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Innovative mobile phone game gets gamers out into the real world



Written by Tony Malkovic Monday, 10 December 2007

PEOPLE in and around Perth got a real-life insight into the next generation of digital games recently, with the help of their mobile phones – and a pair of walking shoes.

People taking part in the newly developed Ghost Town game used their phones to explore central Perth for special stickers to help them solve puzzles and unravel a mysterious storyline.

According to David Fono, one of its developers, Ghost Town is an example of what's known as a 'locative' or 'pervasive' game.

"What that means is that it takes the game play out of the simulated environment and puts it into the real world," he says.

"What you do is play it in the real world and you use your technology and devices to interact with it, as opposed to video games where you play in a virtual world."

The game was hosted as part of the inaugural Byte Me! Festival held in Perth (www.byteme.net.au). The festival showcased the work of digital content makers in such areas such as the web, TV, movies, mobile phones and the gaming industry.

To take part in Ghost Town, players required a mobile phone with Bluetooth and MP3 capabilities.

"You're looking for physical objects around town, and when you find those, you get things like SMSs sent to you, as well as voice calls or images sent to you over Bluetooth, and MP3," says Mr Fono.

"And all those media fragments come together to both tell a story and also present a variety of puzzles that you need to solve using information from your environment."

Pervasive games such as Ghost Town have been played in cities such as New York, London, and Amsterdam.

Mr Fono also ran a similar game in Toronto last year. Torgame was designed to use a mix of mobile technology to allow people to interact with the real world, in this case, to enliven public space and help build a sense of community.

"Australia is quite good in terms of the features you have on most mobile phones. Most people in Canada have more basic phones," says Mr Fono.

He moved to Perth from Canada and he and a partner have since set up their own company, Giant Dice, to be part of the State's burgeoning digital gaming industry.

Although pervasive games rely heavily on technology, he says such games are about moving people away from computer screens to the streets.

"Pervasive games are games that lead into the everyday world," he says.

"We're not specifically about mobile technology, but what is great about mobile technology is that you've got the capacity to produce compelling experiences in the real world."



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Written by [Wendy White](#), on 11-12-2007 09:02

I played this game with a few friends last week, and it was absolutely brilliant! We spent three hours on it, but unfortunately had to call it quits before we could finish.

Not only does it get you outdoors, but working in a team. While Ghost Town could have been played alone, having others with you to work through the puzzles and kick you out of a lateral-thinking-loop when you were stuck was a lot of help.

We also learned a lot about the Perth Town Hall as part of the game...

We could have done without the sound files and the phonecalls (which were sometimes tricky to hear perfectly) and just happily communicated with their server via smses and images.

Part of solving one of the puzzles in the game required you to buy a particular beverage from a Perth cafe, which seems like a good sponsorship deal to me ;)

I would love to see more games like this around. Looking forward to further developments from Giant Dice!

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