

Lost and Hound: Video games for the vision impaired

June 6 2019, by Megan Pusey

How do you play a game when you can't see the world around you? A WA game might have the answer.

Making entertainment accessible to as many [people](#) as possible can be challenging, especially for video games which rely heavily on visuals.

The International Game Developers Association estimates [10 to 20% of people](#) don't play video games because of a disability.

The concept of creating a [video game](#) for blind people might seem unusual, but the idea is being embraced by [game designers](#) including West Aussie indie game developer Brian Fairbanks.

Brian's rescue dog adventure game [Lost and Hound](#) is fully accessible for visually impaired people.

As tracking dog Biscuit, the player follows an audio trail that reflects a dog's powerful sense of hearing to complete a [rescue mission](#).

Each level draws inspiration from real-life search and rescue dog situations, such as sniffing out survivors in rubble after earthquakes and in collapsed mines.

Even a scent trail is represented through a low, pleasing hum.

Accessibility awareness

Brian's aim was to create a video game that was accessible to the blind gaming community but visually appealing enough to entertain mainstream gamers.

He believes it's important to make video games more accessible.

"[Vision impaired people] are the only segment of society that we as game developers have done such a terrible job at trying to meet their needs," Brian says.

"They've literally gone off and made their own genre called audio games."

Brian says accessibility is often an afterthought at the end of the production process.

"You don't make a game and then say what can I do for people with a cognitive impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment?" he says.

"You need to start [with accessibility in mind] at the very beginning."

How does it work?

Lost and Hound looks like a regular game, but if you play with headphones, you can complete the levels using audio alone.

Brian says vision impaired players are better at the game than sighted players.

"[Sighted people] don't use sound to inform their decisions, it's more reactionary ... but blind people do all the time so they're much better at

the game," he says.

"When you think about how much information can be transmitted through sound alone, the breadth of what you can do is incredible."

Showcasing WA gaming innovation

Lost and Hound's unique gameplay earned Brian a [travel grant from the WA Government](#) as part of a new International Access Pass program.

The program helps connect WA game developers with key players in the global industry and covers travel to major games industry conferences.

Brian used his International Access Pass to show Lost and Hound at the PAX East gaming festival in Boston, Massachusetts, in March.

Lost and Hound gained new fans at the 4-day expo with over 200 players giving it a go.

Barking up the right tree

Brian is also part of a tech startup game studio, [Ebon Sky Studios](#), which is developing a custom game engine software that enables [blind people](#) to create their own video games.

"We're creating a framework so people who are blind can make games without code," he says.

"Nobody else in the world is doing this as far as I know."

Vision impaired users will be able to create [video](#) games using voice control to select options from a series of audio menus (such as "brick

house") to create a [game](#) world.

Lost and Hound is [coming to Steam](#) later this year.

For more accessibility resources, see [Able Gamers](#) and [Audiogames.net](#).

This article first appeared on [Particle](#), a science news website based at Scitech, Perth, Australia. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by Particle

Citation: Lost and Hound: Video games for the vision impaired (2019, June 6) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-lost-hound-video-games-vision.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--