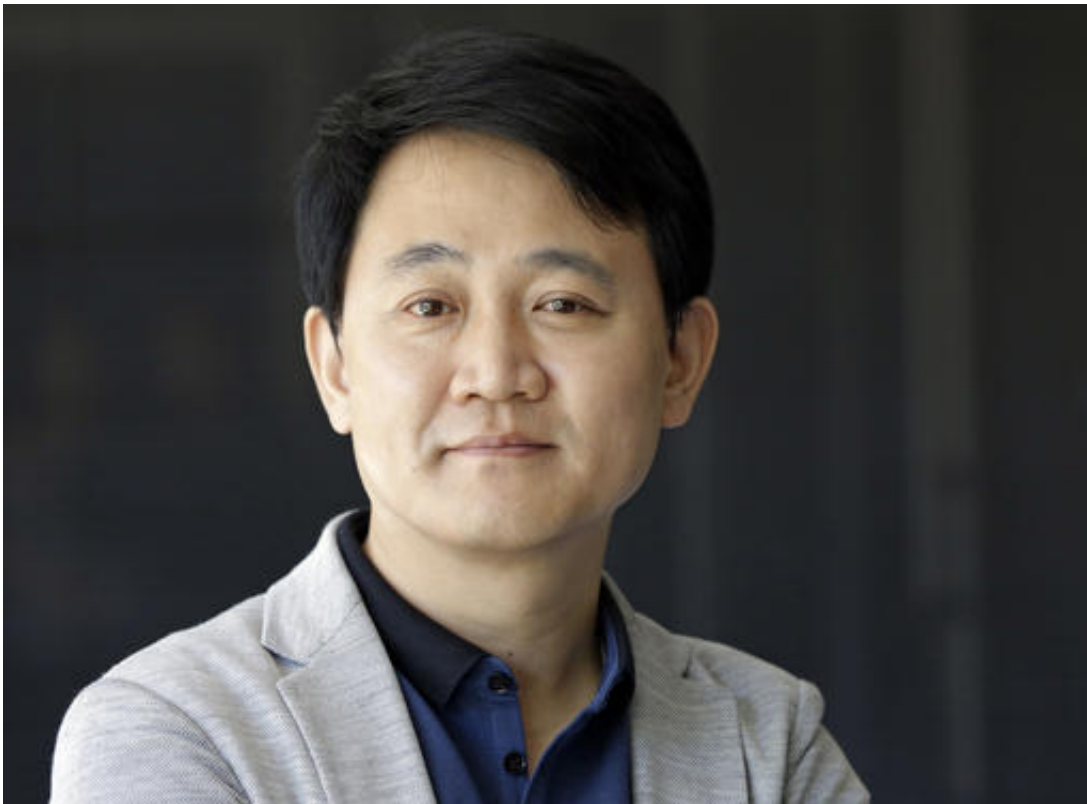


Q&A: Netmarble founder Bang on US mobile game opportunities

August 1 2016, by Ryan Nakashima



This June 16, 2016 photo shows NetMarble chairman and founder Jun Hyuk Bang in Los Angeles. Bang founded Netmarble Games in 2000 and has grown it into a powerhouse mobile gaming company with nearly \$1 billion in annual revenue. Its game, "Seven Knights," has broken into Japan's list of top 10 mobile games. (AP Photo/Reed Saxon)

Jun Hyuk Bang founded Netmarble Games in 2000 and has grown it into

a powerhouse mobile gaming company with nearly \$1 billion in annual revenue. Its game, "Seven Knights," has broken into Japan's list of top 10 mobile games.

Now, the South Korean company has designs on the U.S. Last year, it invested \$130 million in the California company SGN Games, becoming its largest shareholder. Netmarble plans an [initial public offering](#) of stock in the upcoming year, possibly in the U.S.

Bang spoke with The Associated Press recently through a translator on why the U.S. is important and what's next for mobile gaming. Questions and answers have been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Why is it important to get into the U.S.?

A: When we talk about [mobile games](#), the U.S. [market](#) by itself is smaller than what it is in Japan and China. But it has a huge influence in all of the English-speaking countries and in Europe. When we think about the influence, this is actually the biggest market we could consider.

Q: Which companies do you admire for what they're doing in the U.S.?

A: Supercell (Finnish maker of "Clash of Clans"), King (Swedish maker of "Candy Crush") and Machine Zone (Palo Alto, California-based maker of "Game of War") have done really well. We have great respect for what they did.

Netmarble has a totally different strength. We have a huge strength in role-playing games. We feel that the RPG genre is not really as strong in the U.S. market as they are in Asia. We want to utilize this opportunity.

Q: What is the timing for an IPO or any further acquisitions of gaming companies in the U.S.?

A: In terms of the IPO, we're expecting the end of this year to early next year. It hasn't been fully decided but that's the time frame we see. As for the investment and acquisition opportunities, we're actively looking.

Q: Why pursue an acquisition to get into the market instead of trying to get into a business on your own?

A: We have our strength clearly in RPG. We have a lot of experience there. But there are genres and games that we're not really strong at. For example, casual puzzle games. We partnered up with SGN and we invested in them because they're specialists in those games. One of the reasons for doing an acquisition is because when you partner up with someone with the specialty, it's always good for your competitiveness.

Q: How would you characterize the U.S. gaming market?

A: The U.S. mobile gaming market is still on the rise, and it's more casual than hardcore. We could offer them more of our games. We feel U.S. players are learning more about mobile games and getting better at it. They have a better understanding now, so Netmarble has a good opportunity.

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