

Navigating the Labyrinth that led to The Original Mobile Games: A multi-institutional exercise in digital exhibition and conservation

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Introduction

In March of 2017 the CEO and the Vice-President of Exhibits at The Strong National Museum of Play, and their Scholar-in-Residence, a Professor from RIT's School of Interactive Games and Media and MAGIC Center, decided to work with RIT students to prototype emulations of historic, hand-held "Dexterity Games" from the museum's collections on cell phones and/or tablets. This was driven by the observation that most of the actions required to play the historic games (tilting, tapping and shaking) matched some of those used in current mobile games.

The initial prototyping work would lead to the development of digital game packages available on iOS and Android devices and on the Nintendo Switch as acts of conservation, exhibition and outreach.

Background

For twelve years RIT and The Strong National Museum of Play have had agreements around the position of a "Visiting Scholar" or Scholar-in-Residence" position held by Professor Stephen Jacobs. Four years ago a much broader MOU was created, which included the funding of full-time, paid RIT interns to support projects at The Strong. The student team led by Jacobs in the summer of 2017 selected and prototyped twelve of the games working with curatorial staff and the Director of Conservation to safely photograph and record sounds from the games (such metal balls rolling over tin under glass, for example) without damaging them. The digital versions of the games successfully replicated the experience and the gameplay on the ones in The Strong's collection. The games were demonstrated in formal and informal play-testing sessions at the 2018 Game Developer's conference and were extremely popular with everyone who played them.



the strong
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PLAY

RIT Rochester Institute of Technology

second
avenue
reimagine learning

Goal

Create a commercial product which would support the museum's mission around Toys, Games and Play by ...

- Teaching players the history of the games
- Demonstrating their universal design aspects across the centuries
- Conserving their collections by allowing players to virtually access these delicate objects
- Preserving the artifacts, by cataloging and storing the individual digital version of the games and the overall application
- Reach new audiences and promote partner institutions.

Partnership and Revenue Model

To deliver a product of commercial polish, The Strong and RIT entered into an agreement with Second Avenue Learning, Inc (SAL) an educational Game and Software Studio.

The Strong: Provided access to artifacts, expertise of curators, conservator, PR and marketing and led the effort for rights clearance to the games (legal costs)

RIT: Professor Jacobs expertise as a game designer and producer, salaries for the student interns

SAL: Professional mentorship for student developers embedded in their studio, professional technical and art assets mentorship, expertise in deploying software to the on-line stores.

Revenue Share: Split equally between all three parties.

Results

iPhone and Android Version released summer of 2018, Nintendo Switch 2019

Impact:

- **Media Impressions** regarding the products: 3.5 million
- **Ratings on the App store and Google Play:** 4.2/5
- **Downloads of initial application and/or additional playable games:** 10,000
- **Static Web Page Reviews:** 10
- **"Let's Play" Video views:** ~670,500
- **Reviewer/Viewer Comments:** ~1,500. Many discussing what they learned and/or The Strong itself
- **Conference Presentations:** 3
- **Published Case Study:** 1
- **Students with Commercial Game Credits on their resumes:** 15
- **Revenue Share per partner:** ~\$1,200.