



Getting started with live game operations

Join the conversation at the Live Game Operations Resource Center

<https://playfab.com/live-game-operations/>

Getting Started

What is a Live Game?

Any digital game (mobile, desktop, or console) designed to allow ongoing, post-launch updates of content, design elements, or player interactions over the life of the game; particularly games with the ability to manage some or all of these elements server-side without the need to update a player's game client.

What is a Static Game?

By contrast, Static Games are built and shipped as a permanent client with no ongoing updates, tuning, or content releases over time. Games with so-called "On Disk DLC" still qualify as Static since there is no live operational effort needed to distribute this additional content.

What is Live Game Operations?

Live Game Operations is the practice of managing maintaining, and running business operations of a live game post-launch. This includes activities such as ongoing acquisition activity, monetization design and analysis, player lifecycle management, communication design, user segmenting, business intelligence, server maintenance, payment processing, community management, customer support, content development, testing and optimization of content, messaging, pricing, etc.



Chapter 1: User Acquisition

Live Ops Training: User Acquisition



User acquisition is one of the toughest challenges facing any new game. There are a lot of moving parts to think through.

Let's get started...

Where do players come from?



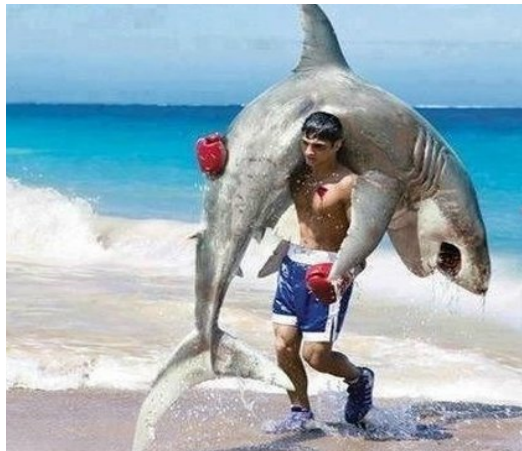
PAID

Buying/renting players
referrals from external
publishers



EARNED

Players referred from non-
paid external publishers

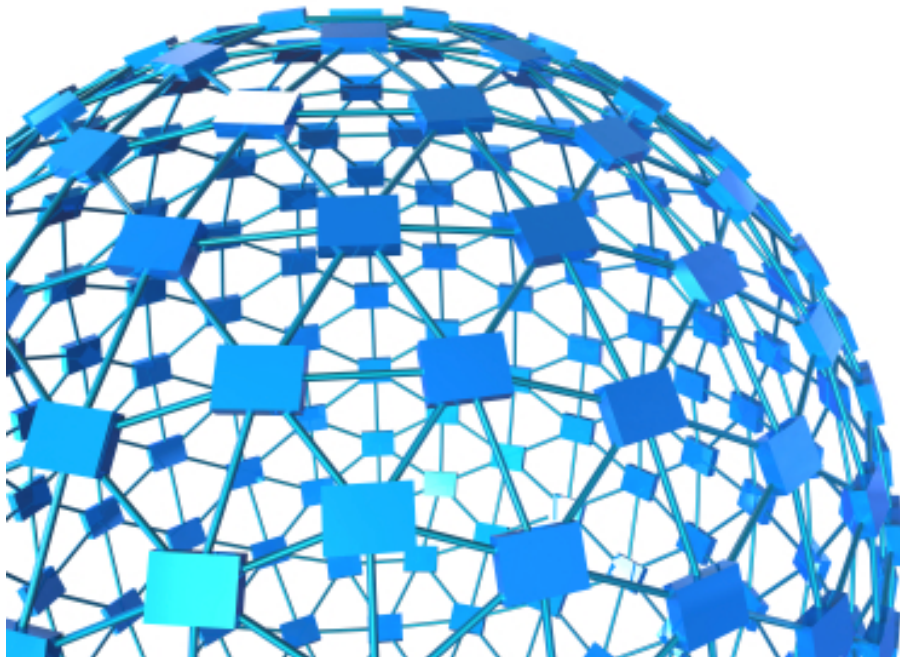


OWNED

Players referred from internal
(owned) publishing and
content channels

Keys to Paid Acquisition

Integrate with Ad Networks server-side to avoid SDK bloat



Attribution Tracking is a Must

- Integrate a service like Kochava, Tune, etc. to track install sources, and conversions

Define Success Metrics

- Plan budget early to ensure it's adequate
- Adjust spend & channels post-launch to optimize ROI and quality

Optimize Content & Channels

- Test copy, images, CTAs, etc.
- Monitor lead quality across ad channels & variations

Hire an Expert

- If you're not comfortable planning/booking/designing ads, work with an agency or consultant

Keys to Earned Acquisition

Feature Placement

- Editorial support in the App Store or Play Store can increase downloads by up to 10x
- Work with platform business teams at least two months prior to launch
- Support platform priority features and technology; be a good business partner to get support

Keys to Earned Acquisition

Social Features

- FB SSO

- Enables persistent account status
- Can get email and other out-of-game channels
- Incentivize login
- Prompt early and repeatedly
- Use 60-day auth token

- Meaningful Social Share Moments/Requests

- Make social elements relevant to core loop
- Make shares fun, authentic, and game-related
- Socially-gated content can increase viral activity
- Aggregate all social communication with central message center
- Can consider a “social currency” earned through friend actions, used for special items



Keys to Earned Acquisition



Social Features

- **Custom Multi-Friend Selector (MFS)**
 - Customized multi-friend selector increases invites, send, and click metrics for all viral activities
 - Create specific segments of friends (likes games, plays this game, etc.)
 - Use tabs to introduce various segments
 - Pre-populate lists with relevant friends
 - Allow 'select all' to quickly send requests to large groups
- **Social Codes (SMS/Email Invites)**
 - Provide non-FB virality
 - Can track accepted friend requests
 - Incentivize and reward invites
 - Pre-populate messages with personalized copy and link to app download
 - Have clear interface to invite friends
 - Allow inviting from Contact List

Keys to Earned Acquisition

Game Center & Other Multiplayer Networks

- Facilitate lightweight solutions for:

- Saved state
- Auto sign on
- Achievements
- Leaderboards
- Discoverability
- FB Likes



Keys to Earned Acquisition

App Store Optimization (ASO)

- Rate My App

- Ratings impact search placement and platform support
- Use pre-prompt interstitial to qualify users before sending them to store for rating
- Ask for rating after moment of delight
- Target 15-20 minutes of gameplay, and re-prompt weekly for non-raters
- Ratings reset after updates, so re-prompt
- Cannot *directly* ask for 5-stars, but you should imply it with art elements in interstitial

- Testing

- Research, test, and optimize copy, keywords, and app icon



Keys to Earned Acquisition

PR and Press Outreach

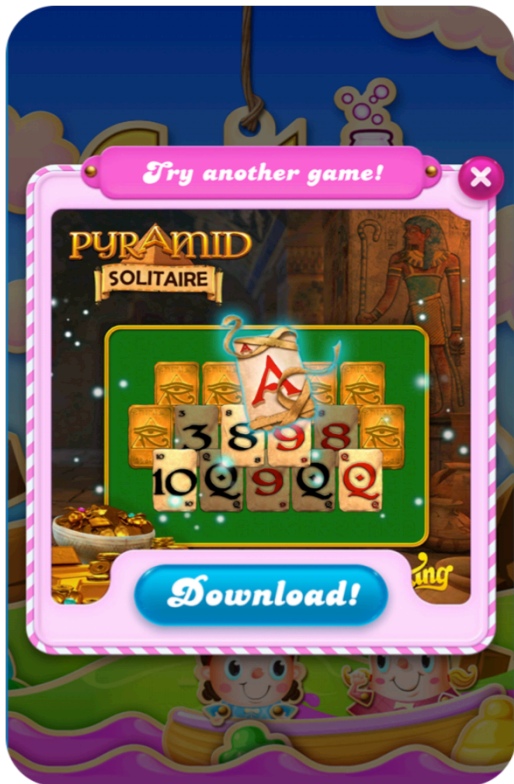
- Public relations value of a third party endorsement
 - Most credible but has a risk of being negative
 - Earned media translates into positive publicity and is the result of traditional news releases and story pitches and press conferences and other devices based on building amicable relationships with reporters, editors, bloggers and other neutral reporters.
 - you can “guarantee” nothing with earned media. But....when earned media works, the resulting publicity is eminently more powerful and valuable than any other format.

Earned Media Defined: 7 Attributes

- **Supports achieving your business objectives.**
- **Involves building relationships.**
- **Requires other people to mention you or your business.**
- **Extends the 4 key types of media.**
- **Leverages other people's audiences.**
- **Requires business resources.**
- **Yields measurable and trackable results.**

Source: ©2015 Heidi Cohen – ActionableMarketingGuide.com

Keys to Owned Acquisition



Cross-Promotion

- Surface new game in existing titles via interstitials, HUD, quests, etc.
- Prompt at load or key moments (e.g. out of energy)
- Incentives to try new game can be very effective



Keys to Owned Acquisition

Web

- Provide unique content about your game before and after launch
- Forums can be a big engagement driver
- Perform SEO for organic discovery
- If multiplatform, create landing pages with links to different version for advertising

Trailers, Let's Plays, Dev Diaries

- Great content for visibility and virality
- Don't always need expensive trailers



SHALL WE PLAY A GAME?

Keys to Owned Acquisition



Social Channels

- Building community on social channels facilitates deeper engagement
- Helps for reacquiring lapsed users
- Increases visibility and virality

Other Acquisition Concerns

Over-the-Air (OTA) Download Limit

- Free mobile games over 50MB (Android) or 100MB (Apple) reduce install funnel by 50%
- Use post-launch installer and platform tech to download additional assets in background



Other Acquisition Concerns

Localization

- Localization at launch can increase regional performance by 100%+
 - Post-launch loc is more expensive and less effective
- 60%+ of mobile revenue is outside US
- Common localizations include:
 - FIGS (French, Italian, German, Spanish)
 - J-BRCK (Japanese, Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Korean)
- Marketing communication must also be localized and segmented to local audience
- Allow language switching in settings
- Be mindful of string lengths, especially for languages with multi-bit characters





a Platform-as-a-Service company

Chapter 2: User Engagement

Live Ops Training: User Engagement



User engagement is one the toughest challenges facing any new game. There are a lot of moving parts to think through.

Let's get started...

Lifecycle Engagement

Pre-Launch (aka soft launch or beta)

- Recommend 4+ weeks in multiple countries
- Test and tune First Time User Experience (FTUE), economy, monetization, and messaging
- Make this time valuable and actionable
 - Set KPI benchmarks (Red, Yellow, Green)
 - Identify key experiments (balance, pricing, UI, etc.)
 - Setup reporting tools and framework
- After soft launch, revise load testing based on observed play patterns

Lifecycle Engagement

Onboarding

- Interactive tutorial that quickly exposes best features/play
- Let them play: minimize reading, number of clicks, or forced actions
- Shower with reward and delight during onboarding
- Don't force non-core features into the FTUE, additional lessons can surface when needed
- Include store/purchase tutorial
- Incentivize tutorial completion and immediate follow-on play
- Allow returning or experienced players to skip



Lifecycle Engagement

Content Updates

- 60-90 days of content at launch
- Aim for 4-6 week update cadence after launch
- Roadmap at least one year of content
- Keep in front of your players: don't let too many pile up at "last level"
- Monitor progress and churn to determine correct rate of content release
- Show content and depth: coming soon, NEW, etc.
- Message updates heavily
- Big updates and new features can get featured placement with publishing partners
- Message client updates in-app and via push with incentive for users to update (>60% will update within 2 weeks)
- After two weeks, force update
- Make sure servers can support multiple clients simultaneously



Lifecycle Engagement

Elder Game

- Design enough long-term content and evergreen play loops to keep veterans and spenders engaged
 - PvP
 - Leaderboards & Tournaments
 - World/Saga maps
 - Crafting, collecting, breeding
- Evergreen meta game allows value from replaying core content
- Veterans can be 50%+ of spend, must keep them playing
- Introduce monetization components to elder game modes

User Tracking

Guest Mode

- Don't force login before users experience the game
- Can increase first session start by **90%**
- Do not gate purchases behind login

Login

- Incentivize social login
- Never force social login before users experience core fun

Cross-Device Saved State

- Ideally, fully-synchronous with server
- Use platforms' tools for saved game state
- Purchases, inventory, level-data, friends, etc. should all come with.
- Requires persistent server-side player accounts



Communication – Push Notes

Permission

- Wait until after a moment of in-game delight
- Use pre-permission interstitial to qualify receptive users
- Make a clear value prop relative to recent in-game experience

Communication – Push Notes

Game-Generated

- Allows for automatic, customized re-engagement
- Transactional events:
 - Energy refill
 - Build complete
 - Freebie available
- Social events:
 - Turn notification
 - PvP challenges, etc
 - Leaderboard position changes
 - Gift send/receive
- Prioritize and group PMs to avoid spamming
- Create auto-campaign for lapsed users with progressive incentives (3, 7, 14, 30 days lapsed)
- Monitor CTR and adjust cadence/content
- Messages triggered by user behavior and including friend's name have higher CTR

Communication – Push Notes



Custom

- Notify users of important game changes and events
 - Sales & Promotions
 - Updates and new content
 - Re-activation campaigns



Communication – Email



- Supplements other out-of app channels (Push, Facebook)
- Good for re-engagement and announcements:
 - User-to-user invites
 - Lapsed user campaigns
 - Transactional receipts
 - Marketing notifications
- Include incentive offers whenever possible to improve CTR
- Obtain email permission and address via FB
- Monitor CTR to optimize cadence and content
- Use deep link vanity URLs so email links can open directly into app

Communication – Badges & Switching

Badges (Apple)

- Icon counters that notify users of outstanding push notes
- Indicate in-game what incremented counter
- Cap counter at 5-10 to avoid overwhelming users

Fast App Switching

- Game should NOT reload when user gets a call, text, email, etc. and leaves app briefly
- If you must reload, welcome user back and let them know you had to reload
- Return to exact gameplay state as when they left

Communication – In-Game

Several formats:

- Interstitials/Overlays
- Banners
- Heads-Up Display (HUD) indicators
- Custom display zones (in-store, etc.)



Deep link interstitials and banners directly to offers/purchase

Time interstitials at launch and between key transitions/loading moments

- Loading/launch good for game issues, updates, or big promotions



Timed Events

- 7-14 day events with deep grind incentive
- Clearly surface details about event before and during
- Include unique rewards only available during event
- Make winning hard (target 15-20% for top rewards)
- All users should have access
- Repeat purchases or event-specific currency can help drive spend

Events

Quests

- Help direct gameplay toward desired activities, improve mid-term engagement
- Tutorializes gameplay and incentivizes engagement with key play elements
- Use interstitials, HUD, and counters to surface quests
- Timed or multi-step quests can improve retention and monetization between content updates
- Make rewards meaningful and clearly surface them



Achievements & Collections

- Rewards engagement with core loop
- Mastery encourages replay
- Don't bury achievements, surface and celebrate them
- Consider tiering to make achievements repeatable at increased difficulty/reward
- Adding new achievements/collections on a regular basis increases elder game engagement
- Adding premium-only elements to some achievements can increase conversion

Return Mechanics

- Fun, but brief, daily bonus event
- Login rewards are boring, make it fun
- Include purchase options:
 - Extra plays
 - Better rewards
 - Press your luck
 - Etc.
- Optimal cadence may not be daily (could be every few hours)
- Include Push Note when new bonus attempt is available



Customer Support

- Proactively message planned or significant outages
- Have tools to provide entitlements for problems
- Use forums and social channels to provide direct communication with users and community managers
- Expose CS email address in-game



Chapter 3: Monetization

Live Ops Training: Monetization



Monetization is one the toughest challenges facing any new game. There are a lot of moving parts to think through.

Let's get started...

Economy Design

Style

- Premium
 - Pay up front, get all content
- Freemium
 - Small sample for free, then premium purchase to unlock full game
- Free-to-Play
 - Full game is free
 - May use in-app purchases for items, content, currency to enhance or expedite experience
 - May use mandatory or optional ad views to generate revenue
- Subscription
 - Pay a recurring fee for regular content additions/upgrades, or items/currency to enhance gameplay

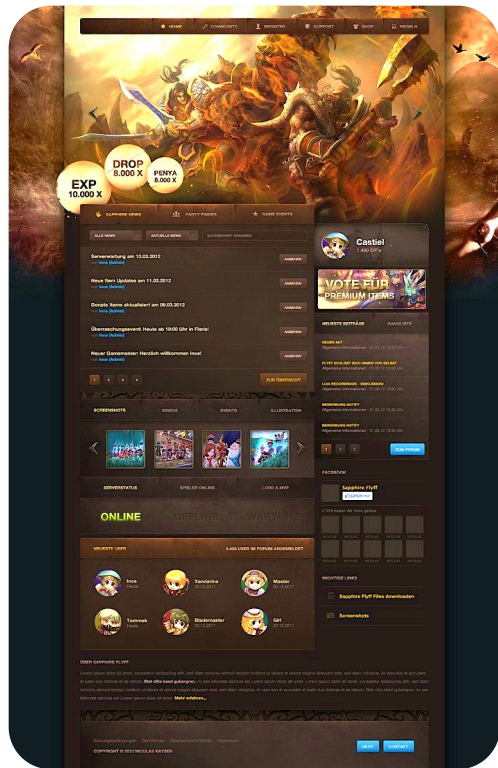


Economy Design

Model

- Model time it takes to consume content
 - Aim for 60 days min for non-payers
- Model earning per session
 - Currency
 - XP
- Model spend per session
 - Price just outside of earnings to avoid inflation
 - Design early pinch points carefully (don't kick users out of the game)
 - Start tight and loosen if necessary
- Find 'cost to complete' (most F2P games target \$1,000+)
 - If using 'Premium-Only' items, target 30-50% of items in each category
 - Create enough premium content to sustain whales at launch
 - Premium should be superior to grind items (but be careful of pay-to-win perception)
 - Cater post-launch premium items to top spending players
 - Deep (80%+) discounts on expensive premium items can prompt conversion from reluctant spenders

Store Design

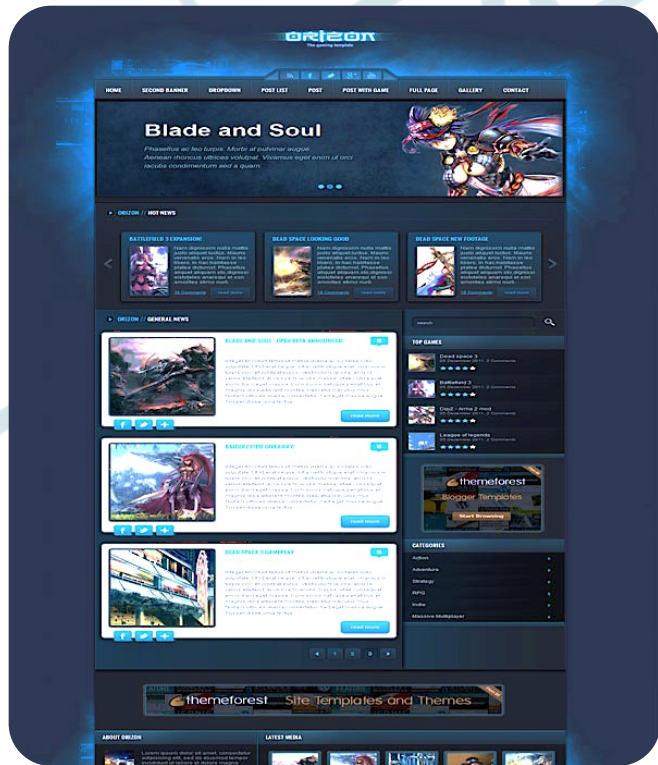


Layout

- Simple navigation & visual appeal
- Full-screen
 - Items
 - Images
 - Promo space
- Server-side control
- Encourage scrolling (emphasizes depth of content)
- Mix premium and grind items
 - Sort/prioritize by perceived value
- Include Promo/Special/New section to drive payers to new items
- Use merchandising callouts
 - NEW, Best Value, Most Popular, 30% Free, 20% Off, etc.

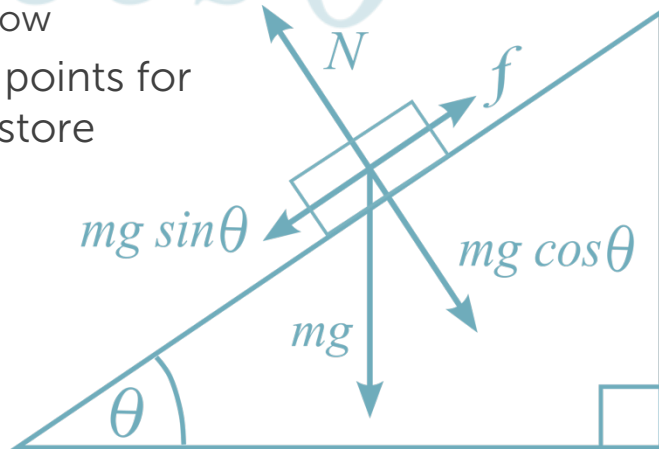


Store Design



Minimize Friction

- Deep link directly to relevant item
- Enable purchase of consumables (currency, energy, etc.) directly from HUD
 - Actively prompt when low
- Provide relevant price points for instant purchase, and store link for other options



Store Design

Transaction Pages

- List highest priced items first
- Pre-select mid-level package to encourage higher spend
- Discount higher-priced packages and clearly message discount/value
- Test removing lowest-priced SKUs (or hiding below fold) to check price elasticity (especially after 1st purchase)

Purchases

Real Money

- Use Real Money transactions sparingly (high friction)
- Real money purchases may include:
 - Premium currency
 - Content/feature unlocks
 - Bundles or packages of items that create added value





Virtual Currency

- Premium Currency
 - Forces payment
 - Allows granular pricing (esp. on iOS)
 - Easily discounted
 - Removes payment friction at moment of purchase
- Earned/Grind Currency
 - Sell for Premium Currency to manage economy balance
 - Scale exchange rate based on user segments
 - Be careful of inflation if sold for real money

Purchases

Impulse Buys

- Surface one-touch purchase option at pinch points
- Use prominent splash screens/dialogs to surface impulse opportunity
- Identify moments of urgency for impulse/upsell
 - Threat of losing something
 - Auto-complete difficult level/task
 - Time extensions



Purchases

Offers

- Promos may include cash discounts, limited offers, time/event based items, bundles, etc.
- Surfacing is key: use push notes, interstitials, and HUD
- Create urgency by emphasizing limited time or scarcity
- Deeply discounted bundles are good for 1st time conversions
- Segment offers to appeal to different users
- Sales should be 40% or more to be effective, but always match with a strong sink to avoid inflation and hangovers
- Vary timing and style of sales to avoid sale fatigue



Purchases

Speed-Ups (for appointment mechanics)

- Make acceleration easy with clear surfacing
- Test event durations to optimize engagement and conversion
- Don't do linear pricing for acceleration (x minutes = x gold), tune and test
- Increase value for long appointment speed-ups to optimize revenue

Purchases

Energy

- Slows content consumption but creates powerful spend motivator
- Must identify:
 - Regeneration time
 - Max energy allowed
 - Permanent increase to max energy (paid or earned?)
 - Auto-refill moments (e.g. quest complete)
- Actively prompt energy purchase when empty
- Ability to gift/receive energy from friends can drive social
- Push notes for energy refill are effective for engagement



Purchases



Durables

- In-game items that users retain permanently
- Overpowering can remove incentives for future spend
- Allow for repeat purchases (level-ups, tier-gated, progressively stronger versions)
- Allow yourself to make durables more valuable in new content
- Avoid *purely* decorative items... should have some gameplay impact

Purchases

Consumables

- Items with a finite life (number of uses, limited duration, etc.)
- Give new users samples so they can learn impact on game
- Allow stacking/upgrading of consumables
- Have multiple tiers of consumables for players at different levels/play styles
- Rotate boosts/items/power-ups to improve exposure and revenue

Option 1

Purchases

Unlocks

- Purchase unlocks for key items in your game
 - Quests/Tasks
 - Level-gated items
 - Map progress
 - Content packs
- Make sure there is always a non-purchase way through (no hard stop)
- Must have enough content to support locking some behind purchase
- Price to make skipping the whole game prohibitively expensive



Chance Mechanics

- Use random chance delivery to drive repeat purchases and disguise rare item pricing
- Ensure payout probabilities can be tuned
- Consider offering different prices; higher-price=better odds
- Receiving chance reward should include strong visual delight
- Model odds for best items at a significant spend
- Free daily 'spin' can help build habit
 - Should include premium-only options that contain or guarantee exclusive items

Alternate Monetization

Offerwall/Ads

- Allows players to earn in-game currency by completing offers or watching videos
- Can add 10-15% to topline revenue
- Entice through prominent 'Earn Free Currency' links
- Actively prompt non-spenders or cart abandons



Mini Games

- Fun, repeatable, easy to find, and short (slots, card play, tap-tap, etc.)
 - Add upsells for additional tries, better prizes, etc.
- Free play at gambling-type games increases exposure and value prop
 - Do not have to be integrated into core loop

Tools

Server Driven Store

- Offer discounts & promos
- Re-order and re-price items

Promo Management

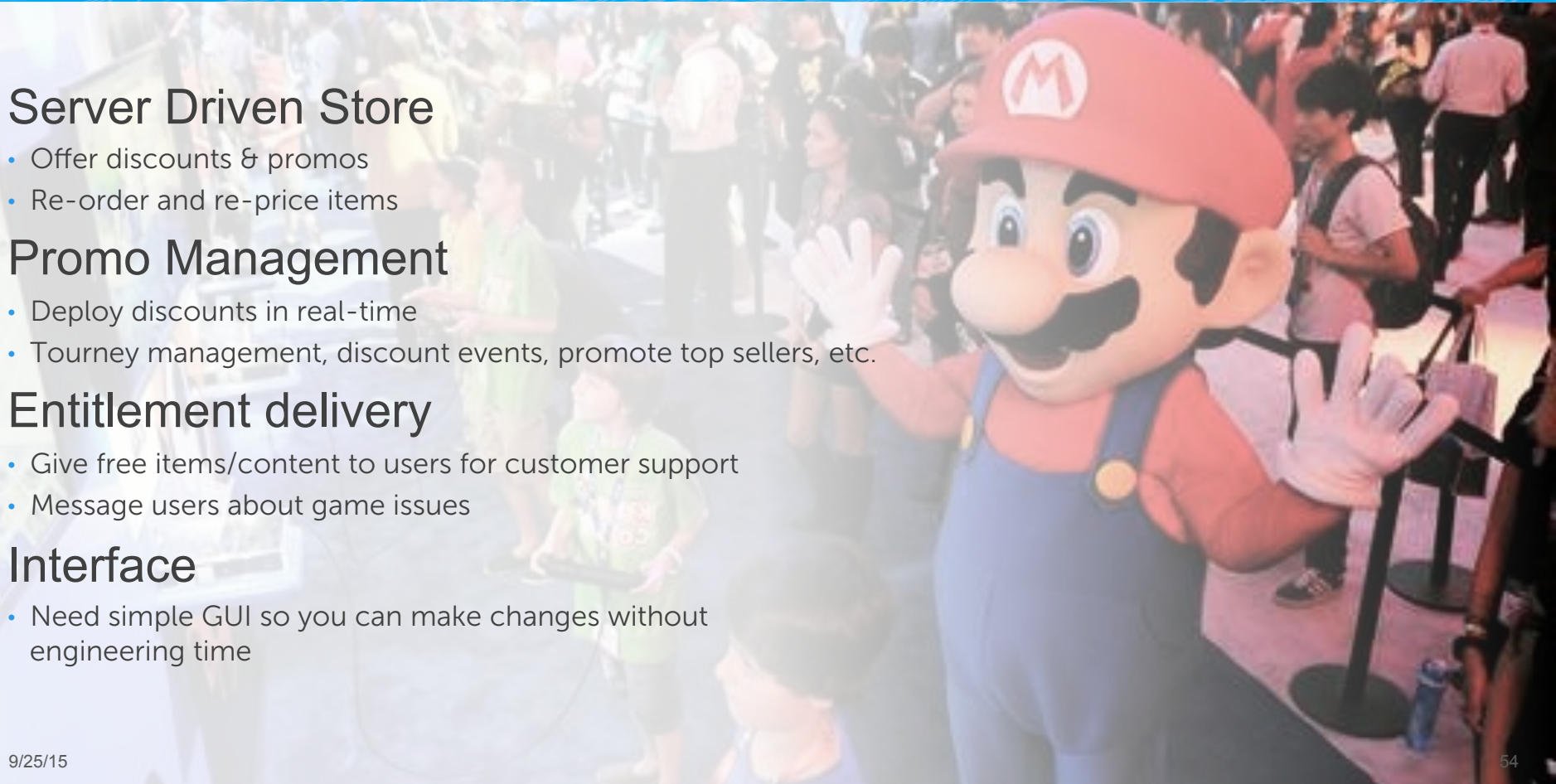
- Deploy discounts in real-time
- Tourney management, discount events, promote top sellers, etc.

Entitlement delivery

- Give free items/content to users for customer support
- Message users about game issues

Interface

- Need simple GUI so you can make changes without engineering time



Getting started with live operations

For more information: <http://www.playfab.com>

Twitter: @playfabnetwork

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/playfabnetwork>