

Zynga building hub for mobile gadget game play

June 26 2012



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Zynga With Friends Network is being built as a common play ground for users of rival smartphones, tablets, or websites and is being infused with features such as live chat, Zynga.com's social stream, and real-time multiplayer capabilities.

The move extends Zynga's strategy of reducing its dependence on Facebook, where it rose to prominence, and becoming a destination for

mobile gamers.

"Zynga With Friends will be your social lobby where ever you are on the Web or on mobile," Zynga general manager Manuel Bronstein said at an 'Unleashed' press event at the company's San Francisco headquarters.

"It will also allow you to see what your friends are playing and will connect you with new players."

Partners working with Zynga in advance of the network launch included game makers Konami, Majesco, Playdemic, 50 Cubes, and Sava Transmedia.

Montreal-based developer Sava used the Unleashed stage to introduce a "Rubber Tacos" game that challenges players at Facebook, Zynga.com, or on Apple or Android mobile devices to retrieve virtual peppers snatched by "a crazy piñata."

"We are thrilled to be an early partner of Zynga, who's clearly the leader in social gaming," said Sava chief executive Alain Tascan.

"Their expertise and platform will allow us to deliver the best possible gaming experience to a worldwide audience."

Zynga didn't announce a launch date for the new network.

Wedbush Securities analyst Michael Pachter was impressed by the number of developers signed onto Zynga With Friends, which he believed could fill a need for a place where people can easily find games for smartphones or tablets.

A prime attraction of the network will be the promotion of game applications across the array of gadgets people love, according to

Pachter.

"I think this whole thing with cross-platform -- the same game on mobile, table or PC (personal computer) -- that is going to work," the analyst said.

"The problem with mobile apps is there is no aggregator, and Zynga is going to try to be that aggregator."

Zynga also used the Unleashed event, where people's dogs or cats were welcomed, to showcase new games including a "The Ville" title in which people represented by animated characters create homes and socialize in Sims-style play.

"You build the home of your dreams and invite friends over," Zynga vice president of product development Mark Skaggs said of the latest addition to a winning 'Ville' game lineup that boasts FarmVille and CityVille.

The demonstration showed players earning points for entertaining friends, exercising, soaking in a virtual hot tub, and even a "happiness home run" in which a cartoon couple slip under a blanket of hearts covering a bed.

"The Ville" will go live on Wednesday, according to Skaggs.

"It looks like Zynga out-Simsed 'The Sims'," Pachter said, referring to a line of simulated life computer games from publishing giant Electronic Arts.

"This is going to show you a battle of the brands."

Internet age play has evolved amazingly since Zynga launched its first

game, Poker, for play at Facebook in July in 2007, company co-founder Mark Pincus posited while reminiscing at Unleashed.

He recalled demonstrating an iPhone version of Zynga Poker for Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, who died last year after a battle with cancer.

"He actually didn't believe it was real working code because of what it could do," Pincus recounted.

"Once he did realize it was real working code he smile and said his son would love it."

Social games played on smartphones or tablets are a mass market phenomena and Zynga title Words With Friends has become a "poster app" for the mobile gaming movement, Pincus contended.

The peak number of people playing simultaneously on the Zynga network on a typical day is on par with the population of Paris, according to chief engineer Kostadis Roussos.

"We now have one of the largest mobile audiences in the world," said Zynga chief mobile officer David Ko. "To keep our leadership position we have to keep innovating."

In that spirit, Zynga has opened its platform and created tools for outside game makers to build titles for play on the company's network.

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Citation: Zynga building hub for mobile gadget game play (2012, June 26) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-zynga-hub-mobile-gadget-game.html>

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