

SOME RESEARCH

Sci

Working Title – Roll Call

Qualitative Game Evaluation

20th June 2005

Background

SCi are developing a new shooter game for the PS2 with the working title 'Roll Call' due for release in Q1 2006. This qualitative research project has been commissioned in order to evaluate how consumers engage with this game and to gain consumer insight into its perceived strengths and weaknesses.

Objectives

To review the current code and potential title names of Roll Call. In particular...

- Appeal
- Enjoyability
- Key features

And to look at game specifics, including...

- Engagement
- Initial Gameplay and Control
- Gameplay features
- Narrative/Motivation
- Setting
- Character
- Graphics and Level Design
- Multi-player
- Music/soundtrack
- Menu and GUI

A brief assessment of shooter games, next generation hardware and games media use was also carried out.

Sample

Four extended group discussions lasting two hours, with one-hour gameplay.

Six male respondents per group.

Casual – must play between 2-5 hours per week.

Must have played and enjoyed at least 4 of the following:

Hardcore – must play above 8 hours per week.

Must have played and completed at least 3 of the following:

Half-Life, Halo, Max Payne (any), Time Splitters, Time Crisis, Rainbow 6 (any), Freedom Fighters, Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30, Snowblind, James Bond (Nightfire or Rogue Agent).

The fieldwork was conducted on 13th and 14th June 2005 in Chiswick, West London.

Group	Age	Intensity
1	16-17	Casual
2	16-17	Hardcore
3	21-25	Casual
4	21-25	Hardcore

Research Findings

Games Media

The vast majority of gamers use a mix of TV ads, magazines and internet sites.

- TV ads – Games with TV ads are seen by more casual gamers as 'big' and 'successful'. The current ad for 'Area 51' is particularly noted as looking good.
- Sky channels mentioned include – 'Gamesville' and 'Game Network'. Not seen as well informed but are useful in showing running footage/demos.

"they don't really know anything about the game" (15-17yr casual)

- Magazines – Games publications are more heavily used by 15-17 year olds - Xbox Magazine, PS2 official, PSWorld.

"with the internet you don't need to know" (22-25 yr casual)

- Lifestyle magazines such as FHM are more predominant with 22-25 year old gamers, but the games sections are generally taken with a pinch of salt:

"very brief and not specialist"

Games Media Continued

- Internet – Many 'google' search for titles they have heard about and screenshots, or for video games sites.

"I search for new releases – google it – I don't know any sites" (16yr hardcore)

- Gamespot is the one site specifically mentioned:
"picks up everything before it comes out and gives you pictures and everything" (15-17 yr casual)
- Email offers a personal approach to gamers:
"Timesplitters 2 started talking to you, then showed bits of the game" (15-17yr casual)
- Ratings – more experienced gamers are sceptical of making any purchase decision on the basis of a single rating. Having been pleasantly surprised as well as bitterly disappointed previously, many gamers cross reference reviews and ratings from various sources including word of mouth.
"if there is a game I like the look of, I hunt on the web for a review, get a few people's versions for the review and pick out the best bits" (22-25 yr casual).
"If I think a game looks good and they gave it a poor rating, then I still might be tempted" (16yr hardcore)

Demos

Demos can be very effective: *"Call of Duty demo – it was fantastic so I bought it the next day"*

- A good demo needs to highlight variety and the game's innovation.
"need to show off the good game features and graphics" (21-25 hardcore)
- Above all a demo needs to communicate the overall gameplay.
- A non-playable demo should act as a showcase for the title's variety of special moves, sequences and gameplay features:
"Half-Life 2 they put a little movie on the disc showing what it is like – shows you what cool stuff you can do" (15-17yr casual)
- A competitive element to a demo can act as an effective hook.
- Demos with an expiry timer are seen as frustrating, but do promote a strong desire to play more of the game.

After 10 minutes playing 'Franklyn Street' almost all respondents had gained a good idea of the gameplay and wanted more – a possible demo level.

New Hardware and Upcoming Shooter games

Hardware – almost all gamers are aware of XBOX 360, PS3 and PSP.

Far fewer are aware of the Nintendo Revolution.

Price estimates for XBOX 360 and PS3 vary roughly between £250-£350. This is perceived as high. Only a minority of the hardcore see themselves as willing to pay this much – the rest see themselves waiting for prices to drop.

£200 is a price point at which many gamers feel they would purchase.

Gamers are excited about Call of Duty 2, Gears of War, Black, Area 51, Far Cry Instincts, Perfect Dark Zero, Killzone 2 and of course Halo 3.

Titles

Please refer to Appendix A, B and C for scoring exercises.

T-Zero – Least popular title.

Does not stand out or explain anything clear to gamers.

Sounds like the racer 'F-Zero'.

Roll Call – Uninspiring.

Only tested in 2 groups.

America's Finest – Unpopular and not appropriate.

Many gamers think of a US Military Ops game.

Reminds some of "America's Most Wanted" "Team America" "cheesy"

City of Fire – Middle of the road.

Loses popularity after playing the game – not appropriate.

"city getting bombed" (15-17yr casual)

"on fire as opposed to gunfire" (22-25 yr casual)

Zero Tolerance – Third choice - but appropriate and gamers have a lot to say about it.

Communicates violence, action, shooting as well as professionalism.

Some gamers feel that it would entail playing 'the good guy'.

"you go in there, you don't take no shit, you just want to get the job done" (21-29yr hardcore)

Titles continued

Riot Response – Joint favourite.

Appropriately describes game and alliteration is catchy, but...

Some feel it is restrictive and unexciting.

“you sound like a policeman battering everybody” (16yr hardcore)

Urban Chaos – Joint Favourite.

Highly appropriate - associated with ‘gang wars’ and ‘terrorists’.

“sounds really exciting, a city where riots and gangsters and you are the authorities fighting back!” (16yr hardcore)

But some gamers remember a PSOne game called Urban Chaos – has the potential for confusion.

Three possible titles but each has its own weakness.

Roll Call Positioning 1/2

Roll Call has elements that remind gamers of various shooters:

Dead to Rights - police action

Freedom Fighters – squad based shooter, New York, you play the good guys saving the city

Soldier of Fortune – violent killing of terrorists in an urban environment

Timesplitters – fun shooter where enemies keep coming

Max Payne – gritty urban environment

Medal of Honour – straight forward action packed shooter

Time Crisis – shoot your way through as cops, relatively linear pathway, many enemies, arcade style

Roll Call Positioning 2/2

Roll Call is seen as distinctive, especially in its:

- Pace
- Emergency Services
- Weapons, particularly throwing machetes
- Shield

"high pressure"

"raw action packed bad arse shoot 'em up" (22-25yr casuals)

Gamers focus on the arcade qualities which suggests Roll Call is likely to occupy the same space as Timesplitters and Time Crisis. As an arcade game, Roll Call is more likely to appeal to casual gamers than hardcore (more strategic, technical) gamers.

First Impressions 1/2

- Opening news sequence - sets the scene effectively and is not too long. Similar in style to Splinter Cell and Freedom Fighters. Gamers indifferent to the inclusion of Hollywood stars – most think it will not add much.

"News – got you up for it" (22-25 yr casuals)

"it's like a real film" (16yr hardcore)

Then it is *'straight into the intense action'...*

- 'Franklyn Street' (first level) – seen as distinctive:

"not really like other games" (21-29 yr hardcore)

"it is very interesting for a first level...in others you can't even get a gun" (16yr hardcore)

First Impressions 2/2

- Being thrown into this maelstrom of action is an engaging assault on the senses that leaves gamers wanting more.
- Expletives give the game an adult feel that is popular.
- Riot Shield - The molotov cocktails and the deluge of enemies make the introduction of the riot shield a welcome and innovative feature – they know it will be essential kit.

After roughly ten minutes play, the response is strongly positive amongst most, especially casual gamers. The game is perceived as very “arcade” in style.

Initial Gameplay and Control

Most gamers get to grips with basic controls and game path with relative ease.

However...

For some it is all too much to be attacked immediately whilst trying to learn the controls.

"it's really messy...I couldn't work out where I was going...too much going on" (15-17yr casual)

A tutorial level, or a less intense and more tutorial first level is suggested by a small minority.

Many are surprised/disappointed that they cannot jump.

Controls - noted as being *"hard to aim"* (15-17 yr casual).

Enemies lack variety in terms of:

- Looks
- Weapons
- Tactics (AI)
- Strength

The verbal directions such as to the first breakable door are vague and inaccurate causing some to get frustrated.

Fireman reticule and controls can detract from a less experienced gamer's first play. The left and right reticule icons are not clear in terms of what they do.

Gameplay features 1/3

Roll Call is generally seen as a relatively straight forward shooter.

"simple but good" (15-17yr casual)

Team control – very popular and distinctive feature.

The way it is introduced and utilised could be more emphasised.

"sometimes need a reminder of what fireman can do or he could suggest it" (16yr hardcore)

Some suggested dogs and vigilante members of the public as possible team members.

Medic healing animations are unrealistic.

"she just points at you and you get healed" (15-17 casual)

Weapons - All popular.

Tazer – not really used when they have a perfectly good gun and enemies charging at them.

A lot did not realise that they could disable enemies for extra points. Some suggest increasing its range with a tazer wire.

"if you are a cop you are supposed to arrest people" (22-25 casual)

Some feel the high capacity to carry projectile weapons is unrealistic and that their alignment when used is "off".

Gameplay features 2/3

Automatic pickup of weapons can confuse gamers, for example, when accidentally pulling out the shotgun you didn't know you have in hostage mode can be disastrous!

Torch – Essential to certain levels, popular and atmospheric.

The fire, reload and melee actions are satisfying and realistic to watch. Some would like to see the inclusion of a 'pistol whip' for close range combat.

Shield – a defining gameplay feature – *"lovely" (16yr hardcore)*

Brings a new tactical element to the gameplay – popular feature that it cannot be used in conjunction with guns.

The visible damage leads some to expect the shield to become less protective.

Hostage Mode – Gamers enjoy the satisfaction of saving the hostage.

The slow motion set pieces are greatly enjoyed, but some thought it may become repetitive if used after.

Gameplay features 3/3

The greatest concerns are to do with longevity and variety of task.

The learning curve and complexity of task seems to end in the first level provoking fears of dull gameplay.

"I am interested to see where this is going to go...you have got guns, tazer, shield, fireman already"

"this you would rent, complete it and say it was a good game" (22-25 yr casual)

"not much different to Timesplitters except there is fireman behind you"(21-29yr hardcore)

Some see the gameplay as quite predictable.

"great fun but feels a bit samey" (22-25 casual)

Movement – one gamer notes that movement is too smooth and there is no change of movement when climbing.

"doesn't feel like you are walking normally" (16yr hardcore)

The gameplay components - team control, weapons, shield, hostage - are well received but there is a need for more variety of task.

Levels and Navigation 1/2

Gamers exposed to Franklyn Street, The Dockyard, Below Zero and Subway find the levels relatively diverse and evocative in style.

"environments you can imagine being in" (22-25yr casuals)

"feel quite industrial" (16yr hardcore)

Directions to the next task need to be communicated more clearly.

"at one point I did wander around not knowing what to do" (15-17yr casual)

"I was stuck for a while – looking for a valve" (21-29yr hardcore)

The actual switches and doors themselves are not obvious enough for some gamers to easily identify them.

*"where is that f***ing door!" "I got stuck lifting that crate in the dockyards" (21-29yr hardcore)*

No way to replay vital information if missed by the gamer. Some suggest an audio and text log option.

"I forgot what he said" (21-29 hardcore)

Gamers can find some levels too dark even when using flashlight.

"even with flashlight, I have to go back, it is slightly frustrating" (21-29 hardcore)

Levels and Navigation 2/2

Some gamers see Roll Call as a linear experience. This restriction and the narrative directions can be frustrating – some desire for path choice is preferred and would increase replayability.

"you should have freedom of path" "

"a little like follow the leader" (22-25yr casual)

A solution to feelings of linearity could be to offer multiple paths within a level.

Levels are received well but need to offer more choice in path and be clearer in communicating what to do next.

AI

Some feel the majority of AI is basic.

Gang members look and react very similarly.

"the enemies just run around" (15-17 casual)

"enemies just pop out" (15-17yr casual)

A variety and hierarchy of enemy is seen as ideal.

"In Halo 2 – you have things that are easier to kill, then medium ones, then big bulky things that are hard to kill but have weaknesses" (16 yr hardcore)

Where there is variety it is remembered:

"I liked it when I shot a bloke from the ceiling" (22-25 casual)

"I liked the subway bit where I was jumped by the guy with a meat cleaver" (22-25 casual)

Team members can place themselves in awkward positions.

"medic gets in the way of the firing line" (21-29yr hardcore)

AI needs to be more varied

Narrative and Motivation 1/2

The game concept is very well received. The action packed pace makes players feel “pumped” and under pressure.

The fact some find it unbelievable does not detract from its enjoyment.

Gamers particularly enjoy:

- News Reports
- Terrorists
- Hostages
- Special Team
- High Paced Action

Narrative and Motivation 2/2

However, there is currently little perceived plot or emotion in either the character or the task at hand. Delivery of this would make the game more engrossing and raise the stakes.

"shoot everything you see game...as long as you know it does not have much of a plot it is alright" (15-17yr casual)

One gamer found the crack team described in the news as a little disappointing in reality:

"I don't know, I expect loads of people to pile out of the swat van and then it is just this old guy with his mate...the chief I was following was just a guy with a moustache and was too old for this"

"are they swat team or your average police? – they don't look like swat" (15-17yr casual)

Lack of information on enemy leader...

"if you put a face behind these terrorists it would work" (21-29yr hardcore)

More back story/narrative would heighten emotional engagement

Character

Nick Mason

Lacks background, description and personal emotion.

"he hasn't got a character" (21-29yr hardcore)

"he's got two legs – that is about all I know" (22-25yr casual)

"typical good American cop" (22-25yr casual)

Many suggest increasing Mason's personal motivation through the addition of loved ones into the storyline.

Or levels set within his personal space.

Real actors suggested as Nick Mason tend towards no brain action heroes: Bruce Willis, Arnie, Colin Farrell, Russell Crowe, Van Damme, Vin Diesel, Mel Gibson.

Nick Mason needs some personality to enable emotional engagement

GUI, Controls and Graphics 1/2

GUI and Controls

- Well laid out.
- Most gamers quickly get used to the GUI.
- Most feel that the weapon icons on the bottom right of the screen are well located.
- The weapon layout is intuitive. Low ammo gauge is noted as a useful feature.
- Gamers do use the secondary fire and the more skilled use zoom.
- No gamers realised the auto aim feature – they feel it is them.
- Some suggest crouch (L3) would be easier to use if clicked on and off instead of held.
- Some feel the analogue movement is slightly oversensitive:
"sometimes a small touch and it moved right over" (22-25 yr casual)

End of level player statistics is a popular idea, especially amongst hardcore gamers.

GUI, Controls and Graphics 2/2

Graphics

Generally rated as good but not groundbreaking.

Gamers really like the visible damage inflicted to the shield.

Smoke and heat effects are also noted as impressive.

The controls are intuitive and the visual set up is solid – giving a strong experience.

Music/Soundtrack

A lot of gamers feel that music should directly represent the on screen action to reflect/build mood and suspense:

"without a soundtrack would be better, where music comes in at certain points" (22-25 casuals)

"fast and rocky – in time with the game" (16yr hardcore)

"heavy dance" (22-25 casual)

"fast paced for killing" (15-17 yr casual)

Suggested Bands:

- Lincoln Park
- Foo Fighters
- Oasis
- Chemical Brothers

Some feel the current music is not appropriate enough:

"music in background – did not sound dramatic enough for what was going on if a police station was overrun by terrorists" (15-17yr casual)

Multi-player

A multi-player mode is seen to offer much needed longevity to Roll Call and shooters in general. It is essential...

"in one player, once I have done it I would not go back" (22-25yr casual)

Gamers expect death match, capture the flag and co-op modes.

The idea of 2 player co-operative is especially attractive.

"that would be cool!" (21-29 hardcore)

"the co-op mode is for a longer evening, deathmatch for a quick bash with more than two of you" (22-25yr casual)

Multi-player options are expected and are crucial to adding longevity and value for money. A 2 player co-op mode is seen to be highly appropriate due to the team gameplay.

Conclusions and Recommendations 1/3

Roll Call is well received by the majority of the gamers who played it in this research study.

It's most appealing qualities are the "intense, arcade action", which enables gamers to be quickly absorbed by the gameplay.

The set up and GUI is seen as solid and intuitive and adds to gameplay enjoyment.

This arcade style suggests that the core target market will be the more casual gamer – in particular the more strategic, technical gamer (e.g. Rainbow 6 fans) is unlikely to find enough variety in the gameplay.

Gamers are impressed by some of the specific gameplay features such as...

- **Team control**
- **Weapons**
- **Shield**
- **Hostage Situations**

Which are seen to have distinctive qualities not found in other games.

Conclusions and Recommendations 2/3

However gamers feel there is room for improvement in gameplay in the following areas...

- More variety of task
- Greater complexity of task – more than flicking switches
- More varied enemy AI
- More explicit ability to capture enemies rather than killing them (e.g. more imaginative use of the tazer)
- A more subtly graded learning curve

The above perceived weaknesses lead gamers to expect a fairly easy, quickly completed game, which may lack replayability. A game to rent rather than buy.

Conclusions and Recommendations 3/3

The overall narrative and characterisation of Nick Mason is also seen to have weaknesses and, at present, may hinder the building of a lasting franchise. In particular Nick Mason is lacking...

- Personal motivation
- A back story
- Gameplay which involves his personal space
- Background heroism

If these elements are supplied then the gamer is more likely to invest emotional energy in engaging with the game, which will lead to a more compelling gaming experience.

Finally, multi-player options are expected and are seen as crucial to adding longevity and value for money. A 2 player co-op mode is seen to be highly appropriate due to the team gameplay.

Appendix A – Mean Title Scores out of 10 before game exposure

	T-Zero	Zero Tolerance	America's Finest	Riot Response	City of Fire	Urban Chaos	Roll Call
Group 1	3.7	7.5	6	5.7	6.7	7.2	N/A
Group 2	1.8	3.8	4.2	6.3	5.8	5.8	N/A
Group 3	3	4.5	4.7	6.7	7	7.5	N/A
Group 4	3.8	7.8	4.8	5.5	5.8	6.8	4.7
TOTAL MEAN	3.1	5.9	5	6.1	6.3	6.8	
Total Voted Favourite Note one respondent voted twice	0	9	1	5	2	8	

Appendix B – Comments on favourite titles before game exposure

TITLE	WRITTEN COMMENTS
Zero Tolerance	"ruthless shooting game" "shoot 'em up or where you are a hitman" "killing people with zero tolerance to anyone who gets in your way" "city fighting" "crime prevention" "crime - kill 'em all type feeling" "action... maybe cop shooting" "fighting with lots of guns - not tolerating other people in the game" "not taking any crap - you are there to get the job done" "FPS - cool name"
America's Finest	"soliders that made a big difference in war - leader of a squad of men"
Riot Response	"police shooter - like the two Rs" "out in streets involved in riots - catchy rolls off the tongue" "more shooting game - tells you quite a bit about game"
City of Fire	"all out shooting game with lots of fire and blood - fire brings lots of images to mind" "A FPS special forces or SWAT style game" "could have a wide variety of environments"
Urban Chaos	"gang war" "police vs gangs - sounds serious" "a gang game including guns" "city shooter" "fighting in cities with riots or gang trouble" "exciting and modern" "a mission game like GTA or first person" "urban is cool" "hectic fast paced game, loads of action and mayhem"
T-Zero	No Comments
Roll Call	No Comments

Appendix C – Mean Title Scores out of 10 after game exposure

	T-Zero	Zero Tolerance	America's Finest	Riot Response	City of Fire	Urban Chaos	Roll Call
Group 1	3.3	6.8	4.5	5.7	6.2	8	N/A
Group 2	2.5	5.2	2.7	8	4.7	6.2	N/A
Group 3	3.3	4.5	3.2	7.8	4.7	7.7	4.2
Group 4	3	6.3	6.5	4.8	4.5	4.3	6
TOTAL MEAN	3	5.7	4.2	6.6	5	6.6	5.1

- Note that Zero Tolerance polarises opinion, scoring as 9 people's favourite but not coming top (see Appendix A).
- Riot Response becomes more popular after gameplay highlighting its appropriateness.