



KaukomieliConsulting

**The Concept Plan for an online game
product,
case: In Spirit of Kalevala**

For a start

In this concept plan we are going to explore the ways to make an online game product that is based on Kalevala story. Besides that we are giving the brief instructions how to create the sense of community in online game.

The aim of this concept plan is to give the guidelines to design and production of the game product.

At first there's a discussion of how to create and maintain the community among the users or clients. The sense of community is considered a key issue of online games. The community should give an added value to the game and it is the way to make relationship between the player and the game.

We'll give a brief introduction of the communities have been made in different kind of game product. The focus will be in so called MMPORPG (Massive MultiPlayer Online Role Playing Game) games. The games to be featured are Ultima Online, EverQuest, EVE Online and Counter-Strike.

After the description the games we'll analyze the business logics of online games. In overall logics could be divided in to the two categories: the players pay for the game or playing or both. An example of this is Habbo Hotel made by Finnish company Sulake Labs Ltd.

Then we'll make an audition of Kalevala and "In Spirit of Kalevala" brand and focus how the brand should be taken within the game designing. There could be used at least two different approaches to Kalevala game: game could base very strict to the story or quite loosely. Latter means that the plot of the story can be translated in to the future. At the end we are giving a number of suggestions for action.

Communities in game products

The sense of community is a strong trend in game industry. Internet has made it possible to create different kind of online and virtual communities and these communities have a certain level of applicability in various ranges of businesses. The community could be born within shared interest (as a hobby), social relationships (kinship) or shared experience (e.g. game product).

It has been predicted that online gaming and other entertainment applications are growing trend because of the spread of broadband connections at homes. Online gaming is expected to be the next “killer application”.

But it should be emphasized that mere social relationships create the sense of community. Virtual communities are made of set of four different aspects that are:

- 1) users
- 2) common purpose
- 3) codes of action
- 4) technological systems

In this concept plan we focus on common purpose or goal that is shared within online community. In computer games there should be a specific object that makes the players act in a specific way.

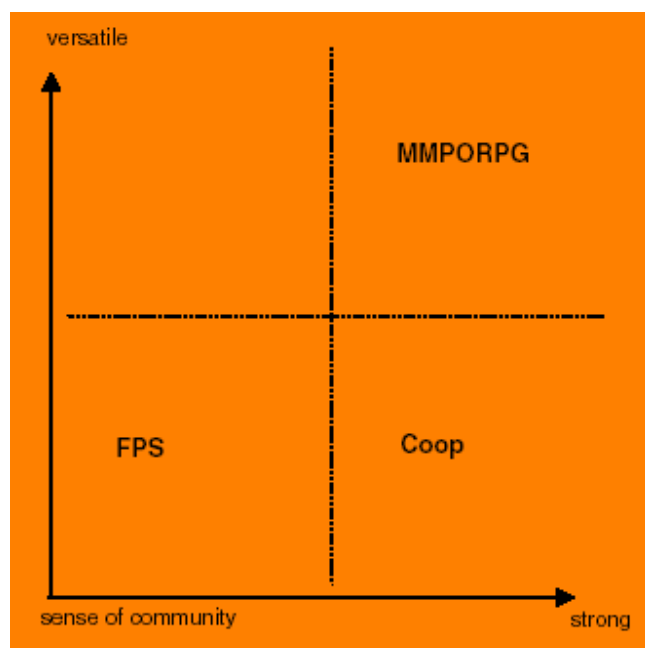
The sense of community in online games

The community for its own sake isn't enough in computer games. The community should have a function in game that motivates the players to act in a certain way. In so-called MMPORPG (Massive MultiPlayer Online Role Playing Game) games the sense of community is a vital part of the experience.

Multiplayer online role-playing games could gather several thousands of people all around the world together. A player creates a figure (or avatar) that is used to play the game among the other players (or avatars) in a virtual world. The games have no clear ending and players' aim is to develop their avatar and accomplish different kind of tasks and objectives.

The community in game product is a means and added value:

- cooperation is essential to accomplish the game (“united we stand”)
- the community is to create certain feeling (player is aware that other players are real players not computer guided / game is played with friends)
- the community is to help player to success (you are doing better if you cooperate with other characters).



The community is growing added value to the game. The fans could produce extra material to the game (fan sites, fanzines, modifications or report bugs in a game). This activity could be used in product development. The players are able to comment or make improvements in game product by an open forum. By this forum the producers are able to gain new ideas for the users e.g. players

The codes of community

The game genre is important factor that influence the level and versatility of codes of community in the game. In MMORPG games the sense of community is very strong and comprehensive. During the game the player is able to change his/hers role and interaction between the players is a key to accomplish the game.

The examples of these kinds of role playing games are Ultima Online and EVE Online. Furthermore the Finnish Habbo Hotel could be placed to this category even it's not a pure game product.

In most of so-called cooperation (coop) games teamwork is the only way to accomplish the game. The sense of community is very strong but the roles between the players are very strict. In coop game the player has its own role that he/she plays. The examples of this kind of games are Counter Strike, Battlefield and Battlefield war games. The player is a part of team that constitutes of different kind of expertise.

These kinds of games are based very strongly on reality (on or historical events or so). So-called First Person Shooting games (FPS) are more individualistic type of online games. In these type of games the sense of community doesn't bring added value, it's just a nice thing that has a little effect to the game.

How to maintain the sense of community?

It is widely agreed the community should have a shared goal or object that brings people together to form a team. The technology or game product should be considered just as a medium. The players are the ones that form the community.

PRG. Online role playing games are based on communal playing. Ultima Online is an example of game product that has a strong sense of community. In Ultima Online the players should accomplish different kind of tasks with other players. The player should use multiple roles (to perform as a merchant or a ranger) to succeed.

Coop. Co-operation games the player is a part of the team. Teamwork is the only condition to play the game. Coop games are most usually war games so they are based on reality or on real historical events. Examples of Coop games are Battlefield, Battlefield and Counter Strike. Leadership skills and the handling of players' role in the game are essential. By these Coop games the players are formed the clans where certain players has specialized themselves in specific role, e.g. a scout or a sniper.

FPS. First Person Shooting games are usually action games and the team working and the sense of community is very weak. If there's the community it is just virtual arena for represent player's own status or achievements. For instance in FPS game called Diablo the player isn't able to see other players.

In this type of games there's usually the "best players" category, and by this the player is able to show his/hers achievements and armament. The most advanced players have weaponry that lower level players don't have.

The community is just additional feature (Diablo)

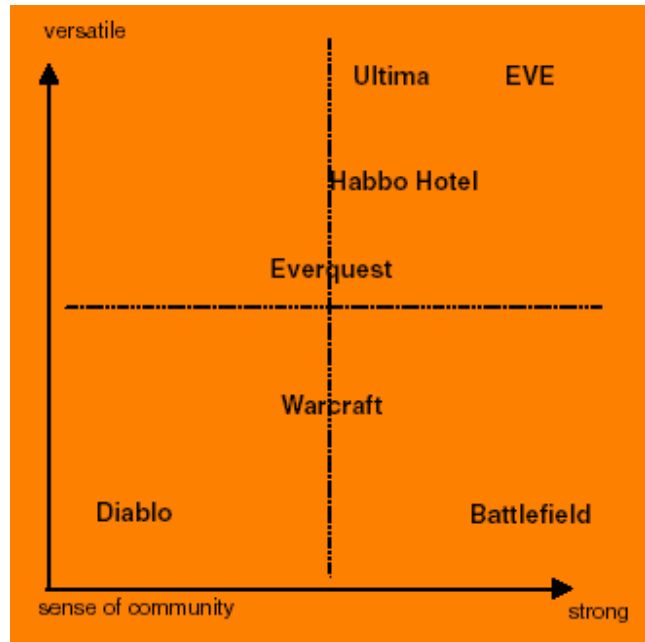
You don't manage without your team

(Battlefield, Counter Strike)

The Community strengthen the playability (Warcraft and EverQuest)

The community is the key to success

(EVE Online and Ultima Online)



The brief introduction of the games

In this section we are going to introduce four different game genres by the examples. These four examples are Ultima Online, EverQuest, EVE Online and Counter Strike.

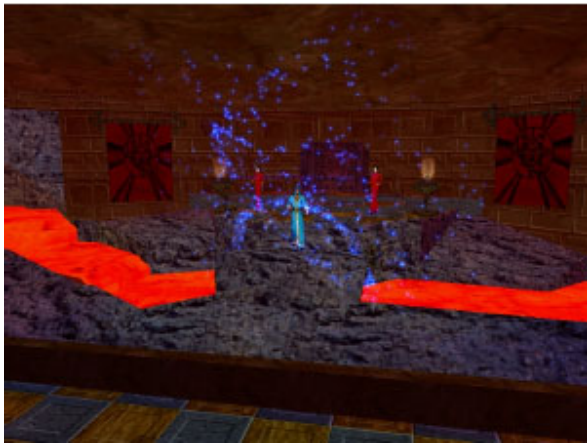
Ultima Online is often considered the first popular multiplayer role-playing computer game. Ultima Online is based on older Ultima series released in early 1980's by Richard Garriot. When Ultima Online was published in 1997 it was the first role-playing online computer game with graphic interface with the monthly fee. The game is online-only and played by thousands of simultaneous users on various game servers.



The emphasis of the game is more on community and virtual living than in traditional gaming. Ultima is more the place to perform a certain role than to play a game. The player has to play more conventional characters as a fisherman, carpenter or merchant instead of magician or knight.

Ultima is more like massive virtual community (that has a certain level of game options) than traditional role-playing game. Since Ultima's heyday in the early 2000's, overall subscriber turnout is dropping. EverQuest surpassed the number of subscribers achieved by Ultima Online in 1999.

EverQuest is a fantasy multiplayer online role-playing game released in 1999 by Sony Online Entertainment. EverQuest is based on more traditional fantasy world as Ultima.



The world of EverQuest players explores a Tolkienesque fantasy world of sword and sorcery. The game is played from FPS point-of-view in 3D environment, and the emphasis is more on action and adventure than in Ultima Online.

While some parts of EverQuest can be played alone, without the help of other players, the game generally remains a very group-centric game. A single character will be unable to complete many of the encounters in EverQuest. Most parts of the game can be complete with small groups of up to five or six people, but the most challenging and rewarding encounters require the cooperation of many players, sometimes even several guilds, totalling more than 100 players.



EVE Online is a persistent world multiplayer online game set in space. Icelandic CCP Games developed EVE and it was published May 2003. EVE Online is famed its rich and deep storyline and outstanding graphics.

EVE is set in a world of galactic magnitude, governed by a hyper capitalistic economy. The aim of the player is in commerce. The game is set in space far away from Planet Earth. In game there's five major empires that hold between the balance of power in the world of EVE.

EVE is different from many other MMORPG games, as it doesn't have a "level" system in which the player's character gains experience by completing tasks. This avoids the problem that exists in many other MMORPGs. The more experienced gamers have a huge advantage over everyone else.

Furthermore all the players are on the same servers and therefore same game-world. On February 2005 EVE Online achieved a new record for the maximum number of simultaneous players logged into game, at 13,000 players.

Counter Strike is a first-person shooter (FPS) that pits a team of counter-terrorist against a team of terrorist in rounds of competition won by completing an objective or eliminating the opposing team. The game source engine was developed for Half-Life (another increasingly famous FPS).



Counter Strike is a team-based cooperation game in which players join either the Terrorist or the Counter Terrorists. The player is a part of the team and could specialized himself as a specific task or role in a team.

Counter Strike is nowadays the leading multiplayer FPS in the world. In 2002 there were over 30,000 Counter Strike servers on the Internet, and in 2004 there were frequently over 85,000 players simultaneously playing Counter Strike at any point in time, accounting almost 70% of the online FPS audience.

Business logics in game industry

How to make money of community? Habbo Hotel (developed by Sulake Labs Ltd) is a fine example to the Finnish game and content industry of making money of community.



Habbo Hotel is not a game but more as a chat and communication channel. It is a virtual world that looks like the virtual hotel. There's 2,3 million monthly hotel visitors, average 15 years old. Habbo Hotel has opened its doors in 16 different countries and there's over 18 million Habbo characters created in 5 years time.

The revenue of Habbo Hotel is coming from selling of virtual goods or services. The service is free of charge, but the users have pay with their mobile phone or Internet bank account when they'd like to have a new decoration in their virtual hotel rooms, new clothes to their character, new pet or permission to jump in to swimming pool in front of everyone. The coverage is extremely high because there are no costs of raw material or distribution. Virtual chair costs 3 Habbo credits (51 cents), tapestry of one room 85 cents and virtual jump to the swimming pool 5 cents.

The business logic of game and content industry is based various payments. Usually the logic is constituted of different kind of factors. Business model is not conducted from one distribution channel but in one specific channel can be used several business logics together.

In general level the business logics of game industry can be divided in two parts:

- 1) selling the game product
- 2) selling the opportunity to play

The first logic means that user buys a pc or console game from the store, and if he/she is willing to play online game the player should pay an extra fee. In second logic the producer is selling the limited amount time or the access to the user. The second logic is widely used in massive online role-playing games and in cross-media games.

The third model is so called pay per play browser logic that is widely used in online gambling.

The business logics of online role-playing games described earlier are focused in these two business models or the last model. Traditional model on communal online games is that at first player buys a game from store and later order the access to online game forum.

At the beginning some of the online games are free of charge. Later the player is able to buy extra features. Habbo Hotel is an excellent example of this kind of logic.

Habbo Hotel is not a game product even if in Finnish version there are a few rather primitive games. It is more essential that users decorates their flats and their characters and communicate with other users. Central comprehension in Habbo Hotel is that the users create the content, and are willing to pay of that, too!

The critical question of communal game product is that by which means the users are motivated to pay using the product and to create content in product.

How to strengthen the sense of community?

How it is able to strengthen the sense of community in online service. To form online community there are four steps:

1) Publication level

In the first stage online service is made just to inform the clients. The role of the website is very close to traditional mass communication, the information is spread in "from one to many" basis. The aim in this first stage is to generate and motivate users to become clients.

2) Interaction level

The functionality of online service is deepened with interactive content. Interactive content means very simple applications: online store or free email address. Many of added value services costs extra for the client.

3) Transaction level

The aim of this level is to strengthen the relationship between the service and users. The user identification and personalization are used to help the clients to find valid information to their special needs or the client is able to create own character to play the online game. By personalized content the user will be "tied down" to the online service. By this it could be possible to collect monthly fee to maintain the service.

4) Community level

At the final stage there should be a community that is making the content by themselves. Users are using the service to communicate or play with each other, and this will be the content. The goal is to encourage the users to create content that is important to them. This is the way that ensures the content is something that clients and users considers valuable.

The point in these simplified steps is not the content but the needs of the users. Why the clients are using our online service? What kind of needs do they have? By what means we are able to satisfy and exceed their needs?

What does The Kalevala Represent?

The Kalevala represents two fundamental aspects: it was both the product of Lönnrot's work as a scholar and a poet, and a National Romantic adaptation. It was collected at a time, when the Finnish people needed and were, in fact, directly seeking a basis for their emerging feelings of national identity.

The Kalevala has a significant role in determining the Finnish identity and its distinctive features to other nations. There is an idea of an own, unique culture and heroic future. It is hard to understand the Finnish history without the myth of the Kalevala.

The Kalevala is Mythical

The Kalevala is considered to be a historical place, one that was simultaneously shrouded in prehistoric mythology. It is the home of sons of Kaleva, the mythical isthmi, a geographical place, the prehistoric Finland and its prehistoric era before the crusades. What is the Sampo? Were the characters divine or mortal? How about the North of the Kalevala? The Kalevala is highly ambiguous and partly obscure, and it challenges the modern, rational interpretation of the world in many ways.

It is obvious that the Kalevala represents the Finnish identity, folklore, poetry and literature. However, what else does it signify? The table below briefly demonstrates the issues, spirit and phenomena represented in the Kalevala.

The Traditional and Socially Important View	Features and Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cornerstone of the Finnish literature • The Finnish culture • The Finnish Identity (y) • The Finnish History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mysticism (y) • Prehistory (y) • Symbolism • The Finnish origins • Trueness to nature
Format	Content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folklore - Poetry • Folklore - Songs • Lamentation • Chants • Fairytale (y) • Story (y) • Experience (y) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riddle (y) • Love (y) • Heroism (y) • Feat of valour (y) • Sanctity • The North • Force (y)

(y) = Values for Youth

FinSpirit Ltd

“FinSpirit Ltd is a services company founded by small enterprises from Oulu district in February 2001. It is situated in the city centre of Kajaani and has been offering its services since April 1st, 2001. The objective is to assist small and medium enterprises from Oulu district and Northern Finland in exporting their goods. Thus their products are offered in a consolidated way. Specially classified products bear the label "In The Spirit of Kalevala Finland". Our main subject now is the organisation of marketing and sales events in Central Europe.” (www.finspirit.fi)

In The Spirit of Kalevala Finland and the Youth

The values communicated by the brand:

- The Finnish origins
- Trueness to Nature
- Respect towards other people
- High quality
- Ethical aspects
- Responsibility
- Cleanliness
- Genuineness
- Commonplace heroism
- Traditions
- Functionality
- Beauty
- Ergonomics

An Example of an Online Game: Habbo Hotel

The youth aged 12-16 are at a critical age in respect to the development of their identity. They are searching for means of demonstrating their own identity as well as of identifying themselves as a part of a group, a greater entity. Habbo Hotel is an excellent example of this. It offers an opportunity to meet friends, get to know new acquaintances, experience the sense of togetherness outside the boundaries of school or home, and to take part in virtual events (the DJs, celebrities, pop idols etc). Habbo Hotel has a strong connection to the reality.

The values of In the Spirit of Kalevala Finland Related to This Group

- Responsibility
- Genuineness
- Ethical aspects
- Respect towards other people

An Example of an Online Role-Playing Game: EverQuest

Another, a more extensive trend in the online games, such as the EverQuest, features historical adventure. In these games, the individual personality of the player is overpowered by the role of a mythical, heroic character, which develops a variety of skills, such as combat, witchcraft and craftsmanship. This kind of games offers excitement, sense of achievement, and fictive entertainment significantly different from the everyday routines.

The values of In the Spirit of Kalevala Finland Related to This Group

- Heroism
- Traditions
- Trueness to nature
- The Finnish origins

An online game concept based on the Kalevala – modernised or traditional?

The introduction above outlines the basic ideas of the Kalevala. In order to adapt the story to an online game concept, many choices must be considered. One of the most crucial decisions concerns the approach to the Kalevala, i.e. whether to choose a modern or traditional adaptation of the epic. The traditional approach would produce the environment, characters and time of the Kalevala as depicted in the epic. Another possibility is to modernise the content. The modern approach would replicate some features of the original story, such as the characters and their relationships, and an outline of the plot, but present them in a different time.

Johanna Sinisalo’s novel Sankarit (The Heroes) is an example of this: Väinämöinen is a rock star called Rex, Ilmarinen is an IT-specialist named Ile Aerosmith and Lemminkäinen is a decathlonist called Kauko “Mahti” (Mighty) Saarelainen. The Sampo is presented as a computer algorithm.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
The Traditional Adaptation of the <i>Kalevala</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledged - Tested - Finished - Mysticism - The attraction of the prehistoric era 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obscurity - It is a challenge to shorten and speed up the plot - The youth are not attracted to the <i>Kalevala</i> - Much work owing to the status of the <i>Kalevala</i> among the youth
The Modern Adaptation of the <i>Kalevala</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New and modern - Typical features of the present time can be included in the story (for example ‘rap battle’) - No prejudice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Much work, challenging - The lack of credibility - Not tested - May arise suspicion

SWOT-analysis

Kalevala is a mythic story and it is known throughout the world. It has been translated in several languages. Furthermore the characters of the story have a clear identity that could be used in online game.

Oulu’s region is a both strength and weakness. Area is a very plausible because of technological pragmatics and amount of private investors in region. But the area has

concentrated too much on technology. The region has a little content industry and this is a clear weakness on the global scale.

In the game industry there's not much examples and benchmark objects of how to make a game from a book. Usually the games are based on movies, not books. Movies are as a medium very close the game product, so it's a great challenge to transform book to a game.

The opportunities are cross media, technological competencies and networking. Cross media products are considered a great advantage in game products. The Networking different kind of universities (and faculties) and companies is the opportunity. Even if there's not much content industry in the Oulu, there are close relationships to other universities as University of Kajaani, Rovaniemi and Kuopio. Furthermore the networking between universities and companies gives an added value to game product.

One certain threat is delaying. This could be considered the last chance to break out globally. In aboard there has been lots of interest towards the Kalevala saga. Because of lack of intellectual rights, it could be a matter of time when someone else is publishing the game based on Kalevala.

Another threat or challenge is how to make "In Spirit of Kalevala" brand younger. At the moment the target group of "In Spirit of Kalevala" is middle-aged Europeans. Key issue is what kind of values should be addressed with "In Spirit of Kalevala" to much younger audience, without endanger the brand identity of the trademark.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - well-known story - strong story - clear identity - the image of Oulu region 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oulu's technological focus - few objects to benchmarking
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cross media - strong brand - technological capability - networking 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - delaying - no intellectual rights - how to address "In spirit of Kalevala" to the youth

Suggestions for the action

> To model MMORPG games, especially Ultima and EVE Online

The major challenge in Kalevala online game is to motivate players to play other roles than just warrior or ranger. If every player wants to be warrior the plot of the Kalevala will change drastically. The players of the game should realize that to succeed they have to do things that could be considered as dull or boring (to be a merchant, carpenter or so).

> To share the game for free (at the beginning)

The business logic of the game is the key issue. Is game delivered free as Habbo Hotel and all the extra and value added services has a fee? Is there a service based fee or a monthly fee. In first stage when the game is published, the game should be delivered as a free. By this it's possible to gain visibility and recognition among the players and other groups.

On later stage - when there are enough players - there should be a certain monthly fee.

> How to address Tekes?

If there's a need for development fund from Tekes' Fenix Programme, the few issues should be considered:

Well-conducted business plan: What is the business? How to make money? What are the deliverables? Who are the target audience and customers?

Global markets: the end product should be a remarkable in global basis and it should have a worldwide markets (Europe, USA and Asia).

What's the novelty: Tekes is keen on technology-based projects that are creating something new. Is there similar Tekes funded projects going on?

Well-concepted idea: if the game product or an idea of it is conceived well the funding will be much easier. Intangible matters should make tangible. There should be some screenshots of the game, some sketches of characters and worlds.

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