

Ubisoft Game Makers Podcast
Keeping the Entrepreneurial Spirit Alive
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(LIGHT MUSIC)

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

I'm a problem solver. So when I see a problem and when I feel I can help, I propose solutions and that's what's so good about Ubisoft. I mean the entrepreneurial spirit is still there. It was there that time, but it's still there.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

You're listening to the Ubisoft Game Makers podcast. I'm Charles-Adam Foster-Simard. Ubisoft is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. And one thing I love about working for a video game company with that kind of history is talking to people who have been at Ubisoft for a long time, and who can share some great stories about how the company has evolved, but also insights and lessons that come from that experience. Today's guest on the podcast is Anne Blondel-Jouin. Since joining the company in 1996, Anne has played key roles in production and live operations for Ubisoft games like Far Cry, TrackMania, and The Crew, working to guarantee long-time engagement on Ubisoft titles after release. Today, as VP Open Innovation, she leads Ubisoft's Open Innovation Accelerator, a brand-new initiative that seeks to build partnerships between Ubisoft and innovative players in the video game industry, like Indie Studios. I spoke with Anne about career evolution in the video game industry learning to reinvent yourself and take on new challenges while following the same core objectives. And of course, how she sees innovation in our industry. Well, hello, Anne.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Hello, how are you?

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Good, how are you?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

I'm very good.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So thanks for taking the time to talk to us today and to share your experience at Ubisoft and your career. Really, I want to talk about your whole career. So I want to first go back to the very beginning and know just how you got started in the industry, how you got your first job.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

So that was a long time ago, as you mentioned it. It's a career now. I'm being called a veteran. I'm not sure I like that word, but hey, that's the way we're called. So I'd rather, you know, veteran's better than senior, I guess. So, that was like 25 years ago and it was luck, opportunity, I guess. I've always been a gamer. I've been lucky enough that my dad and my brother were savvy into video games. And this is where I ended up playing video games, at first with my brothers, then my cousins and my friends, then the friends of my friends. And this is how it started. I never stopped. And when I was in college, actually it was a business school and I wanted to play games. So we started a, what we call a association. I don't know how you say that.

It's, you know, people, I mean, colleagues or comrades from school coming together. And we had to, we were making people pay to play games and to play on consoles. And it was, it was not that much. I mean, it was 10 francs at that time. So 1.5 Euro to now amounts, to rent a console and some games, and this is how I got to play for free for three years.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So it was a student club at school...

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Exactly, thanks.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

..and student organisation.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

It was, actually, yeah. And its name was called Games Bond. So it was quite funny, you know, we were so proud of that. So, I've always been into games and when it was time for me to get a real job, as I said, I got lucky, I looked into, you know, there were ads, paper ads, again at that time. And I found Ubisoft and I applied. I never said I would be taken. I went to some of the interviews and I loved what I found there. And I guess they liked what they found in me too. And this is how I ended up. I started with business, obviously, that's why I mentioned I was in business school. I mean, it was the easiest way for me to jump into the video game industry because obviously, I had no training, no education in video game building, but there was, at that time, nobody had been trained. Nobody had, there was no school, no university, no nothing. So it was quite easy for me to go to through the business door. And then five years after, I went to the production door, which was what interested me the most at that time and still does.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So you didn't study, obviously video games, you studied business. Did you see video games as a viable career at that time before actually seeing, you know, open positions at Ubisoft or even when you were studying, you know, it was games were

just for fun and you were studying, but you didn't really see it as an opportunity for work?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Games was for fun, I mean, they were for fun and always are for fun for me, but it's great that I can be, you know, making a living out of having fun. But having said that, I mean, yes, when I applied for Ubisoft, when they recruited me, my father, he said it was not a career, for him. And frankly, at that time I was 22, so I didn't think about a career or anything. I just thought, "Hey, that looks like fun. This looks like something I know how to do and why not give it a try? So, and I didn't realise what I was doing. I actually, I jumped there and I saw a bunch of people who loved and were passionate about games, like I was, and they were hard worker like I was, and this is how it started. No, at first I have to say, I didn't think about it as a career at all.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So this was 1995, I think?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Yeah. When I applied in '95. When I got recruited, that was the end of January '96. So it was just after the PlayStation being released, we were going to be releasing the first Rayman. So that was so much excitement within not only Ubisoft, but the overall industry, you know, that great new console was coming on the market. And everybody was just so amazed by all the possibilities it was going to be bringing to all of us gamers. So yes, it was an exciting time. That's why also I think I, I stayed there because it was all that energy and I felt that there was, yeah, money to make for all of us and to have a true living out of it.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Can you take us back a little bit to that time? So the company was 10 years old. What was Ubisoft like in 1995, '96?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Well, from what I recall, I'm not sure that's exact truth, but from what I recall it was 200 people only. Our CEO, Yves Guillemot, was already there. And his desk was in the middle of all of our desks. I mean, and actually, not all of us had desks. The first thing I did the first day I went there, was I put up my desk myself, and we were moving our desks all over the place anyway. I mean, there were more people coming and coming, and coming and coming, so we had to push into the walls and everything. So it was a lot of, I don't know, it was like, how do you say? At first it felt like school being, you know, continued for me because we were all the same age, more or less.

We were all passionate about games. We liked playing games and it was all about, we had no money, not much yet. I mean, even though Ubisoft was going to be

introduced to the stock exchange at the end of this year, but it felt like there was energy coming from all over the places. And you had a specific role, yes, but everybody was entitled to help everybody else. I mean, when we were doing shows, like it was not easy at that time, but I remember going to MEDPI in Cannes. We used to go at night, you know, putting the booths up all together and we were painting. We were planting, you know.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:
You just did what needed to be done.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:
Yeah, absolutely. And it was all of us doing it in the same adventure.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:
So it was very much a start-up culture, it sounds like.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:
It was, it was, yes, actually. Yes, it was.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:
Now you've moved quite a bit in your career at Ubisoft. So as you said, you started more on the business side, you eventually moved to production side. I'm curious about your progression because it doesn't seem very linear to me, looking at your CV, basically looking at the different roles that you had. So I'm curious to know, you know, how did you manage those shifts and changes in the different roles that you occupied and how did you make those decisions to say, "Well, OK, now I want to switch, I want to do something new, I want to take on new challenges?"

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:
OK, that's a lot of questions.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:
Yeah, It's a lot wrapped into one.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:
So what I'm good at and what I think Ubisoft feels I'm good at, is that I like blank pages. I like starting something from scratch. I'm a problem solver. So when I see a problem and when I feel like can help, I propose solutions and that's what's so good about Ubisoft. I mean the entrepreneurial spirit is still there. It was there at that time, but it's still there. So I was lucky enough that I was bringing some ideas and some of them would, you know, get canned, but some of them get, you know, I got the approval and this is how I moved to the next position. And I have to say that since I started, I've always been lucky enough to build my own job, my own position. Before me, there was not that position. And it's just because we were building up. You know,

it's like flying a plane and trying to fix it at the same time. This is what I've been doing all the time.

So it seems that there is no logic into it, but there's one which is, well, there was a problem which needed to solve and I felt that I could help and I wanted to help. And I felt excited about helping. So I proposed, and like I say, nine times out of 10, it wouldn't work and then it worked. So this is how I did it. And I think the second thing is that I always wanted to be close to creative people because I'm creative myself, but not as good as those people. And obviously not in video games. But I think I have a talent, is to understand what creative people want to do. And I think I'm quite a good supporter so I can help them get a focus on their creative vision while I'll deal with the other stuff, which is getting in their ways. So, I mean, resources, planning, budget, obviously, that comes from the business education and having that crave for creativity and technologies has been super helpful for me. So I'll always want it to go as close as possible to creative people. So this is when I had the opportunity to jump into production.

At that time, there was a third-party development. I asked if I could go. And they said, "Well, yeah, why not? Let's see what you can do about that. And this is how I started. Then they wanted me there because I was again, a business person. So I knew how to negotiate contract. And all of a sudden I realised that I was not that bad at listening and understanding the vision and making the vision possible. And in the end, we ended up working with Crytek on their first Far Cry PC. We ended up with working with Gearbox on the first Brothers in Arms 1 and 2. So it was super rewarding as well. It was not only a business approach, it was also a content approach and I was at the service of the content people. And then this is how I joined international production, was in Ubisoft, which is responsible for supporting Internal Studios. And here again, I was there to help understand the vision, understand the objectives and make sure that I was providing the right means when the means were needed for those teams to achieve their vision.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So it's a good mix of recognising kind of your own strengths and your own interests, and then combining that with what you're good at and where you're needed and where there might be opportunities and then jumping on those.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Yeah, and excitement too. I have to feel that it's going to be fun, and that I'm going to be bringing something. I mean, I'm lucky enough that I'm not sitting behind a desk and saying, OK, what am I doing today? There's always something interesting. And if it's not, I'll always find a way to make it interesting because I'm working with great people will make it interesting, interesting as well. I know it sounds cheesy, but that's true. I mean, thanks to the team, it's always interesting.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

And in terms of getting those skills and that expertise, have you gone outside of Ubisoft, for example, with associations or groups in the industry?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Well, yeah, I was honoured enough that when Audrey Leprince and Julie Chalmette from a Women in Games, France, asked me to join at the very early stage. I feel that it's a responsibility for me to share what I've been experiencing, not as a lecturer, obviously. I mean, as I said earlier, I've been very lucky and it was a matter of opportunity to seize them. And I have that interview makes it sound that everything has been working perfectly all the time, but I can tell you, it's not the case, but here, I'm here to anchor it, but I'm not lying. I mean, what I'm saying is that there's room for everyone and it has to be a more diverse industry. And some people feel that it's not going fast enough.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

And yes, it can feel that it's not going fast enough, but it starts from the beginning and it starts from everywhere. So I feel that being able to, you know, if I can help and if people feel that when I talk, it's interesting and it's a clicking for them to realise that yes, they are made for that job, well, I'm super happy to do that, you know, and I'm also doing it because I have a 12-year-old niece and she wants to be in the video game. And I'm just like, "Hey, maybe it's time for me also to share that and make sure that it's going to be a safe environment for her to grow. I'm not saying it was not safe for me, but I feel that if I can contribute and if people feel that I can contribute, I'm not going to be staying on the side and say, "Oh yeah, but do it yourself." If I can play my part, I'll do it. So that's why it's important for me to be part of Women in Games, France.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Well, let's talk about what you're doing now.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Yes.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So you're a VP of Open Innovation and you lead a team that's called the Open Innovation Accelerator.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Yes.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So I think a lot of people don't necessarily know what those things mean. Although, there are words that we know, but so put together, what exactly does your team do? What do you specialise in now?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

OK, so Open Innovation is looking outside Ubisoft for talented, what we call whiz kids with indie developers who are doing things we don't know how to do, we cannot do, we don't have time to do, we don't have the expertise to do, we forgot how to do and so on and so forth. So this is where the innovation part comes from. And open, obviously, it's to open the doors and go to them and say, Well, we are very fond of what you do, we would love to find a way to collaborate with you. How does that sound to you?" Would you be interested in collaborating with us and what are your needs? I mean, you know, sometimes it's, yes, it's a matter of money, but I have to say that money doesn't do everything in.

If you don't go and show that again, you understand the vision and you care about the vision and that you're going to be respectful about the experiences that the developers wants to bring to the gamers, I think it couldn't be working. So that's the approach and the philosophy that we have within the team. And Accelerator is that we feel that's where the more we access to different brains, creative brains, the better it is for them, and for us. We're a strong believer into collective intelligence and collective creativity. So this is what we do. We spot whiz kids, indie devs, that we feel that we would love to be working with. We go to them, ask them if they'd like us to come and talk to them. And if they say yes, well, we have a full process to make sure that we only keep like, creme de la creme, but not only for us, for them too.

We want them to be a hundred percent convinced that they want to work with us. And at that time it's up to us to understand, as I said, their needs and propose the best collaboration. Could be what we call the learning expedition. So we spend days or hours with them sharing our knowledge and expertise and experience. We bring our best experts to the table and they do the same. And it's very rewarding because it's, you know, different brains looking at the same problems with different approaches and different solutions. So in the end, it's always profitable for all of us.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah. So it's not just about funding, necessarily. It can be all kinds of different partnerships. And I assume that they can also learn from some of the things that we do and vice versa.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Actually yes, if I can share an anecdote. I mean, the first time I went to GDC, that was back in 2018. When I came and ask those developers if they were willing to a

partnership with us, the first answer was, Oh, we're not looking for a publisher. And it was just like, "Oh, that's great because we're not only publisher, we're mainly developer. I mean, 80% of our workforce are development people. So I said, "Well, you know, it's a developer talking to developer. So at the very beginning, people were just, "Oh, OK. Ubisoft, not only a publisher, and it's not all about money. I said, "Well, money could be involved, obviously, but let's see if we can make it work together and let's see how we can benefit from exchanging with each other.

And yes, so it's a lot about learning a new process. And as I said earlier, learning about what they are trying to achieve. So that's, you know, we want to open our doors so that they open their doors.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

That means when you understand their needs, all of a sudden you can pick and spot within the company things they're not aware of yet within Ubisoft because it's you know, it's confidential or anything.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

So we can offer them to get in touch with teams who were not being known so far from working on an amazing new title from Ubisoft. And we make those connections because we feel that it could be helpful for the developer and that's what they are willing to share with us. It could be helpful for us as well. So yes, it's a lot of learning at the beginning.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So I think it's no secret that the industry is quite competitive, obviously, between, you know, big video game companies usually. And there's also quite a culture of secrecy, I think, and confidentiality in the industry. So when you first started this initiative and you're approaching these developers, are they used to that openness? You know, you were saying at first they were seeing you as a publisher or they were seeing us as a publisher, but is there also this kind of surprise that this desire to exchange so openly?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

I think they are. They are so willing to share, that sometimes we had to tell them, Don't tell us anything until the non-disclosure agreement...

(CHARLES-ADAM CHUCKLES)

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

"..is signed, because we don't want you to feel that we're going to be doing you harm or anything. We're not there to steal anything, we're here to share." And sharing has to be balanced. So I have to say, that it's really, it's really a matter of generation. And I'm not talking about age there. I'm talking about maturity. If you're confident about what you're doing and there's strength about what you're doing, you're not afraid of sharing because you know that you have something that no one else can copy and that you will only benefit from gaining some knowledge from someone else.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah, yeah. So the trust, it's interesting what you said though, the trust comes from the confidence in your own tech or your own project, your own creativity.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Yes. And again, as I said, I mean, the way we work too, is that we're not receiving pitches from indie developers from all over the world, wanting to get money and funding. We go to them, we scout them. We have a scouting team. I mean, those people, they have a nose, so to speak, you know, like in perfume. They smell, they can feel what we call weak signals. You know, they're going to shows, digital or physical. They're looking at the press, they're looking at Steam. They're looking at Twitter, Kickstarter, Twitch, you name it, everywhere all those indie developers are. And then when we realise that they could be a great fit, then we go to them and we ask them if they're willing to. So I think that's the most surprising things for them is that it's the other way around.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

We don't ask them to sell us something. It's rather us selling Ubisoft to them. So we see that. And it's a way for us to show them that we want the relationship to be balanced.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So you spoke about your scouts earlier. What are they concretely looking for? Is it innovative tech? Is it creative creativity in terms of the games themselves, the game modes, the content? What exactly are they seeking?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

That's a good question. We, as I said, we're not business developers, so we're not looking at the titles from a business perspective as well at first. Not asking the question, "Oh, will it work?"

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Will it sell?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Or, "Will it sell?" or anything. The only thing we're looking at does it have potential in terms of engagement, in terms of activity, in terms of retention? Is it bringing something new to the table and not only to the overall industry table, but also to our own table? And do we see a fit? Do we see synergies possible between them and us? So what we're looking at is, yes, proof for weak signals about game play and game design. I have to say that first game play game design, then the team, because again, it's creative people, meeting creative people, and human relationships are key to that. I mean, you cannot pretend to bring entertainment to people if you're not entertained yourself and you're not having fun doing that. And you're not enjoying discussing and sharing with the people and your partners. So, and then comes if it's a reason why there's a potential in terms of retention, activity and engagement, then comes maybe the technology, then comes maybe their organisation, maybe the people they hire, maybe the tools, the instruments they're using. It could be anything.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Now I know the initiative just started, so this is maybe still confidential, but are there some examples of some partnerships and some whiz kids that you've been working with that you can talk to us about?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

So I can share some of the learning expedition we've been doing already. So we have had a great learning expedition with Bossa, which is a studio, which has built for instance, Surgeon Simulator. And we were very fond of their, the way they approach game jams internally. So we shared on that. They shared that to us and in exchange, they were very eager to learn how we're building procedural dungeons within the divisions.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Oh, OK.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

So, this is what we did. We did also learning expeditions with Maschinen-Mensch. There've been developing a game, which is called The Curious Expedition and those guys, there are only two. And we were just, you know, those guys are prototype fun. Like we wish we could be prototyping it that fast and that quick and dirty. So we were very, very amazed with what they were doing. And they were interested into, "How did you work? Build a world? How'd you build an IP?"

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So you work in Innovation and I'm curious to get your take on how do you stay up to date on all the innovations in the industry? You know, what's cutting edge? Because of course, I mean, since you started, the industry has changed so much. You were talking about the first PlayStation, just coming out when you, when you were starting and now we're on the fifth, five generations later. So how do you stay up to date with, you know, what's going on in the industry? What are some of the trends? What is just a trend or just a fad also, and, and what things are there to stay?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

First one, I'm lucky again, I'm curious. And I like learning. So every time I see something that I don't get, or I don't understand, even if it might not make sense in the end, I like looking at it. Second, I have a great team, and I'm not saying that because Matthieu was next to me, but I have a great team. I mean, those guys, they know what they're talking about and they are... And I listened to them very carefully because what I like the most is when they come to me and say, "Oh, that's going to be working." And I'm just like, "What? I'm not getting it. Can you explain to me?"

And they are patient enough to explain to me and all of a sudden, and I feel like I'm growing and I say, "Oh yeah, I can see where it's coming from and where it could be going. So that's how I keep up to date. I mean, myself, the teams I'm working with and the teams surrounding us within Ubisoft, a whole group has great people like that, doing the research for us.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

And what about your skills like yourself in terms of personal kind of development at Ubisoft and professional development from role to role? How do you stay on top of your game and get the right skills both in terms of soft skills and hard skills?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

I think I listen a lot and I look at things a lot. I'm not an extrovert. I'm more of an introvert. So I'll look, I'll listen, and I ask a lot of questions. I'm not afraid of asking questions. And I think it's part of my personality, but it's also thanks to how Ubisoft was at the beginning. We didn't know anything about video games. You know, we just knew how to play them.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

And we didn't know how to make them. So we learned while we were growing. So we'll always be asking ourself questions. So I would say that, and on a hard skills and soft skills, again, it's an exchange with people and it's true that being so close to external

developers, it's great because you have access to different cultures and I'm not talking about working cultures only, but also, you know, cultural.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Going to different countries, different languages, different approaches. So that makes you, you know, always challenge yourself and always ask yourself, are you doing things right or wrong? If I can share an anecdote with you. When I started with Nadeo, I was a Nadeo Live Managing Director. And I have to say, I was super happy to be joining that team because I had fell in love with what they were doing. I mean, that was my very first, the reason why I decided to join them, they took me to the workup of TrackMania. And it was in France, in Paris. It was a summer holiday. And I was just like in shock. I never felt that in my whole life, even in concert. And I was just like, "Oh my god, this is what I want to do." So I joined them and, you know, had been in production for so long and business for so long. I was just like, "Yeah, I'm going to help you get inside Ubisoft," you know, get...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

You know. And I mean, I swear for the first six months, everything I was proposing, I was totally out of what was needed for that team.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Wow.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

I knew what to get close to the consumers was. I didn't know what to get close to the players was. And that turned upside down everything I had been doing. I mean, I learned community development, community management. I learned e-sports obviously, I learned everything about online, not everything, but I learned lots. And during those days in six months, it was like a slap in the face.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah, it must be hard.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

It was hard. It was hard because I was like, "Oh, all of a sudden everything I know, I don't know anymore." But I felt good about it because I knew that I had been around for quite a long time. So I knew I could bring things to the table, but I knew also that if I was being too obnoxious and arrogant, they would kick me out.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Right.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

And what's interesting is that it was reversed again. I was there to teach them, you know, how Ubisoft is doing things. And in the end, it was the reverse. They taught me how you do live games. And this is how I've been pushed onto The Crew. And this is why I decided also that The Crew could be the first game as a service for Ubisoft. Thanks to everything I learned thanks to Nadeo. But I learned it the hard way.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah, it was a time for you to sit back, to learn, to sit back and just kind of take it in and learn.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Absolutely.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

It's interesting also, you were saying that it's thinking of the players less as consumers and more as community members who are, who are there also, who are participants and stakeholders.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Actually, it's not our games. Once you have players coming into the game, it becomes their games.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

And I think the beauty and the success comes when it becomes our games. You know, there are games, but when I say our game is it's Ubisoft's game, plus the players' game.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

If it becomes their games, you're going to be losing it because they might be taking you to somewhere you cannot deliver what they're looking for. If it remains your game as well, they'll be running away, so to speak. And if you manage to do it as a very balanced relationship, then all of a sudden, I think it becomes something super strong and super big. And I think The Crew has achieved that with you know, it's been released in 2014. And I think of obviously, I mean the biggest one, which succeeded

was in Ubisoft, is Rainbow Six. And I think even if it's hard, very hard because sometimes you know, it's like a personal relationship.

You have highs, you have lows. And, but you have to trust the relationship that you have built together with the players. And as long as you trust. And, you know, I always say when people are, when gamers are mad at you, it's still good, because...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

It's because they care.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Exactly, exactly. When they stop saying something, then you have to worry about it.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Hmm. Interesting. So you have your finger on the pulse of the industry, I like to think, working as you do, leading the Open Innovation Accelerator. So for you, what are some of the trends that are emerging that are really exciting you? Is there anything that you see coming on the horizon or just emerging today that you know, you're really excited for?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

I'm not sure something coming in the horizon, I think it's something becoming real, for sure. And it's going to be a no-brainer now, but it's like gamers are, I mean, we say gamers are stakeholders, but it's true. It's their games, our games. We build it together. And our role is to propose, to offer gamers experiences. But more than that, it's offering tools and instruments so that they can make the games the way they want it to be. So it's a, hyper-personalisation, it's a community approach, it's obviously UGC, but also UGA, you know, you have gamers doing a lot of more active content, just not only pushing you know, stickers...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

So, UGC is user generated content, for those who don't know. What's UGA?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Oh, it's my own word. I'm not even sure it's there yet. It's a user generated activity.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

OK.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

You know, when we...

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

We can make it a thing.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Oh cool, thanks.

(BOTH CHUCKLE)

I give you a percentage.

(BOTH CHUCKLE)

See, that's the business. So, yeah. Yeah, that's for me, that's the biggest tendency. And what I love is that I recall, again, that at GDC, it was a long time ago. I was having an interview with someone from the BBC and he was telling me, "Oh, how do you see the future?" I say, "Well, you know, I see Sony and Microsoft being driven by the players too. So that's all of their consoles merged together. And all of the players coming from wherever they were, they will be playing together. And he was staring at me like, "What?" You know, those are world gardens and he was right, they are world gardens, but right now it's not up to us to decide anymore. The gamers have the power. And I think it's cool because who else than the gamers know better than what's good for them?

So we have the talent, we can provide the talents. We are, I mean, we need to make sure that we provide the best experience as possible so that they want to come and stay with us. But then it's up to us also to, again, to give them the tools and instruments so that they can really make those games their homes, so to speak, or at least the place they want to gather to spend time with their friends. Well, it's nothing new to me because, World of Warcraft. We've all heard about those stories, people getting married and stuff like that. And we've seen that with the pandemic, with the COVID. Kids were gathering again together, you know, using games and Roblox is doing a great job on this front. So I think, yes, gamers' gain is really - and again, I'm going back to Games Bond - but it's a way to bond people together.

And whether you play or not within the games, doesn't matter, at least you're experiencing the same thing together. And it's something which makes you feel good, that you're proud of being part of, that you feel that you can express yourself, that you have... That you're designing your own rules and you can be yourself because those games fit your rules.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Well, thank you very much for this enlightening conversation, Anne. Maybe we can add on one last word also, which is what game are you playing right now?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Splitgate.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Splitgate?

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Yes.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Oh.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Go on the internet and look for it.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

Yeah, I'll check it out.

(BOTH CHUCKLE)

Thank you very much, Anne.

ANNE BLONDEL-JOUIN:

Well, you're very welcome. Thank you so much.

CHARLES-ADAM FOSTER-SIMARD:

For more information on how Ubisoft and the Open Innovation Accelerator are supporting some indie games this year, visit ubisoft.com/indies. And in case Anne's story has inspired you to join us and start your own journey at Ubisoft, Check out jobs.ubisoft.com to see opportunities all around the world. This episode of Game Makers was produced and edited by the team at Engle. I'm Charles-Adam Foster-Simard from Ubisoft. Transcripts of our episodes are available on Ubisoft News. For more from Game Makers, remember to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening.