

MAIDMARIAN.COM

Indie player

Independent game developer embraces Adobe® Director® and Shockwave® Player to deliver 3D games online—challenging marketers to a test of strategy

In the world of interactive game publishing, success can be hard to come by unless you have deep pockets. And, the boutique massive multiplayer online (MMO) interactive game niche is just about the toughest market to crack, particularly for programmers working on their own.

Independent game developer Gene Endrody, a likely inspiration to solo programmers everywhere, figuratively and literally quit his day job and, against all odds, hit the jackpot in the massive multiplayer online gaming (MMOG) space. By following his dreams and using Adobe technology to make them come true, Endrody now heads up Maid Marian Entertainment, a company that produces Sherwood Dungeon, one of the world's most popular 3D, browser-based MMOG done in Shockwave.





Sherwood Dungeon creator, Gene Endrody, uses Adobe technology including Adobe Director, Shockwave Player, and Photoshop CS to create and continually update the popular 3D, browser-based massive multi-player online game.



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Gene Endrody,
CEO,
Maid Marian Entertainment

Maid Marian Entertainment Inc. is a leading developer of next generation web-based games specializing in community oriented multiplayer games. Immersive 3D virtual worlds, where players explore and interact with other players around the globe, are delivered to any web browser. By clicking on a link, without any retail box to purchase, total user engagement is at hand.

“What I do is build massive multiplayer games that deliver an experience close to that of a traditional retail game—but that you play right in your web browser,” says Endrody. “Adobe Director software and Shockwave Player made it possible for a small independent company like mine to distribute games without jumping through retail hoops or competing with the larger console game publishers.” Endrody’s story is truly a David vs. Goliath fantasy

about one person who starts something in his basement and, on his own terms, turns it into something big.

MaidMarian.com attracts over 1.3 million unique visitors a month with up to 4,000 simultaneous players at a time logged into the multiplayer games. The lion’s share of visitors play Sherwood Dungeon, a multiplayer game which Endrody views as somewhat of an ongoing experiment where he continuously tests new ideas as well as the creative possibilities that Director software and Shockwave Player afford. Sherwood Dungeon is a free 3D fantasy world where thousands of players come together to defend their honor in combat and join a community of like-minded participants.

Delivering the third dimension

With limited programming experience under his belt, Endrody got excited about working in Director software when 3D capabilities were included in a release. Now, he models and animates characters in his 3D modeling tool of choice— Autodesk Maya software—and imports the 3D art into Director. Using Director, he triggers the appropriate animation based on the game logic and is always mindful of file size, so the characters can walk, fight, and perform other game heroics. Texture maps for the 3D models, icons, and other user interface elements for the games are generated using Adobe Photoshop®.



Gene Endrody imports his 3D art into Adobe Director and triggers the appropriate character animation—walking or fighting—based on the logic of the game. Adobe Photoshop generates texture maps for the 3D models, icons, and other user interface elements for the game.

By nature, web games are limiting because of download size—which isn't necessarily a bad thing for an independent developer because it effectively levels the playing field between the big players and the ankle biters. "Having an army of artists and vast cash reserves doesn't give a large developer much of an advantage when the game needs to be small enough to run within a web browser," says Endrody.

"I love Adobe Director. There's no other product that can deliver hardware accelerated 3D multiplayer games to a large installed base of users on a web page," says Endrody. The potential for web-delivered boutique MMOs is huge, according to Endrody. For him, the vision of players clicking on one web link and instantly entering a fantasy world of knights and castles, where players from all over the world can hang out and slay dragons together, is what keeps him creating immersive game worlds.

Fantasy come true

During an interview, Endrody discloses that he is a card carrying, fantasy fan who played *Dungeon & Dragons* as a teenager, read fantasy novels, and made a few attempts at writing medieval adventure games on his Commodore 64. Back in 1996, he reserved the MaidMarian URL with a vague notion that working in the public domain would

be a good strategy for a small independent developer. "In fact, MaidMarian.com has always allowed me to make a living with one foot in a fantasy world, thanks to Director and Shockwave Player," says Endrody.

Shockwave Player, according to Endrody, is the most popular way of delivering games online, and for good reason. Other delivery mechanisms do not provide a satisfying 3D experience, cannot deliver the capabilities required for full scale massive multiplayer gaming, and do not have adequate installed bases to engage players instantly sans barriers. "If someone has ever played a Shockwave game before, odds are that they will be able to play mine." Maid Marian Entertainment has four game servers running the Shockwave Multiuser Server under Microsoft® Windows Server® 2003 on the back end, which handle and relay all information about how one player is using the game to all other players in the vicinity.

Despite Endrody's organic programming style, the basic Director architecture of Sherwood Dungeon's game code has evolved to become quite robust. "Often by doing creative things to the underlying systems, new features become not only possible, but also fast and elegant—much better than using brute force to shoehorn new features into a game," he says.

Company

Maid Marian Entertainment

Vancouver, B.C.

www.maidmarian.com

Challenges

- Remain an independent yet profitable developer
- Revolutionize the way massive multiplayer games are developed and delivered

Solution

- Web-based massive, 3D multiplayer games built with Adobe Director software
- High impact game experience deployed online ubiquitously via Shockwave Player

Benefits

- Delivered web-based game with nearly similar impact of traditional boxed product games
- Retained small file size for fast download
- Provided one-click game entry with no additional downloads or installs
- Remained small, independent, and profitable
- Benchmarked 4,000 simultaneous users and 1.3 million unique monthly visitors
- Established successful viral marketing model with high click-through rates

Toolkit

- Adobe Director
- Adobe Shockwave Player
- Adobe Photoshop CS
- Autodesk Maya Version 7.0 software
- PC running Microsoft Windows® XP



Adobe Director and Shockwave Player make it possible for small independent companies like Maid Marian Entertainment to create and distribute games successfully.

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Simple commercialization

Aligned with Endrody's belief in keeping things simple, Maid Marian Entertainment has succeeded in making money without much of a formal sales or marketing mechanism. The advertising revenue model is "quite viral," says Endrody. "Anyone who wants to can put the game on their web site." With 10 million ad impressions a month and some of the highest click through percentages of any online content, the revenue model is very successful.

Web games have an uncanny ability to market themselves virally through blogs, portals, e-mail, forums, instant messenger, and social networks. Anyone who can provide a link and say, "Try this cool game," becomes a distribution partner. Players can go from discovering the game exists to playing it in literally 20 seconds. Sherwood Dungeon and MaidMarian.com are designed

to get players into the game quickly with an absolute minimum number of mouse clicks. "The trick is not to mess that up," says Endrody.

For Endrody, the combination of the viral distribution and ad-based revenue model is a winner. Once Sherwood Dungeon hit 4,000 simultaneous players, it was clear that MaidMarian.com would be very successful on ad revenue alone. "Whether developers like to admit it or not, the way a game makes money is a major influence on its design," he adds.

In true community fashion, where feedback from Sherwood Dungeon users greatly influences how the game evolves, Endrody sees himself continuing to leverage Director and Shockwave Player to stay small, independent, and profitable. His belief in Director as a viable development platform for 3D web gaming, and his comfort level with the software, are second only to his sense of attachment to the Director developer community. "In all, I have confidence that Adobe products will enable me to continue to revolutionize the way massive multiplayer games are delivered and stay at the top of my game (no pun intended) for the foreseeable future," he says.



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