



Accessibility, artificial intelligence (AI), and hybrid-casual games were among the noteworthy topics at the March 2023 Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Francisco. Here is Part 1 of our *Notes From the Field* with a few highlights from the sessions we attended.

Accessibility for Gamers

Accessibility was an issue that featured heavily at GDC this year. According to some estimates, nearly one in five people on the planet lives with some form of physical or mental disability.

These individuals include casual and hardcore gamers who play games and engage in other forms of interactive entertainment on a variety of console, mobile, and extended reality (XR) platforms. To provide great customer

experiences more broadly, game developers and publishers are paying increased attention to the needs and desires of gamers with disabilities.

At GDC, speakers offered a number of potential solutions for improving gaming accessibility, including:

- Encouraging game studios to hire full-time staff dedicated to accessibility issues.
- Conducting robust user testing to identify accessibility barriers in games.
- Leveraging middleware-based accessibility solutions.
- Addressing hardware-related accessibility considerations at the beginning of the development life cycle.

Framework for Responsible AI

Although AI tools, like ChatGPT and DALL-E, have been front and center in the news recently, AI has long been a fixture in gaming. That said, the release of new and sophisticated deep learning models has attracted the attention of those who seek to incorporate those models into game development, including by creating more dynamic gameplay and more intelligent nonplayer characters.

However, AI technology poses potential ethical and safety challenges that require careful consideration by businesses and regulators alike. To this end, several speakers shared their views on how best to develop a framework for "responsible AI," which included increasing product testing and establishing guardrails to facilitate safe player communities.

Popularity of Hybrid-Casual Games

There was buzz at the conference on the continued rising popularity of hybrid-casual games. This trend seems to be a natural progression as the hyper-casual market matures and in light of global economic pressures.

Hybrid-casual games offer deeper gameplay experience than hyper-casual games, while maintaining the easy gameplay loops that made hyper-casual games so popular. [Hybrid-casual games are a mix](#) of hyper-casual, casual, and mid-core (but not hard-core) games.

- Hyper-casual or "tap to play" games require no more than one or two swipes or taps to play.
- Casual games are a step up in gameplay but still require little effort to learn and play.
- Mid-core games are a level up from casual games in gameplay and require skill and strategy to play.
- On the furthest end of the spectrum are hard-core games, which involve detailed, intensive gameplay that require practice and mastery.

Hybrid-casual games often incorporate elements which make them more engaging for players.

With this increased user engagement, hybrid-casual games also offer a multichannel monetization strategy for developers. While hyper-casual games often rely on ad revenue, hybrid-casual games offer a mix of in-app purchases and ads. Hybrid-casual games are well positioned to continue the growth trajectory despite current economic headwinds.

Stay tuned for *Notes from the Field: Game Developers Conference—Part 2!*

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