



Developing skills

ANNE GIACOMANTONIO speaks to Sony's John Rostron about game production and development – and how you can get involved

John Rostron is the director of Sony External Development, Europe. He works for SCE Worldwide Development Studios, who are responsible for finding and coaching external game developers to create the best games for Sony. SCE Worldwide have created titles such as *Buzz!*, *SingStar*, *MotorStorm* (above and bottom right) and *Formula One* (above right and far right) among others. Rostron spoke to us about how his department develops games and how you can fit in to this exciting industry.

What is your department's role within Sony?
My department works with other companies who build games for us. We work with about 20 to 30 different companies depending on how many games we are doing at a particular time. All of those companies produce games for Sony. Many of them are on an exclusive basis, but some work for multiple publishers.

What does a games producer do?

I have a department of 20 producers, who are the people who direct the games: they work with the external companies to figure out what games we are going to build, then what sort of game it is going to be and what the overall design of the title is going to be.

Producers also decide on the focus of the components of a game to attract the audience that it is intended to appeal to and fundamental things such as how long a game will play for.

'There are lots of different ways into the industry: you could go into art, production or programming'

Games are sometimes brought to us. An external design company submits a proposal and we say whether we are interested in working with them to bring that title to the market. However, more often than not, designs are generated internally by staff and then we find a company to work on that design for us. There might be several companies pitching for one particular design at the same time.

Is the future of the UK games industry looking healthy?

I think it's extremely healthy. Although we are based in Liverpool, we happen to look after all of Europe and Australia for computer entertainment.

Games cost significantly more to develop these days and take a lot longer to build – around two-and-a-half years. With introductions such as the PlayStation network, we are able to do games at a much lower price and distribute them electronically, directly from the PlayStation store. You find that start-up companies can build up a much smaller-scale idea and we will work with them and fund them to bring that idea to market. As a rule, companies start up with just five to 10 people.

We also see more ideas coming in from companies newer to the market place.

We work with those companies and help them grow, so hopefully they will have successful titles and can go on to bigger and better projects. If there is a great demand for a smaller game there is no reason why that can't turn into a franchise with multiple spin-offs from it.

So, what if I have an idea for a good game?

As far as we are concerned a great idea is a great idea, so if we get a submission from an external source – even from an individual – then we will consider it. We'll see if we can flesh it out and turn it into something that would make a good game; quite often we will put money behind the idea and try partnering them with an existing company, to try and bring the idea to the market. That happened about a year-and-a-half ago with a title we do called *Buzz! Jr* – it was an external company where we got a two-page document that clearly illustrated what the game was going to be. We ended up bringing that game to the market and it was



very successful across Europe and the UK.

What else can I do?

There are lots of different ways in: you don't have to go into game design. You could go into the art, programming or production side of

things, with the latter you have an overview of the game and you are operating much more like a film producer. It really depends on what interests you.

You could even go in though the quality assurance route where you test the games and can work your way up. So, there are lots of different routes you can take: you just need the tenacity to try as many of them as you possibly can.