

Sheridan and CSE Games:

Popular board game goes mobile



Fabio Del Rio, President, CSE Games

A Burlington-based game company was looking to roll the dice and have its popular board game recreated in a digital platform for smartphones and iPads.

CSE Games wanted to develop a mobile version of its award-winning board game Gridstones. This abstract strategy and visualization game is easy to learn, thought-provoking and though it's designed for children seven years and older, adults also enjoy it.

The board game involves players adding and removing stones from a grid to create patterns that match patterns on accompanying playing cards. The first player to get rid of all their cards wins.

Though fairly simple in design, company president Fabio Del Rio didn't have the programming expertise to move this game from a board to a screen. "We have a business background, not a programming background," said Fabio. "To us, this was brand new territory."

To bring a mobile version to life, CSE Games made the right move by forming a partnership with Sheridan College and FedDev Ontario's (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario) Applied Research and Commercialization (ARC) Extension initiative.

The ARC initiative matches small- to medium-sized companies with Sheridan faculty and students to conduct applied research, development and innovation activities that help companies become more productive, competitive and ultimately create jobs. (Funding of up to \$100,000 is matched by a 50% cash or in-kind contribution by the participating company.)

Two student-programmers from Sheridan's Faculty of Applied Sciences and Technology (FAST) joined Fabio over the summer of 2012. Though they worked through the hot summer months, the energetic students worked as though it was the first week of classes.

"I was really impressed right from the get-go," said Fabio. "I was extremely impressed by how quickly they grasped the strengths of the game and how quickly they had the first working prototype. I was also impressed with the way the team solved problems, always keeping the user experience in mind," he added.

Fabio was also pleased with how the student's energy and enthusiasm were paired with the solid experience of Sheridan Project Manager, Patrick McKenna and FAST professor, Kevin Forest, who oversaw the students' work.

Patrick helped the students take Gridstones in new directions, such as devising a way of playing the game as a single player, creating different difficulty levels and other features.

"It was really quite eye-opening how motivating this practical yet fun project was for the students," said Patrick. "They were really self-motivated and invested in this."

Thanks to their efforts, CSE Games now has a quality working prototype that the company is tweaking with adjustments such as additional graphical elements, animations and sound effects. At the same time, Fabio and his team are developing a marketing and business plan to give this game targeted exposure, giving it the best chance to succeed in the very competitive mobile game market.

Fabio intends to launch Gridstones in early 2013 and hopes the mobile version will spark increased interest in the board game, and vice versa.

"When you compare our mobile Gridstones game to other popular abstract strategy mobile board games, it definitely has the look and feel of a game created by a major studio," said Fabio.

"I had heard there was great talent at Sheridan, and many of the top designers at game and animation studios are Sheridan grads. This is indeed the case!" – Fabio Del Rio, President, CSE Games