



CASUAL GAMES  
ASSOCIATION

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# Diary of a Mobile Game:

## From Concept To Carrier Deck

**October 17, 2007**—My first step in deciding on a concept for a mobile game is to ask the obvious question: What do people do on their mobile phones? They talk—but developers have no access to the microphone. They take photos—in fact, we had just shipped our first game that made use of the camera as a motion detector and allowed photos to be used as game elements. It's difficult to convey all of that to a potential customer in a 28-character game title, though. What else? It appears that many people firmly believe consumers want to see video on their phone. I buy that, but GOSUB 60 makes games for the mass market, and mobile video still isn't close to being mass market. Besides, most of our carrier partners like to see games that work on at least 85 percent of their devices. As I scour the data and our mobile devices, I finally see it: Nearly 50 percent of U.S.

*Short development cycle?*

*Check.*

*Meets an untapped market?*

*Check.*

*Big potential for marketing*

*tie-ins?*

*Check.*

of depth to the letters, and the feasibility of allowing different modes of text input to make players comfortable. There's enough positive feedback to formalize the concept, work on an internal pitch, and calculate the return.

**November 2, 2007**—The idea is presented to the Greenlight committee, made up of marketing and development team members that give game titles either the go-ahead or the axe. I stress that it's a "text" game (for the development-minded in the group) and that it taps into a verifiable consumer behavior (for the marketing-minded in the group). Short development cycle? Check. Meets an untapped market? Check. Big potential for marketing tie-ins? Check. All green! *Texting Championships 2008* gets slotted into the schedule, beginning development in January.

**January, 2008**—The goals are set. We allocate six months to develop the game, make sure it works on over 500 J2ME and BREW devices in the U.S., and secure carrier buy-in. If we do this by June, I anticipate on-deck sales beginning in August. This appears aggressive, especially if you've ever made a mobile game—which we have.

**February, 2008**—The development team is deep in game construction, and the marketing department conducts consumer research via focus testing. The development goal is to have a prototype within six weeks. The focus test goal is to find out what consumers "innately" know about texting and whether they even refer to it as such. Being in the mobile industry, we never want to assume that one of our terms is familiar to the mass market.

**March, 2008**—Now we get to play. The first round of *Texting Championships 2008* is passed around and the primary game mechanic is deemed entertaining by all, but we do decide to change one core concept. We want to make it more interesting by whisking players through different looking levels, accelerating and decelerating based on how quickly words and letters are texted. Marketing has finished compiling industry stats and our focus group tests. The name—"Texting Championships 2008"—doesn't test well, but some other candidates do. The name is changed to "Speed Texting 2.0."

**April, 2008**—Time to sell the idea. We pitch *Speed Texting 2.0* to the U.S. carriers. With all of our supporting data and sales points, the game is well received. Nearly all carriers agree to put it on the

mobile phone users send or receive SMS messages every month, and that number continues to rise! There have been SMS-based games in the past that had limited success, but I had not seen the concept of texting brought into a Java or BREW game on U.S. carrier decks. I write down "Texting Championships 2008" in my idea grid.

**October 24, 2007**—I kick around the idea in my head for a week and decide on falling words and letters that need to be cleared via fast texting. I want it to be challenging, addictive and easy to pick up and play. I also want to add a social element to the game, as texting is very social by nature. The idea is brought up to a few other employees who each bring different ideas about the look, the layers

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### By Josh Hartwell

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*In 2003, Josh Hartwell co-founded GOSUB 60 and currently serves as CEO. As CEO of GOSUB 60, Josh evangelizes quality casual games on the mobile platform and maintains the company's status at the top of the charts. He defines the company's strategy,*



*shepherds partnerships and manages finance, as well as leads a team of programmers, artists, marketing and sales personnel. Instrumental to the development and publication of titles such as JAMDAT Bowling, the*

*Solitaire Deluxe® franchise, and Bliss™, Josh has more than eight years of experience in the wireless industry. With GS60 experiencing 40 percent revenue growth each year, he continues to build the business entirely organically without outside financial backing or mergers. Josh can be reached at josh.hartwell@casualconnect.org.*



## Diary of a Mobile Game:

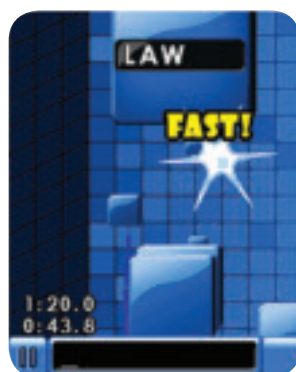
*From Concept To Carrier Deck*

*As I scour the data and our mobile devices, I finally see it: Nearly 50 percent of U.S. mobile phone users send or receive SMS messages every month, and that number continues to rise!*

deck. As for the one holdout, we feel we can get their support further down the road. We also learn that other publishers are racing down this “texting” road as well, adding pressure to our timeline. So much for having an original idea.

**May, 2008**—The decision is made to implement our own multiplayer and leader-board systems, rather than licensing them from another company. This pushes out the ship date but will save us thousands of dollars. An on-screen, head-to-head race meter is also dropped, as the concept of racing “ghost times” of others is not well understood in additional focus testing.

**June, 2008**—Friends and groups are added to the game, allowing people to create private groups in order to share race times. We decide against a “team” concept that would allow competition against other teams, as again, this concept is difficult to convey and deemed not worth the investment. We do add a novel concept from marketing: At the end of each level, the game looks at the latest times of all players around the world and informs you what percentile you are in. We’re not the first game to do this, but it hasn’t been done in mobile with any frequency.



**July, 2008**—You’ve got to love last-minute changes. We were targeting the beginning of this month to have the game completed but have now changed that to the end. (For the sake of full disclosure—and the fact that my team will be reading this—this slip is my call. Definitely not the team’s fault.) What’s more, many of us are finding it more fun to text single letters, or smaller words, as opposed to five and six letter words. With the way the game’s dictionary system works, this presents a rather significant problem to resolve. After more testing, we decide that smaller words are more fun than longer words. We also make last-minute changes to our ranking system, which unlocks higher levels, displays a player’s rank on the leader-boards, and opens up new taunts for head-to-head competition.

**August, 2008**—The game is becoming addictive, and everyone in the office is having fun trying to get the fastest times in the head-to-head levels. In a stroke of genius, our development and marketing teams open up the list of taunts to the entire company. Everyone starts making up funny taunts, tough taunts, and pseudo-tough taunts that users will get to choose from in the

game. It’s a fun reminder of what a great team we have—plus it gets everyone further invested in the product.

**August 21, 2008**—The game is sent to our first two carriers for outside testing! Our launch dates with all of the carriers have firmed up, and we will achieve our goal of being the first mobile texting game in the U.S. market with nearly simultaneous carrier launches. The importance of this can’t be overstated. By being first, we help to ensure our slot on the carrier decks. By launching on as many devices and with as many carriers as possible, we facilitate maximum word-of-mouth marketing and uptake. And we learn that we will beat the other games to market by at least a month.

**August 22, 2008**—All that’s left is additional testing to prep the game for the remaining carriers. Everything is lined up for September launches. The game ended up with very sophisticated features (as opposed to my initial Greenlight pitch) but received the carrier uptake that we all envisioned. With no other texting game to compare to, this was truly a ground-up development with the invention of the game mechanics occurring during production. Although building the mechanic was more time consuming than we had envisioned, the extra time definitely resulted in a great product. We missed the June finish by two months, but because of our strong carrier and distributor relationships, we’ll get the product on deck only four weeks beyond the initial projection. Now, we wait to see how consumers respond—in the form of sales figures. I’m convinced this diary will have a happy ending. ■

