

To: Pierce, Momoda, Kwinn, Rowe, Stern
From: Stark
Subject: Pitfighter Success Analysis

Date: Nov 16, 1990

Attached are each core member's writeups. Please review and we will try to meet to discuss next week, tentatively on Tuesday. Assuming we are able to reach a general consensus, we will then provide a summary to the attendees of the Concept Approval, possibly these writeups, as-is.

- research equal success rates

1) memo stating meeting results
(still want focus)
will proceed w/ initiation

Dates: focus _____
initiation _____

What made Pit-Fighter a success?

Theme/Game Play

Pit-Fighter benefited from staying with a proven theme and improving on it. Until Pit-Fighter, Atari designers avoided making this kind of game because it was morally and/or ethically distasteful in their opinion. History has proven that this theme is not just a flash in the pan. Even though Pit-Fighter didn't introduce dramatically new game play, it got a lot of mileage off the ingredients it did have.

Graphics

In my opinion, the realistic digitized look of the game gave it that special look that separated it from it's competition. Though there have been many fighting games, those that have been successful have introduced something new and unique to the player. The cinematic look of Pit-Fighter was definitely was a draw to players.

Multi-Player

In any game that gets significant play, the more coin slots you've got, the more the game is going to make. Three-players was an important element to the games success.

My suggestions for Pit-Fighter II:

Theme/Game Play

Improved game play needs to be implemented. Though it wasn't necessary for Pit-Fighter, it should be a priority for a sequel. The novelty of Pit-Fighters digitized look probably won't carry the sequel. Attention to new fighting features is a plus. I don't believe that our original three heros are strong enough to build a sequel around. Three distinct new characters with story and personality can be built around them. From this kind of base, sequels and licensing potential could be a reality.

Graphics

The novelty of the graphics will wear off. The jerkiness and blockiness should be improved to give a more polished look. I would recommend that the game move from a static arena environment to a combination of side-scrolling and match scenes.

Hopefully we can add more graphics in the way of scenary and opponents. At least give the same opponent different moves if we have to see him numerous times.

Multi-Player

Effort should be made to accomodate 4-players. If we can make a better game, the sequel should be even better earning than the original. Sure, if the characters are all on the same plane, overcrowding will exist. But, by making side-scrolling areas, multi-tiered playfields can accomodate more characters without much confusion.

From: KIM::PIERCE 16-NOV-1990 11:35:53.94
To: STARK
CC:
Subj: Here it is.

To: Gary Stark
From: Mark Stephen Pierce
Subject: Pit2

What went right with Pit-Fighter

1. Gametype targeted at our core market. 14 year old boys who play fighting games. This is a good idea: Attack your core audience.
2. The Digitized look. This added a new height of realism to the graphics that the kids obviously like. It is like playing TV for the kids. This enable the player to put themselves in the headset of being a powerfull fighter.
3. The game tuning. The game was tuned very aggressively. The players enjoy a challenge. Easier tuning would bore them. While tuning I paid close attention to the successfull competition out there and tried to take the best of all of them.
4. Overall game length (20 min.) was also good. It could be played in one sitting and was therefore digestable unlike some of our games which take 45-60 mins. to finish.
5. Good wave to wave pacing.
6. The grudge matches were players fought each other. This added a temporary change in the flow and goal of the gameplay that was refreshing and exciting.

Things that need to be fixed in "Pit2"

1. Improve "anim-lock" on the moves and objects.
2. More 2 player moves like the death grip.
3. More women. Meaner and harder Big Boss (end guy)
4. More objects that behave realisticly.
5. Better cabinet graphics and handling of them.
6. This should not be a sequel. It should be a new game perhaps with a license.

MSP

In response to the Concept Approval, I have assembled my thoughts on why I think Pitfighter was successful. It would be a mistake to assume our success was due entirely to the design and implementation. Marketing factors played a definite role, but as that is not my expertise, I will elaborate primarily on the implementation aspects.

I believe that Steven Segal movies, bigtime wrestling and Pitfighter all have characteristics in common. They're very uncomplicated (minimal plot, strategy), they appeal directly to the most base emotions, and they're generally NOT appreciated by adults (the exception being little old ladies at wrestling matches). In a sense, these are all examples of VIOLENCE SIMULATORS. Assuming one accepts that categorization, the next task is to ascertain which elements go toward making a successful VIOLENCE SIMULATOR. I would categorize them as follows:

1) Visual: It has to LOOK real. Pitfighter used digitized graphics, certainly a step above the old hand-drawn graphics of Double Dragon. It was also to our advantage when certain characters were thought to be recognizable (Bruce Lee or Claud Van Dam look-alikes).

2) Audio: no less important, it must SOUND real. Again, the sound effects were digitized in Pitfighter. We also exceeded the competition in sheer quantity. Pitfighter had at least four times the number of 'grunt' and 'groans' as Final Fight, etc.

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One contradiction to the 'simulator' theory is the extent to which hits are exaggerated. Like a good Rocky fight scene, all hits appear far more numerous and powerful than an ordinary man could possibly survive - the 'superman' syndrome.

* * * *

3) Touch: Video games appeal to one of the senses not even the movies can communicate - the sense of 'touch'. Although we don't have the luxury of Hard Drivin's forced feedback, the joystick-three button combination is simple and quite effective. Each fighter could be made to perform well over twenty moves (more than any of our competition). The resultant 'hit' could cause any of seven reaction moves by the victim. Even missed punches were acknowledged with unique animation and audio. A key aspect of this feedback is timing - responses must be regular and immediate. I would directly attribute the character Ty's popularity over Buzz or Kato to his responsiveness. His pause after a victory is the shortest of the three.

4) The basics: I believe Pitfighter was careful to adhere to some basic rules of game design:

- easy to learn, hard to master: Pitfighter's rules and controls are very basic. Yet, there's a sufficient number of 'hidden' moves to master to keep the players coming back.

- multiple player: If the design allows, three quarters are always better than one. Four is even better.

- unqualified continues/add-ins: At all possible times, player continuations and add-ins should be allowed.

- tuning: The game must provide a fine resolution of game time tuning, preferably through tables. The Game Options table should utilize these tables.

- doesn't exceed subject's attention span: With our particular player base, we estimate the maximum attention span at 1/2 hour (the length of your average sitcom).

- variety of play: Not only do players compete against the computer (cooperative), but also against each other in grudge matches (competitive). At 14 years old, beating up your buddies is most likely perceived as very 'macho' (ego-forming).

Non-implementation items:

5) Marketing support: Marketing acknowledged the need for Atari to enter the market with a fighting game. Jerry supported the project from it's conception, even including a marketing section in the Concept Approval packet. Nearing the completion of the project, marketing took a big gamble by sending out distributor samples PRIOR to the New York showing. The gamble paid off. But as I stated at the outset, marketing is not my forte. I will defer to Jerry for further input.

6) "The right place at the right time": We were also fortunate in that Pitfighter entered the market at a time when our competition had very little to offer. Pitfighter was perceived as 'original', Atari's premiere entry in the fighting game genre. There was a 'slot' in the market and we filled it. Given the unpredictable nature of our industry, I attribute this advantage more to 'luck' than anything else.

With the exception of #6 above, it is the goal of Pitfighter II to meet or exceed each of the above guidelines.

The digitized graphics were a big draw. They provided a new-different look to draw in players. But, more importantly, they made the game more fun. Whatever it is in teenage boys that makes them interested in playing fighting games in the first place also makes them even more interested in beating up on REAL-looking, LARGE bad guys. "Take that!" has new depth of meaning. Not to mention that we also make the players themselves into REAL big, beefy-dangerous guys, rather than Toons. This is "giving the player power", as we've heard our core playing group craves.

We gave players a fairly large variety of moves so that (1) it took a while to find them all and (2) it took even longer (and was fun!) to try to find the best way to USE them all.

The accuracy of our physical modeling (in the program, with regard to mass, acceleration, dimensions) meshed very well with the digitized graphics. I.e., both were realistic and supported the illusion.

I think the grudge matches (a FREE chance to beat up your friend!) were a brilliant idea. Keep them! (or something like them)

The familiarity of the controls was a plus. I wouldn't change them in a sequel.

The super moves are good, even though they're used mostly by casual players. Experts know they take too long, but (1) not all our players are experts, (2) they DO feel very powerful, and (3) even experts will use them as an "in your face" maneuver (during grudge matches, for instance).

The power pill is lots of fun. How about alternates? One to make you invulnerable, one to make you faster, one to give you back lost strength.

Naturally, the final goal, with the big payoff, is a rush to the player. (Actually, getting off the subject for a moment, I was surprised that Pit-Fighter's lack of obvious progress didn't hurt it. I mean that you can hardly tell one fight from the next [at least the first couple of times you play], so I was afraid the players would figure they weren't getting anywhere, get bored, and leave. That, obviously, wasn't the case.)

I'm sure the players loved having stuff to throw at each other. I'm also sure Gary plans on carrying that over into any sequel, so I won't go on about that. More of the interactive playfield stuff (like the cars) would be great, too.

This game has fast action. The fists and feet fly more quickly than in Double Dragon, for instance. I am not really sure that this is a plus, but it's obviously not a minus. Putting in smoother animation might slow this down somewhat. I'm not stating an opinion on which is more important (fast action or smooth animation). I'm just mentioning that the team should keep this possible trade-off in mind during development of a sequel.