



Case study

Bringing new ideas to reality faster

How Unity's flexible tools for rapid iterations help
pressure-test game concepts at Gameloft

“Going through so many ideas, being able to one day do a basketball game and the next a shooter in space, and being able to do that at the scale of a company like Gameloft – I don’t know of a better tool than Unity to do that.”

– Renaud Forestié, Director of Gameplay, Gameloft Montreal



GAMELOFT: A UNITY DEVELOPER CASE STUDY

The challenge

Quickly testing game concepts and their technical feasibility at scale

Platforms

iOS and Android

Company size

Over 4,600 employees worldwide

Location

Montreal, Canada

How do you put cool game ideas into production fast, turning a creative spark into a foundry? As Gameloft Montreal's Director of Gameplay, Renaud Forestié developed a distinctive process for quickly finding and pressure-testing game ideas. The approach Forestié established assembles a small team who explore concepts by quickly producing tangible, working versions of games that stakeholders can play and evaluate. By quickly bringing multiple game concepts to life using Unity, this system lets the best ideas rise to the top for final development, publishing, and marketing.

Started in 1999 by a cofounder of Ubisoft, Gameloft has grown from developing games for Java- and Brew-enabled handsets to being a major mobile game provider with over 2.5 million daily downloads. Their studios span six continents, and their hundreds of well-known titles range from *Asphalt*, *Dungeon Hunter*, and *Modern Combat* to the tycoon hit *Disney Magic Kingdoms*.



Flexible tools to test and develop playable games

Like a movie production, game development starts with a pitch. Testing teams and producers listen to a number of game ideas from designers (called “vision holders” at Gameloft), select the most promising projects, and assign resources to them. According to Forestié, his team would “allocate somewhere between one and three weeks per project, and for each project, we create several iterations.” The team would often have something playable by the end of the first day and something testable by the end of the first week.

In just one year, Forestié’s team completed over 30 projects with between one and five builds each. Of these, twelve were greenlit for production. “To maintain this level of output,” he explains, “we need Unity, and that’s why we use it for all our projects.”

“We try to create substantial builds that will give us ‘Wow, that’s interesting!’ reactions, where we can get objective data like user retention and how many times people launch the game. We put them into the hands of players really fast.”

— Renaud Forestié, Montreal’s Director of Gameplay, Gameloft

The results:

- Highly functional initial builds for player testing
- Fast understanding of a game’s technical viability
- A toolset and environment that ensure that weak ideas fail fast
- A steady stream of tested, production-ready game concepts

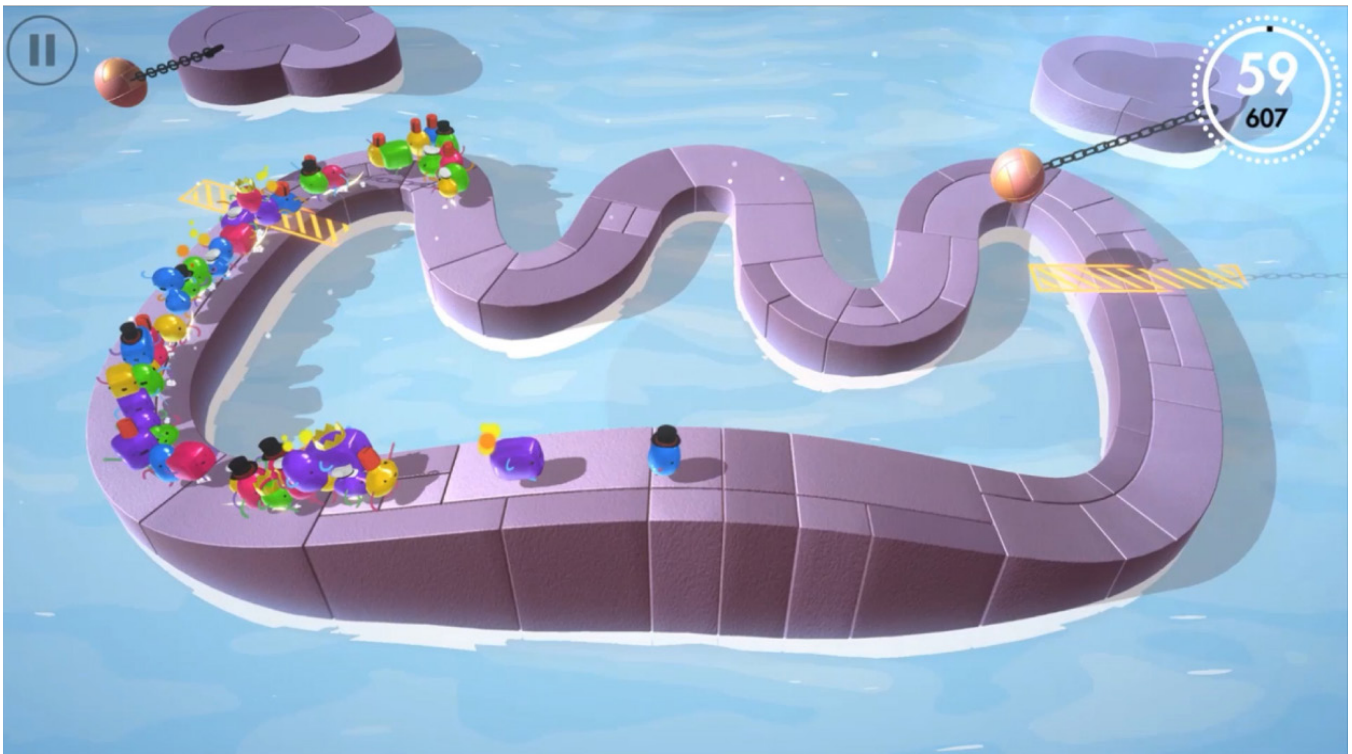
Rapid game design and iterations

Putting player experience first

“Growing up, I loved playing with Lego®, video games, and did a lot of drawing,” Forestié says. “Now I’m combining these interests – designing basic game elements, assembling ‘building blocks’ with Unity and making games.”

His UX experience strongly influences his approach to game development, keeping him focused on the player. That’s one of the reasons why his approach to vetting game concepts puts so much effort into creating builds with an authentic game feel. “We want to build for the player first, and if a player has a good experience, then chances are we’ll get good retention and good numbers.”

He acknowledges that rapid game iteration isn’t for everyone. Most projects don’t move beyond initial evaluations, and that can be disappointing. However, good ones do make it through. He adds, “With experimentation, sometimes there’s serendipity – finding out things that we just didn’t know or expect. That’s really fun.”



50 Buddies was created in just six days, from ideation to release.

Guerilla testing on the subway

When Forestié arrived at Gameloft, his goal was to get ideas into testable form quickly. “We needed a tool that would let us move fast, and I don’t know of a better tool than Unity to do that,” he explains. “At the same time, we want to make the game concept really appealing, so it’s not like your standard prototype where it’s just programmer art and only used internally. We want a certain level of ‘juice.’”

In addition to internal reviews, Forestié literally takes the games he’s working on to the streets. “I do guerilla testing where I’ll give people in the subway a phone and hope they don’t run away with it,” he jokes. “I’ll watch how they play the game and study their faces.” It’s not formal playtesting, but this system gives developers a valuable first impression. Quick feedback, combined with extensive experience, guides the teams that Forestié manages to either push for further development or conclude that the idea isn’t strong enough and start again.



With Unity Forestié was able to build the prototype for this game by himself, in a single day.

Adding instant “game feel”

To deploy Forestié’s testing system, his team maintains its own feedback library, based on Unity’s native API, so that with the click of a few checkboxes they can trigger particles and screen shakes, chromatic aberrations, freeze frames, and timeline modifications, which lets them easily create a strong game feel. Forestié defines

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“game feel” as all the visual and audio feedback that the game uses to tell a player that something happened. “Let’s say I press the trigger button, my gun shoots and I see a muzzle flash, hear the boom, and the scene recoils. I see and feel all of that, which tells me I shot the gun.” Forestié believes that these extra effects make the player feel rewarded, and that’s what makes a game fun.

He also considers game jams a great place for testing, and at most game jams, Unity is the development tool of choice. “What I love about game jams is when players do Let’s Play on YouTube. I get to see people I’ve never met, that I’ve never connected with, play the game and say, ‘Oh, I think I should go through this door, I should pick this power up.’ For me, that is really cool.

A deep toolbox and highly supportive cast

The Unity Asset Store has been an important prototyping resource for Forestié’s team, offering everything from characters, environments, and music to billing add-ons and localization tools. “Whenever we need something off-the-shelf, it’s probably for sale or available for free in the Asset Store,” says Forestié. For example, Cinemachine, which is free, is a unified, procedural system for in-game cameras that can cinematically track and compose a defined target.

“Cinemachine is an asset I use a lot and that I love. It really helps with all our camera stuff, having a zoom, having a screen shake, just the ‘noise’ that you get natively with Cinemachine is amazing.” ProBuilder – which was initially on the Asset Store but has been a built-in Unity platform feature since 2018 – is a key asset that can be used for 3D modeling when testing a game concept.

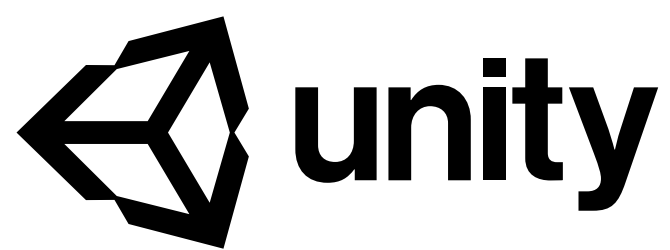
Another vital resource is the Unity developer community. “When we’re stuck with something difficult, I know someone else in the world has solved this problem, and I just have to Google it.” Forestié also says that he



This rapid prototype was created in seven days, starting first with movement, then testing AI, and finally gameplay abilities.

spends a lot of time on Twitter. “People share amazing Unity tips and tricks there, so I’d say it’s one of my first sources of information.” He often points other developers to the Learn section of the Unity website, and with new releases, goes to the tutorials. “That’s where I learned most of what I know,” he explains.

Finally, with its ability to quickly publish to virtually any platform, an innovative and diverse feature set, and the ease with which teams can collaborate, Unity became the go-to development tool for Forestié and the game-designers he’s worked with at Gameloft.



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