Indie sensibilities embraced at gaming conference

March 26 2013, by Derrik J. Lang

In this March 25, 2009 file photo, Video game enthusiasts attend the Game Developers Conference, in San Francisco. The schedule for the 2013 GDC held March 25-29, illustrates the dramatic changes that have reshaped the gaming industry in recent years, an evolution that's as much about business models as it is about pixels. GDC organizers have added a summit on free-to-play games, planned talks on topics like crowd funding and micro-transactions and coordinated panels with such titles as "Making Money with Mobile Gaming" and "Why Won't FarmVille Go Away?" (AP Photo/Ben Margo, Filet)

It's a time of transition for the video game industry. With last year's launch of the Wii U, the impending arrival of the PlayStation 4 and the likelihood of a new Xbox on the horizon, the next generation of video game consoles is nearly here.

However, more than half of the attendees at this week's [Game Developers Conference](#) in San Francisco identify themselves as indie developers and their next creations will be for smartphones and tablets. So when it comes to the next generation of consoles, the question on their minds doesn't seem to be "What's next?" but rather "Who cares?"

The schedule for this year's GDC illustrates the dramatic changes that are reshaping the gaming industry, an evolution that's as much about [business models](#) as it is about pixels. GDC organizers have added a summit on free-to-play games, plan talks on topics like crowd funding and micro-transactions, and are presenting panels with such titles as "Making Money with [Mobile Gaming](#)" and "Why Won't FarmVille Go Away?"

For the past 15 years, the Independent Games Festival has served as the Sundance of GDC, specifically honoring and highlighting the work of indie developers. But the lines have increasingly blurred between the IGF and GDC, the 27-year-old conference that serves as the largest gathering of the [gaming industry](#) in the U.S. outside the [Electronic Entertainment Expo](#) in Los Angeles.

Simon Carless, executive vice president at UBM Tech Game Network, which hosts GDC, IGF and several other technology conferences throughout the year, said 58 percent of developers surveyed by organizers plan to release their next game for tablets and smartphones. That's a big switch from 15 years ago when GDC was known as CGDC—the Computer Game Developers Conference.

In this Feb. 20, 2013 file photo, Mark Cerny, lead system architect for the Sony Playstation 4 speaks during an event to announce the new video game console, in New York. The schedule for the 2013 GDC held March 25-29, in San Francisco, illustrates the dramatic changes that have reshaped the gaming industry in recent years, an evolution that's as much about business models as it is about pixels. Sony is angling to reignite developers' enthusiasm with the PlayStation 4. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File)

"I think what we're seeing is that there's many more small developers," said Carless. "For example, 53 percent of developers identify as an indie developer and 46 percent of those surveyed work at companies with 10 employees or less. It's simply a fact that people are more excited by platforms where there's a low barrier for entry."

Sony is angling to reignite developers' enthusiasm with the PlayStation 4.

When the Japanese electronics giant announced the PS4 during a splashy press conference in New York last month, Sony boasted that the successor to the PS3 would essentially be a "supercharged PC," a platform that would make it easier for developers to create and sell games. Sony plans to detail more about the PS4's technology during a Wednesday panel at GDC.

Nintendo will also be on hand with a Wednesday session outlining easier ways for developers to make apps for the Wii U, the touchscreen controller system that kicked off the latest generation of consoles last year but has failed to catch fire the way the original Wii did when it launched in 2006.

Microsoft will likely wait to tease how it plans to succeed its Xbox 360 console and camera-based Kinect system until E3 in June, although the company has scheduled several talks at GDC this week, including how to create games for Windows smartphones and second-screen experiences for Xbox SmartGlass, its companion app that connects mobile devices to Xbox 360s.

In this Feb. 20, 2013 file photo, Andrew House speaks at an event to announce the Sony Playstation 4, in New York. The schedule for the 2013 GDC held March 25-29, in San Francisco, illustrates the dramatic changes that have reshaped the gaming industry in recent years, an evolution that's as much about business models as it is about pixels. Sony is angling to reignite developers' enthusiasm with the PlayStation 4. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File)

Meggan Scavio, general manager of GDC, said 23,000 attendees are expected at this year's conference, which kicked off Monday at the Moscone Convention Center and continues through Friday. While an increasing number of game makers are more interested in creating the next "Minecraft" instead of the next "Call of Duty," Scavio noted that so-called triple-A games continue to have a place at the conference.

"We're still talking about all the really big titles," said Scavio. "We've got talks on 'Dishonored,' 'Borderlands 2' and 'Assassin's Creed III.' Bungie is going to be talking about 'Destiny.' The guys from 'The Walking Dead'

game are doing panels. Hideo Kojima is going to be there. It's not indie central yet."

In perhaps the most impressive indication of indie dominance, the artsy PS3 platform game "Journey" is up for the most awards at Wednesday's Game Developers Choice Awards, which honor the best titles of the past year and are selected by a jury of game creators. "Journey" was designed by thatgamecompany, a studio that went indie last year.

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