. The season pass gives the user all the future DLC that the developer is planning to release for the price of the season pass. This has been debated because the user invests in the season pass without even knowing if there is going to be DLC released to the game (Develop-online 2017).

The company can take advantage of a season pass to self-crowd fund companies games.

PC

In Pc, the most significant platform on which indie games are published on Pc is Steam from Valve. Steam is a distribution system, but what makes it unique is the greenlight system where developers publish their game and the community votes for it to come on Steam or not (Figure 8, Steam Greenlight 25.11.201).
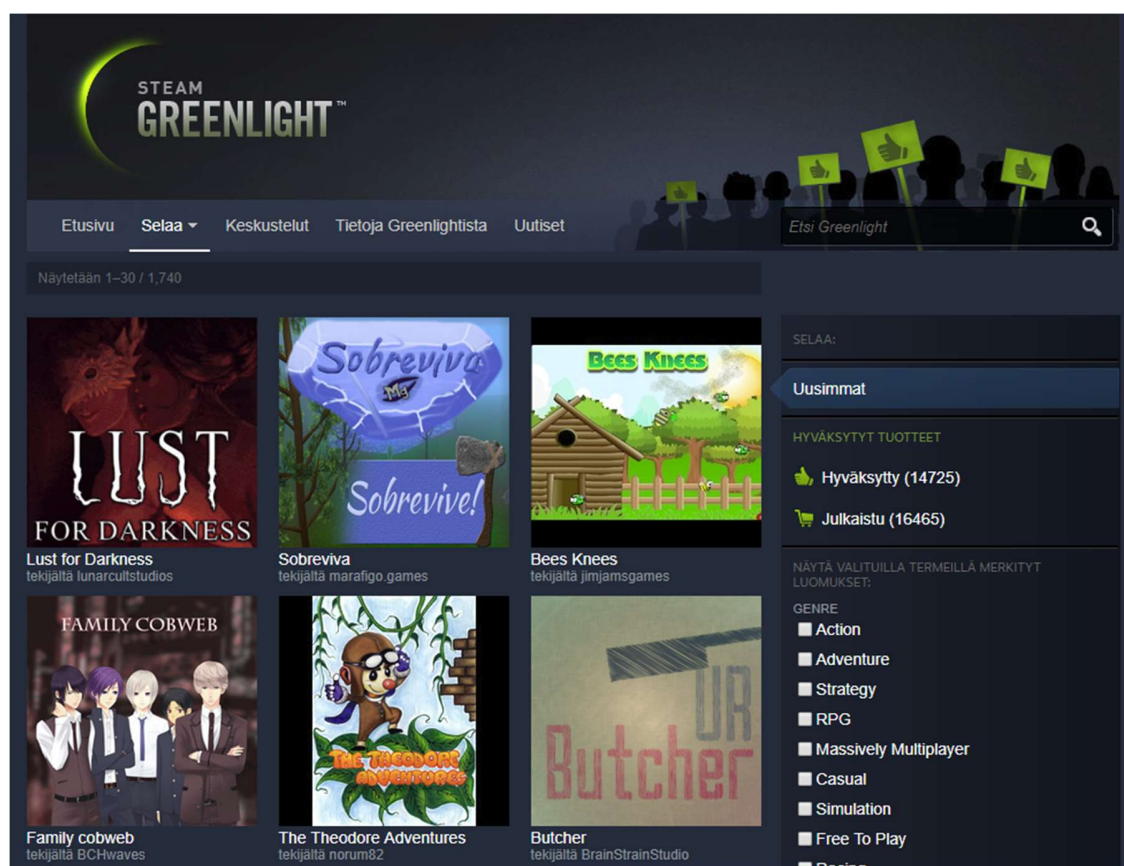

Figure 8, Steam Greenlight 25.11.2017.

Steam also has various promotions for new games that frequently have indie games on display. It also has the "indie" tag so people who want to support indie studios can do so (Figure 9, Steam indie tag 25.11.2017).
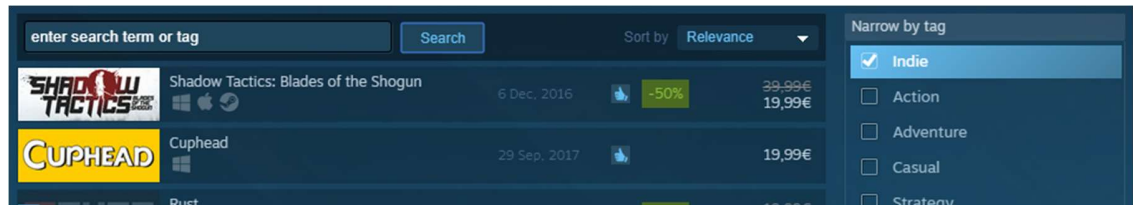

Figure 9, Steam indie tag 25.11.2017.

Pre-order is one monetisation method used in the PC market. The user pre-orders and pays the game before the release for a discount price. This is a highly debated subject because the user buys the product usually without knowing if the game works (Kotaku 2017). The company could, for example, take the money and deliver a broken product.

2.4.2 Old school marketing

Four Ps of marketing represents product, price, place and promotion. It is considered as an outdated strategy (the Six C overtook its place) (Investopedia Staff 2017). The Product part stands for the item or service that the company is producing. The product should ideally be something that will fill, or fix customers' need in their current situation. Regarding games, it can be something that will fix the current gap in the market. The product is the core structure of the company. Price is the price of the product. It should be something that fits the product's quality, and customer's need. Lower price gives more traction but might return lower revenue. For the game industry, there are multiple ways to price the companies' product. In the game industry, there are also professionals who only train to monetise and price company's games or services inside the game. The place stands for the location, but these days it can be transferred to the fact how the company sells their product (apple store, android market). It can also refer to the places where the company markets their product, for instance, a billboard, video advertisements inside other games or banner ads. Promotion is fundamental to all companies. The company has to maintain a certain image to appeal to the customers; this image is gained by a company promoting

themselves. In games, it is showing what makes the company stand out from the crowd, or as the saying, "What is your company's secret sauce?". Environmental awareness and preservation have also impact on game companies' image. For instance, if a company develops a multiplayer game and uses green electricity to power the servers, this will give customers a positive image.

Flyer handout

The company will design flyers to market themselves or their product. Flyer handout is still used in the restaurant business; however, this can be implemented an a game company.

A game company can use this to promote their game tournament or to hand out game download codes at the festival. This will provide the possible users with the image that the company is there with the people who have a positive impact. For a smaller game company, this is a cost-efficient way to gather beta testers.

Outbound marketing

Outbound marketing is marketing where the company goes out of their way trying to connect people. They can do this, for example by calling people and selling their product to them.

A game company can attend gaming events and conferences to attract more attention. The company can find investors from the gaming conferences more efficiently. If the company who is developing a similar game as something that has previously been validated as profitable, company should attend a festival that attracts already users that are interested in that style of games (board game to board game fans for example).

Direct mail

Direct mail marketing is commonly used in car industry by sending mail to former car owners to upgrade their car. This has a high Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) and CPI, so it is not profitable for the game company.

The game company could hold an event for their game launch where they invite media and local prestige people. This event could give them more media and viral visibility. This is also a risk for the company because forceful media attention in a high media freedom country like Finland could reflect the opposite reaction the company is looking for.

Custom Flags

Custom flags are often used by the big corporations in gaming and on other markets. A company orders a custom flag for their company to promote its visibility locally.

An indie company could promote their games by investing in small company flags. If an indie company could place these flags at a festival area or at their game event that somehow reflects the theme of the game. It also stands as a positive status symbol in the local area.

Ribbon cutting ceremony

Ribbon cutting marketing strategy is not that common in Finland but could be adapted to a game release ceremony or for another indie company's office opening party.

An indie company could volunteer to open a new indie company by validating the other indie companies' game idea. This would give the company most likely positive advertisement. The company could also offer to be a mentor and invite influencing game people to the indie game opening ceremony for the just started game company for a small equity share.

Promotional products

A promotional products are still used as corporate presents, but they are also heavily used with premium games on Pc and consoles as either early access rewards or deluxe versions of the game. They are usually used as a statue of a game character or something else from the game. However, this could also be used as highly localised marketing. If the company made small game characters

with the download code of the game on it, it could give to the game and the company a lot of positive visibility.

An indie company should also acquire company merchandise as a corporate gift for investors and loyal supporters. This way the company can give something to make the receiving party remember the company. Business cards are also a cheap and efficient way to promote the company.

2.4.3 New school marketing

Here is an example marketing plan for the company. The company designs a game and identifies its exact market genre. The company then should research market for their product viability. The company should then go to other similar game forums and Facebook pages and tell there of the games vision. The company should then lure people to follow the company social media page and newsletter. The company then should engage with the possible customers by asking what features they would like to see in the game. After that X told the fan base that they would release the game early for all the Facebook followers for 15% of the market price. The game would start making a decent revenue, and X launched a forum and a public chat possibility so that the fans of the game can share the experience.

Six Cs of marketing: This is the successor of the old Four P marketing. It was developed and introduced because people noticed customers were not passive recipients, that they were actively part of the process. The six Cs might look a lot like the Four Ps, but the difference is that now it is not *what we do,* now it is *what we do with them* (Pipeline 2016). Contact stage is considered just to be plain old market research which identifies your future market. Before developing the product, the company has to figure out if there is a market for the product. Furthermore, it should not be just Friends, Fools and Family(FFF); the company should adequately figure out the market scale by surveys and investigating the number of users on a similar product. The contact stage is better to be done by an outside professional because of the company's owners blindness for the concept. After the first market size evaluation; the company should establish

connections. Connect stage means that the company should start gathering the possible customers for example in social media as Kuura has done or by advertising inside the favourite channels of designated audiences. The company should start communicating with possible customers of the company. Ask for opinions and try to get them for an engaged conversation. Make them engaged with the company and the product. The consideration stage is the stage of a conversation where company does not any more ask what it should do. Now the company should ask "If we do A + B at the price C is there any reason you would not buy this product." If the customer says no, then ask what is wrong, fix it and repeat the question. At the consumption stage, marketing specialist of the company can count CR, Daily Sessions (DS), Total Play Time (TPT) and Weekly Active Users (WAU)/ Daily Active Users (DAU), and the company can analyse if the business is a valid plan. Then the most important part of the list is the community. The company must establish a stable community for a stable revenue. This is established by creating a forum, a wiki, a website and social media sites to players to communicate about the game. This stage also requires workforce from the company if the company plans to do it. The company can cut the workforce cost by recruiting users to moderate social platforms. Loyalty always equals revenue.

Inbound marketing

The core structure of inbound marketing is attract, convert, close and delight. The attract stage is to lure the right visitors to the company. The company can do this by using social media or targeted adds. After attracting customers, the company must convert the visitors into company leads. This is done by interactive with the visitors and by offering a reason to stay. Then when a company have the leads, the company should close the deal. This is done by applying sales techniques to the customer. Then the final stage that completes the perfect circle is the delight. This means that the company should make company customers so happy that they will promote the company further to their friends and family. The customers acquired this way are free and already at the lead stage of the circle.

Content marketing

Content marketing is a highly important marketing strategy for a game development company. Game development companies usually sell only games which are content. By frequently updating the game of the company, the company will promote the game and will have a chance to be featured on Google Playstore or Apple App store. The minor feature will get a game from 10k-100k installations, medium feature 100k-500k and major feature 500k- 2mil (DavidPChiu, 2015). This is a substantial asset for a company to get noticed in the highly populated market.

Updates also raise the user's loyalty towards the game. By regular updates for new content, the company keeps the users playing the games of the companies longer increasing the Life of Product (LOP) and CR. Also by establishing a loyal customer base through frequent updates gives the company a good player base for the next developed game. Also updating the game in Google Playstore will give the company a new chance to get featured.

Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is marketing using the people or channels that contain people who are interested in the company product. In games, this means streamers, YouTubers', bloggers and e-sport players. All those previously mentioned have their fanbases which company can plug in. For example, a game company named Kukouri has hired a streamer for their game. The streamer streams their game every week and edits it. They get approximately 12 thousand views per video, and they have got 2 million players in a year using only this marketing channel.

Influencer marketing is a highly efficient marketing channel. This is because customers have developed a negative viewing to regular marketing channels, and they want to be like the people they admire. So, if the company can use influencers that are admired by the customer base of company, this will unconsciously make the product of the company more appealing.

In 2018 there will be distinguished trends in influencer marketing. Key performance indicators (KPI) and Return On Investment (ROI) measurement will get better. Influencer marketing has not been appealing to companies because you cannot track precisely the traffic from influencer markets. This has gotten better after a thorough analysis of the markets, and the increased understanding of deep analysis (Michaels 2017). Fake influencers will be another problem coming in the year 2018. An influencer can buy followers in their social media account; then the influencer can sell their services to the company who does not necessarily know how to verify followers (Michaels 2017). Verification of the follower's company should hire an expert marketer. The final important trend will be that Instagram social media platform will surpass the one billion user milestone. Instagram has become an important channel for game companies to distribute their daily activity to get publicity. Instagram opens the marketing channels to new more Person To Person (PTP) style model.

Guerrilla marketing

Guerrilla marketing means marketing the company's product in an unconventional method. This is often seen in other markets, but there are also some to be found in game industry. In games, guerrilla marketing is almost always the viral effect. When a company makes a game out of political change or some topic that is in everyone's mouth, the company has a higher chance to get viral. The company could also make local game events/tournaments of the company's game to get more visibility through media and the local population.

An example of this was in 2015 when Finnish company Super Cell spent $9million for a super bowl add starring Hollywood star Liam Neeson. Super Cell generated over 164 million views on Youtube and gathered huge media attention (Grubb 2015). This means if they got half of the people to install the game the CPI cost would be 0.10$. This is extremely low CPI because the average CPI for iOS app is 1.24$ (Business of Apps 2017).

2.5   Monetisation

Monetisation is a broad perspective, that is why inspection will be narrowed to monetisation terminology and strategies to mobile gaming. This is done so that Kuura can get the maximised information on the subject. The strategies and terminology that were investigated can be all applied to other platforms such as PC and console.

Monetisation is a term used for defining the game's revenue gaining model. This is easier for premium model games, which define the market price and after paying it, the customer gets access to the whole game (Rose 2017). A modern-day model is free-to-play (later referred as a free model) which gives the user access to the game but either limits the things a player can do for free or offers a faster way to progress in the game for payment. The free model gives the game longer Life Time Value(LTV) if done correctly. The free model has also generated more innovative models to monetise games; this will be inspected in section 2.5.2 Monetisation in mobile.

2.5.1   Most important terminology for monetisation

CAC
CAC is the cost of convincing a potential customer to buy a product or service. (Çetin 2017)
Calculating CAC is relatively simple. The company just calculates all the marketing cost that was required to acquire the customer. Then divide it with the customers that company got in the time span(Figure 10, Example calculation of CAC).

	2017 CAC	2016 CAC	2015 CAC
Total spend for customer acquisition	50,000 €	40,000 €	85,412 €
Total customer acquired per year	3000	2000	5500
Avg. CAC	16.67 €	20.00 €	15.53 €

Figure 10, Example calculation of CAC.

CAC in the eyes of a game developer is the cost that the company pays to get users to the companys game. It is good to remember that when it comes to CAC score and games, that the game should be refined almost to perfection for a trustworthy CAC score. The reason for this is that if a company calculated the CAC score on initial launch and for example, the company would have some significant bugs in the company's game, it would calculate the "broken" games CAC score which will usually show as a high CAC score (Çetin 2017).

CAC shows the developer where the company's marketing money goes and if there is a possible future for the game (Investopedia Staff 2017).
For example, if the CAC score would be 5€/customer and the company's game generates an average of 2€/customer, the company can instantly see that something is either wrong in the marketing budget or the product of the company. A balanced business model is demonstrated in Figure 11, Balanced business model (based on Çetin 2017).
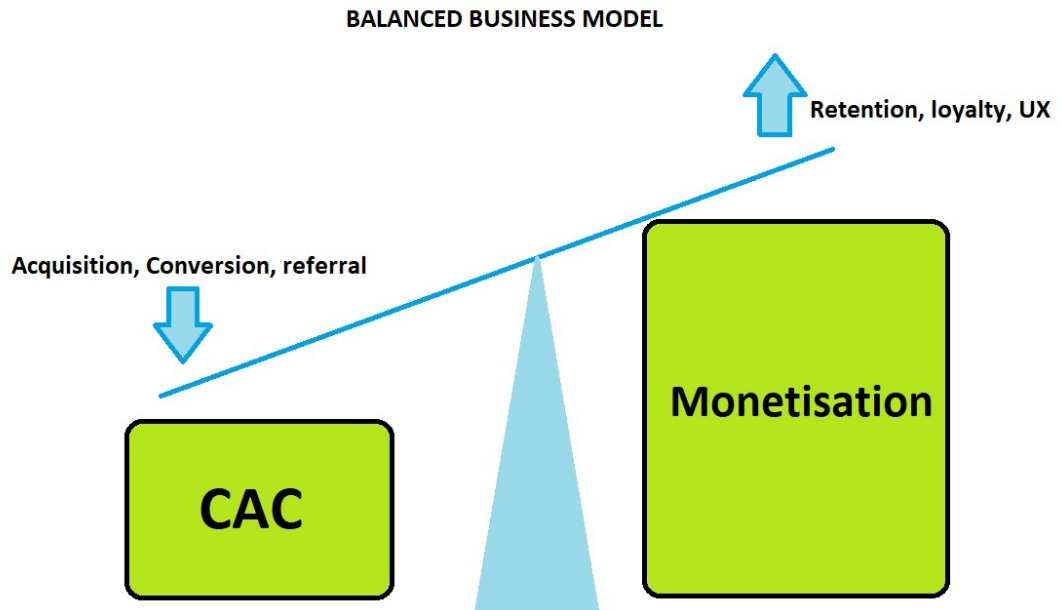
BALANCED BUSINESS MODEL

Figure 11, Balanced business model (based on Çetin 2017).

IAP

The Apple computer company defines IAP as following categories; Consumable, Non-consumable, Non-renewing subscriptions and Auto-renewing subscriptions (Apple, 2017). Consumable products are something that the player can get for the real-life money. The player can obtain in-game currency which gives the player a possibility to purchase something that will boost his game speed or change game avatar appearance as seen in Figure 12, Pool coin example with option to buy custom cue. This is the most common IAP currently found in free model games. This is something a company should look into carefully, too much power with money gives the paying player a huge edge which will lower the DAU.
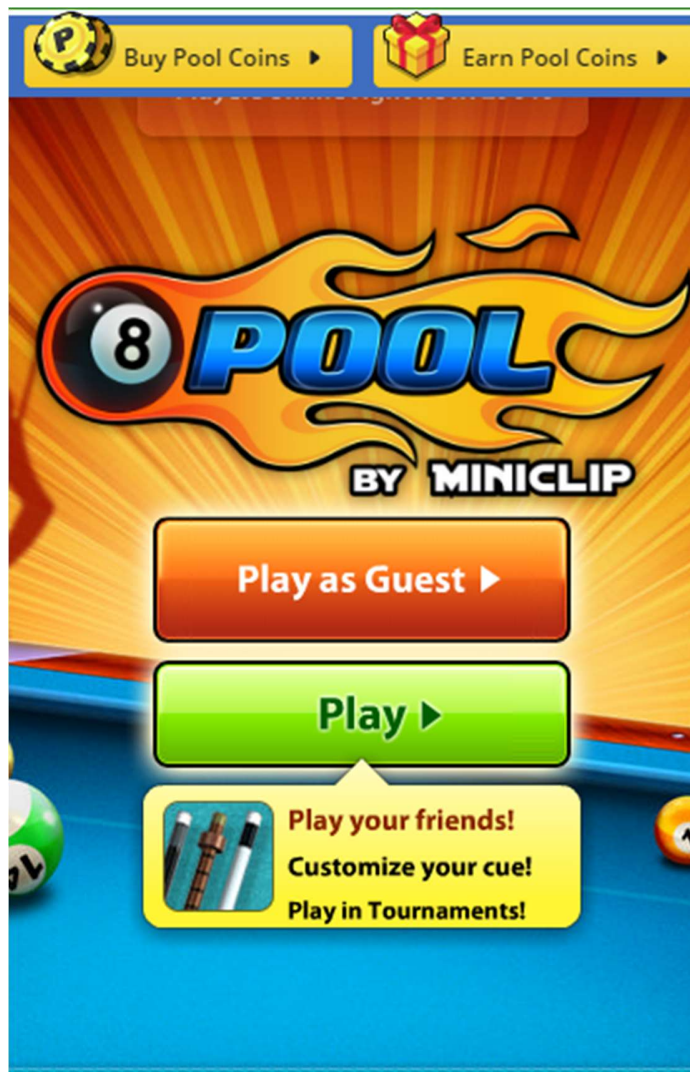
Figure 12, Pool coin example with option to buy custom cue.

Non-consumable products are one-time purchases for unlocking a comfort or in-game advance. These are also used actively in free model games. One of the first companies who utilised this profitably was Rovia with Angry Birds game. Angry Birds gave the player the option to buy the premium version of the game which didn't have adds like the non-premium version.

Non- renewing and auto-renewing subscriptions are a monthly paid advantage that the player can obtain. The difference between the two is that in auto-renewing option the subscription continues until the user cancels it. Subscription is heavily used in PC games.

Whales, dolphins and minnows

Free-to-play users who are under CR are divided into three categories. These categories define the amount the player spends on the game through IAP (Lovell 2011). Minnows are the users that spend the lowest amount in a month. Typically, this amount is 1€ and less. 50% of the player base are minnows. Even if minnows have the most users, they still generate the lowest amount from the three categories (Lovell 2011). The next category is Dolphins which consist of 40% of the player base. Dolphins spend on an average 5€ per month to the game and are thus the second largest money source for the game. The final group is whales with 10% of the players. Whales spend 20€ up each month. Even if whales are only 10% of the player base, they generate almost 50-70% of all revenue the game makes as seen in Figure 13, Demo graph of the player base and revenue (Bagga 2011).
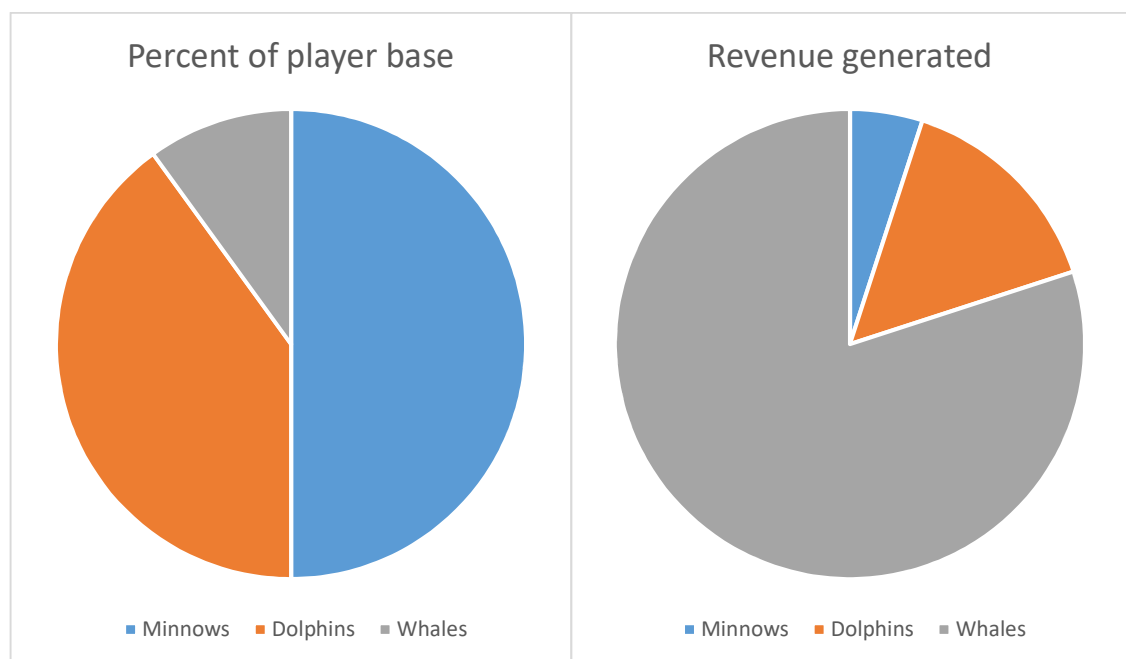

Figure 13, Demo graph of the player base and revenue.

CR

CR is calculated by analysing the number of new users who spend money in the game for IAP or ad revenue. It is important to calculate the new users rather than

the existing ones so that the company will get the actual CR score. Usually, 5% of users of free model games spend money on the product.

2.5.2 Monetisation in mobile

The mobile game market has turned almost purely to the free-to-play model which means that the company can download the game for free but to advance in the game the user must spend real money or watch adds for in-game stuff/currency. This monetisation scheme is popular because it manipulates people to think they are playing the game free even if they are paying money. There is also the pay-to-win model which lets the player play with others but to move forward fast user needs to spend money on different kinds of boosting items. Then there is the truly free-to-play which lets the player play the game, and to get more lives after death; they must watch an ad to continue. There are also different variations of these. Some variations let the user buy cosmetic items for in-game money, and the only way to get the in-game money is to play a lot, or watch ads.

An example of freemium models
- Banner ads that a company implements inside the game window of the company. This is not anymore a highly profitable marketing method because the human eye has evolved to evade ads on the side of the screen in games (Higgins 2014).
- Interstitials between levels are adds displayed between in-game levels. Nizan claimed in his article 42 Ways to Monetize Your Mobile Games so that the company can reach CPM of $10 with this marketing strategy (Nizan 2017).
- More games button is a cost-efficient way for the company to advertise the company's other products.
- Game Exit ad is an advertisement displayed at the end of the gaming session. This has become less productive when people do not close games from in-game menus.
- Selling data to advertisement companies is currently a good way for the company to get revenue, this will change in 2018 when Gdpr comes to action. Through Gdpr companies take responsibility to preserve customers' privacy information (EU, 2017).
- Video adds reward is giving the user an option to watch an ad for more in-game perks such as in-game currency or lives. This advertisement method is the most efficient way on the list to get the user to watch ads voluntarily;

the game engine provider Unity says that 66% of users want to watch ads for reward (Mobilemarketer 2017).
- A premium version of the game can be either opening in-game items or removing ads from games.
- IAP like discussed in the chapter 2.5.1 Most important terminology for monetisation

3 CUSTOMER BASE ANALYSIS USING GOOGLE ANALYTICS

The conclusion and analysis of Kuura's customer base were conducted using Google Analytics. Google Analytics was used because Kuura has not yet released a game to be used as an analytic base. The website analysis also showed the persons interests on Kuura as a brand and a company. The website traction was 300 people who gave the reasonably accurate result.

Using the Google Analytics, it was discovered what Kuura's customer base is. Customer Affinity Preference (CAP) showed that most of the people that visit there are interested in motor vehicles (8,36%), real estates (6,73%) and employment (6,18%) (Figure 14, Google analytics customer interest. CAP gathered from Kuura's website).
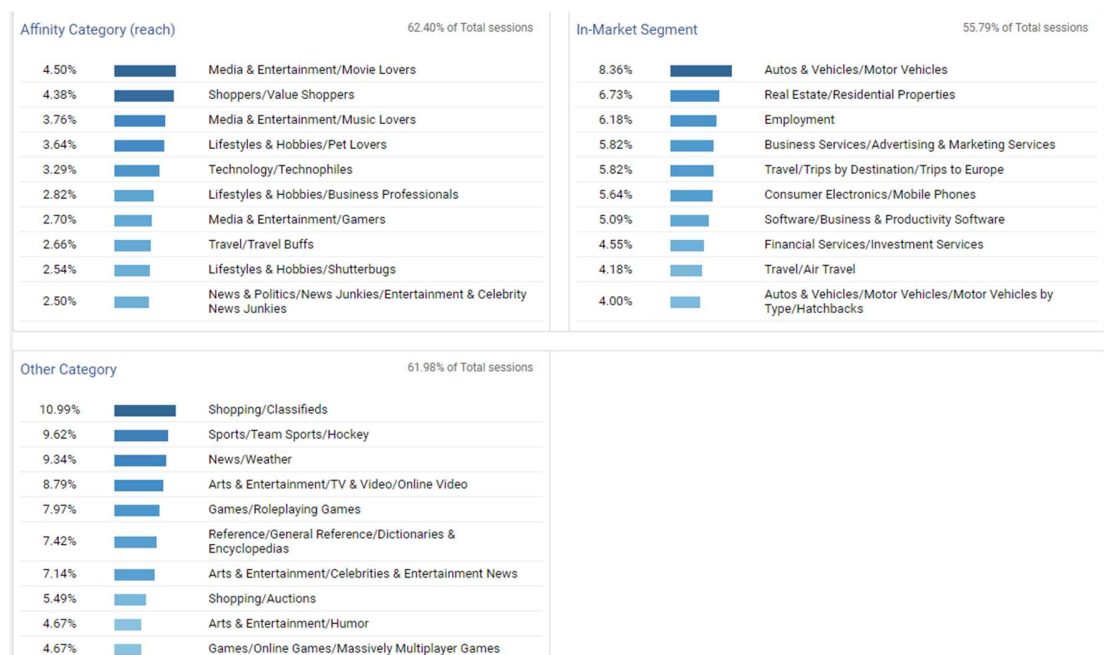

Figure 14, Google analytics customer interest. CAP gathered from Kuura's website.

Also, the analytics told that 20.33% of people who visit the website are using Apple products when visiting. However, further analysis revealed that even if Apple product was number one on the list, the Android phones make up the combined 38.42% of the people visiting. So, this brings the importance of analysing the whole statistics and not just trust the first thing the company sees. (Figure 15, Customer Mobile Device preference. Data from Kuura's website)

	Mobile Device Info	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions		
		Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	Goal Conversion Rate	Goal Completions	Goal Value
		123 % of Total: 50.83% (242)	80.49% Avg for View: 73.55% (9.43%)	99 % of Total: 55.62% (178)	44.72% Avg for View: 52.48% (-14.79%)	2.26 Avg for View: 2.11 (7.25%)	00:01:48 Avg for View: 00:01:48 (-0.34%)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)	0 % of Total: 0.00% (0)	US$0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (US$0.00)
1.	Apple iPhone	15 (12.20%)	86.67%	13 (13.13%)	40.00%	2.07	00:01:20	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
2.	Motorola Moto G (4) Moto G4	15 (12.20%)	100.00%	15 (15.15%)	100.00%	1.00	00:00:00	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
3.	OnePlus A3003 3	11 (8.94%)	63.64%	7 (7.07%)	36.36%	2.18	00:01:06	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
4.	Apple iPad	8 (6.50%)	62.50%	5 (5.05%)	75.00%	1.38	00:00:35	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
5.	Huawei PLK-L01 Honor 7	7 (5.69%)	100.00%	7 (7.07%)	42.86%	2.14	00:01:06	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
6.	Huawei FRD-L19 Honor 8 Premium	6 (4.88%)	50.00%	3 (3.03%)	16.67%	3.83	00:08:35	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
7.	Huawei FRD-L09 Honor 8	5 (4.07%)	60.00%	3 (3.03%)	20.00%	3.00	00:01:07	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
8.	(not set)	4 (3.25%)	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	25.00%	2.50	00:10:37	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
9.	Huawei Honor 9 STF-L09	3 (2.44%)	33.33%	1 (1.01%)	0.00%	2.00	00:00:17	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)
10.	Apple iPhone 6	2 (1.63%)	100.00%	2 (2.02%)	50.00%	2.00	00:01:24	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	US$0.00 (0.00%)

Show rows: 10 Go to: 1 1-10 of 45 < >

This report was generated on 16/11/2017 at 15:53:18 - Refresh Report

Figure 15, Customer Mobile Device preference. Data from Kuura's website.

In the Figure 16, Customer amount of 30days, Data from Kuura's website it is seen how many customers Kuura's website had in the designated period. It shows that Kuura had 193 users and that it was 11.1% less than the previous 30%. This indicates that either Kuura has not marketed well or that it is just an organic disappear. It is hard to verify which reason it was because of the low number of users. If the user amount was higher, it would have shown the point where the user leaves and how much time the user spent on the website or the specific page. From the figure, we see the bounce rate which indicates how many percents of the users just come to the website and instantly leaves. If it is over 50% like in Kuura's case, it tells that people are not pleased with the appearance of the website or we have bots. Bots are automatically working software that do what they have been programmed to do. In this case, it can be something that scans google searches looking for keywords it is designed to look. For bots are

used by big game companies to stay on top of competitors so that the keywords could be "Game, Gamedev, Indie, Appstore".
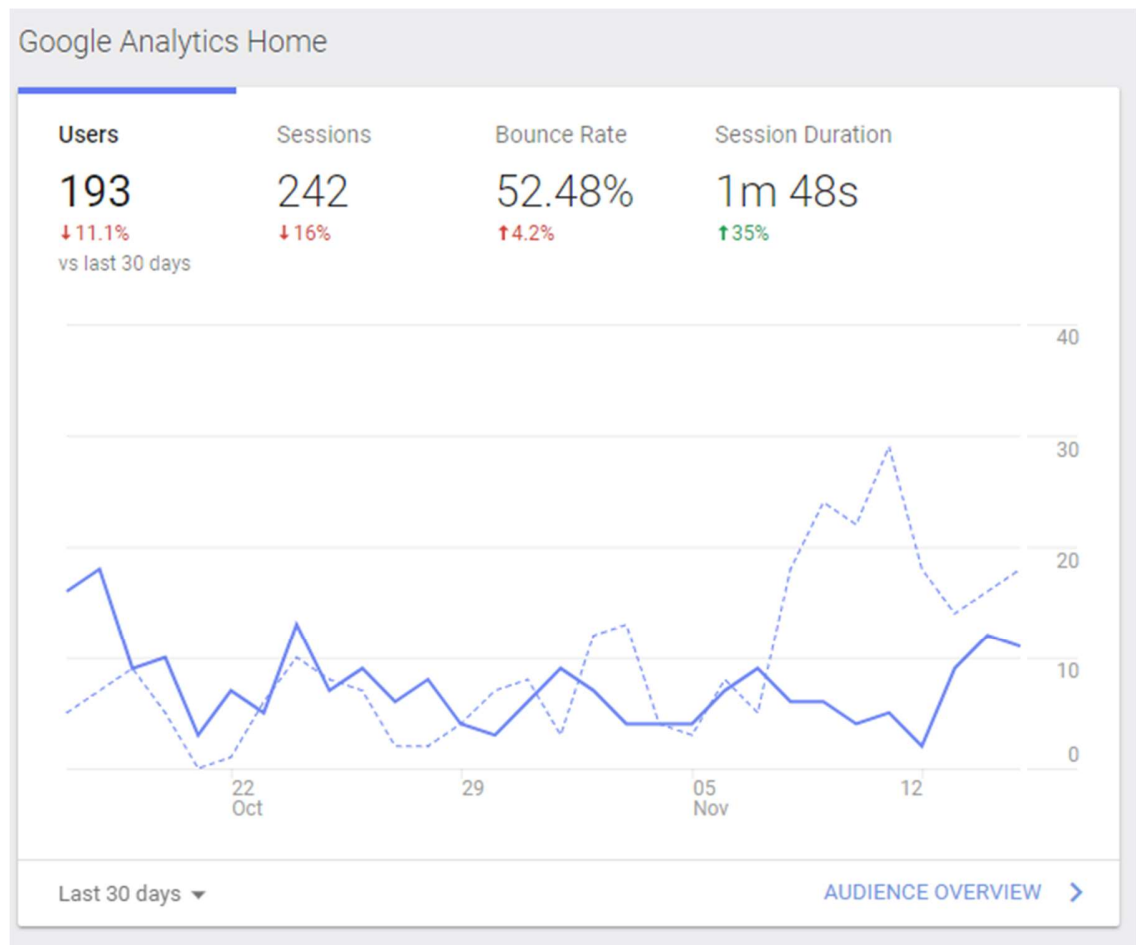

Figure 16, Customer amount of 30days, Data from Kuura's website.

The development of a new website was made to fix the high bounce rate. So, the website would be more user-friendly, and that gives the user the information the user wants when the user needs it. The development of the new website was based on the data from google analytics.

Google analytics also showed through which channels are the users coming to the website (Figure 17, Top Channels that people arrive to website. Data from Kuura's website). The highest three where:

Direct (24.8%) which means the users who just typed our web address into their web browser. These users got the address for example on our business cards or people refering to other people.

Social (23.1%) which indicates the people who have come through social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.

Paid Search (22.7%) which are the users that came through our ad campaign (Google AdWords).

Based on these statistics the focus was channelled on these three sources of users.
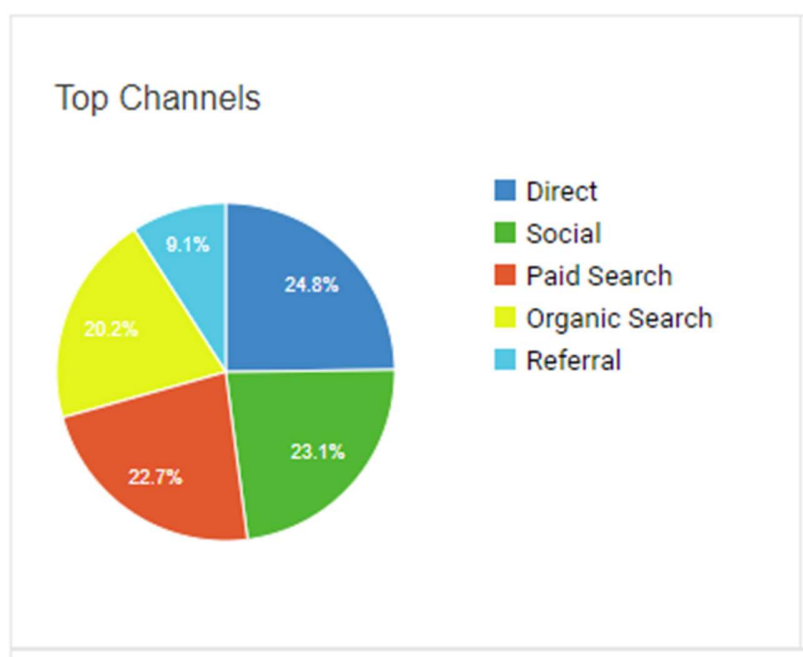

Figure 17, Top Channels that people arrive to website. Data from Kuura's website.

4   IMPROVEMENTS

Through market evaluation, market research and data analysis Kuura plans to implement the following improvement methods to Kuura's marketing strategy. The improvements will be conducted by the author to verify their profitability after publishing.

The improvements also work for starting an indie game company as a suggestion for future marketing strategy of the company. The improvements can be implemented for other companies.

4.1 Improving CAC

Advertise using deep links: This means that the company must make the links that the company uses to advertise its games to take the user directly to the page where the company wants. For example, if a company uses a video add on another game to promote other game of the company, and if the link takes the user directly to the companies homepage rather than the download page, the company will lose downloads, and companies ad campaign will not be so profitable.

Know the company's gamers: The first thing everyone says when a company asks what a company should know when trying to get customers is that the company must always know its target customers and put time and money in that. There is a saying in marketing circles that "Don't go hunting for an elephant with a knife" which essentially means that a company should define first a smaller market to penetrate, and after the company has done that, the company can aim at more bigger targets (LevelUp Training 2017).

Maximise lifetime value: lifetime value (from here on referred as LTV) CAC ration should ideally be 3:1 (Klipfolio 2017). The company can measure its lifetime value by following the formula
Lifetime Value = Gross Margin % * (1 / Monthly Churn rate) * Avg. Monthly Subscription Revenue per Customer.
The reason why this is important for companies is that the most profitable customers come from the users that have been playing the game of the company the longest (Figure 18).

LIFETIME VALUE OF THE CUSTOMER

60% Active, Profitable customers

20% Inactive, Non-profitable customers

20% Very Active, Very Profitable customers
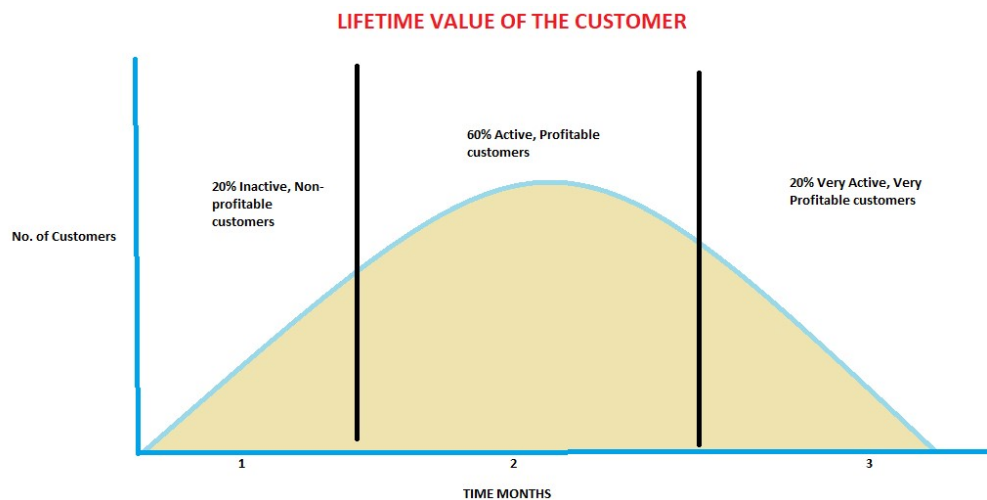
No. of Customers

1

2

3

TIME MONTHS

Figure 18, Customer lifetime value.

Avoid holiday events: Special events in games is more expensive to organise because the company must manage new features just for the game. Also, because if a company is planning to market the game event everywhere, the company must produce new marketing material (for example ads) which will raise the company's marketing cost. It is also good to remember which markets are companies' games localised, because of Asian countries, for example, have their holidays (Chinese New Year for example).

Completely change the marketing of the companies' channels: If the CAC score is too high, the company should analyse and consider what marketing channels individual CAC cost is. For example, if the company puts 100€ on Facebook marketing and it brings company eight users, and if the company would get paid media time for 400€ and company gets 500 users with that, the company should concentrate on the paid media marketing even if the cost is higher.

4.2   Personalising business

Build a company brand like a person; the company will have a higher chance of success. For example, if the company posted on social media like Instagram about companys workers' daily life as a developer, the fans and users would relate and sympathise with the company more in time. If they saw the companys darkest hours and how company succumbs them, they would feel like they are part of the company and they also defeat the difficult moment. Moreover, if the company pictured themselves as a person rather than as a company, users would support the company more efficiently if there was a social scandal.

Kuura will continue to be active on social media and withdraws from a hiring social media expert because they have a marketing specialist in their company. Kuura will change the posts on social media to appeal more to the people at personal level. This is achieved by talking about the subjects of interest that were discovered through Kuura's website analysis.

4.3   Emotional level appealing.

There isn't a thing called rational thinking. People think with their emotions. If a user wants a new game, the user rationalises it to them by thinking "I worked hard last month, I deserve it". The emotional part of the brain is an essential part of the impact. It controls everything. So, when making games, the company should market the game emotionally. For example, make a war game that shows the struggle of your grandparents and market it so that the company is displaying the horrors of war that our grandparent witnessed.

Kuura will use the experience of the past of the founding members to modify the game theme. This is conducted by Kuura's management research to personal past of each other. Kuura will also appeal to the emotional sense of social interaction for their future game.

4.4 Answering the questions in this order. Why? How? What?

Usually companies explains what they do, how they do it and why they do it. This does not appeal to the customer because a company markets the company as a company, not as yourself. For example, if the company said "We make computers, with the latest technology, so the user can enjoy the best experience" that would not appeal to the listener at an emotional level. However, if the company said, "We wanted the user to have the best experience, so we built the computer with the latest technology, so the user can have the computer customer needs." This appeals to the customers at the emotional level. Moreover, as stated in the previous chapter, it is the most critical area of the brain.

Kuura will change their brand slogan. Kuura will also modify the message given in the slogan to appeal to the customer base. This improvement will be conducted by the marketing specialist of the company. The specialist will evaluate and verify the value of the slogan by testing it on people before release.

4.5 Graphics

If a company is targeting at the general populace, the company must pay attention to the details and graphics. Also colours and images trigger the emotion sensors. Fear and fun are also emotions to use in the companys games.

Kuura will hire a new artist with experience to evaluate and improve the current graphical level of the product. This improvement will be conducted by showing the reference pictures to testers. The level of enthusiasm will be measured by these testers to validate the graphics style.

4.6 Micro Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is used, micro influencer marketing is not. Micro influencers are those tiny (0-1000 subscribers) YouTubers and streamers who have not got a large fan base but are good at what they do. If the company gets 100 of those micro influencers, the company will get around 10,000 views for the company game for free.

Kuura will hire ten influencer marketers with less than 1000 followers after the game release. These influencers will provide data on their content so that Kuura can calculate CR and DS rates. Kuura will initiate the second wave of influencer hiring after the verification of the initial wave. DAU will be monitored to ensure the data received from influencers is accurate.

4.7   Going viral

The company can assist its viral visibility by programming a game which has something that makes it stand out from the mass. The company should actively make funny or cool content online for websites like 9gag, 4chan or ylilauta (these are websites that distribute funny and unique content) to assist the people to find the company and promote the company freely.

Kuura will start marketing themselves in 9gag when the game is at beta stage. Kuura will use FFF to improve the chance of virality. Kuura's game concept is niece which will help the virality process.

4.8   Professional monetisation and a market expert

Professional monetisation and a market expert are essential for the company. For managing the everchanging markets and apply the best monetisation scheme that generates the highest CR is essential to indie game companies. Also, the market expert should have new innovative and CAC efficient ways to market the product or service. The expert should also be able to travel to game conferences and festivals to generate more traction for the company.

Kuura decided to invest in a marketing specialist. The marketing specialist will act as the face of the company and will promote the company in a free or cost-effective way. The marketing specialist will also create a marketing strategy that the company will utilise in other forthcoming games.

5   CONCLUSION

Marketing is ever growing industry where there isn't one way to do things. It has evolved a lot from "soap commercial" days and will keep on evolving. The current ecologic and local product boom will turn into something else in few years. The key is to hire a person for a company who is passionate about making the company big and understands markets and the current trends.

Game marketing and monetisation are rapidly changing phenomena. For a company to succeed in this industry is by a hiring marketing specialist who will analyse the market changes and knows how to react to them. A game company should be able to either adapt or change the monetisation or marketing scheme in 2 days' notice to efficiently market and monetise the product. Game companies should also be able to invent their own ways to market or monetise games. When a company invents a niece way to monetise a game, it will give the company the element of being the first. Being niche will lower the CAC and UA cost because of unintentional influencer marketing.

Indie game companies should also have 1000€ FFF support for marketing of the company and game. This money will cover the essential accusations of merchandise and few influencers. There is not truly free marketing and a company should take 15% of the profit of the previous game and put it directly in the marketing budget for next game. This will grow user base steadily and profitably. The company can also try to find and publisher for the next game. Publishers take a piece of the company and all the revenue the game makes. Publishers can be valuable assets if the owner of the company is planning to exit successfully from the company after the game launch. Self-publishing is more demanding but also a more rewarding way to publish the companys games.

An Indie company should always know the CAC, UA, DAU, MAU, RR and DARPU if engaging with an investor. Knowledge of these numbers will give the company a professional look. The company should invest in a marketing specialist who knows these numbers.

An indie game company should also firmly decide about company hierarchy. There is not one way to do this. Taking an example from Finnish game company Super Cell of which office is divided into 30 individual cells where each cell develops a game from start to end. Super Cells' managing team then chooses one game from the 30 and kills the 29 others. By defining a strict hierarchy, each part of the company can concentrate on their field of expertise.

A great game does not guarantee money for the company without a great monetisation scheme and vice versa. This is important for Indie game companies so that they can generate the highest ARPDAU and CR as possible for as little CAC and CPI as possible.

Identifying audience of the company is also essential in game industry. When a company has narrowed down its audience, the company can penetrate the market easier. When it comes to indie game companies, the company should also be aware that the first games of the companies might not be on the top chart, but they will act as a jumping platform, and CV for future games company develops. Also, companies must be able to figure out when it is time to kill the project if the project is failing. It is called an affordable loss, and it happens all the time in the industry. A small indie company should not also just blindly hire a person to take care of the marketing. Multiple companies do this kind of work for free.

Indie game company marketing and monetisation should not be taken for granted. The company needs a professional management team and a professional marketing team. If a company wants to get a game with high WAU, DS and LTV company must invest as much money in development as in marketing and monetisation. The more niche the idea of the game, mechanics of the game, graphics of the game and monetisation scheme is, the more higher chance of success the company has .

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LIST OF FIGURES