

Winning Strategies: A Studio's First Wii® Title

When Portuguese game developer Biodroid licensed the IP for the über popular Argentinean Chiquititas brand, they knew the charming characters and fun story would be best showcased by a game on Nintendo's Wii™. But the Biodroid team had never tackled a project on the Wii before, and they needed to get the game done quickly in order to capitalize on the pending expansion of the hit TV series into Portugal. Biodroid set out to acquire the right tools, and when Gamebryo® for the Wii became available in September of 2007, the studio had an instant way to accelerate their efforts for their developers & artists alike.



Chiquititas Backstory

Biodroid's mission is to maximize the value of IP through innovative development of cross-platform digital media products. Based in Portugal, they have deep ties to the South American market, particularly Argentina, with creative partnerships in place with local companies for co-production of other titles already underway.

Most of Biodroid's projects are geared to extend the reach and the appeal of properties such as popular telenovelas, comic books and TV shows through production of community-based video games, catering to children and teens – while especially seeking to entertain their mothers – as a way to broaden the gaming audience. Chiquititas (“Tiny Angels”) is a family-oriented show created by the Cris Morena Group of Buenos Aires. First broadcast in Argentina in 2006 and later expanding to over 40

countries, Chiquititas is the story of a fanciful young woman who becomes a Mary Poppins-like fairy godmother to a group of orphaned children. The franchise is targeted to children and pre-teens with themes of magic, tenderness, and love.

As Diogo Horta, co-founder of Biodroid, stated, “**This project seeks to combine the magic of the television show, the magic of the Chiquititas universe, and the magic of the next-generation consoles.**”

How did Biodroid serve up this magic? By choosing best-of-breed tools to get the job done. Biodroid's story of Wii development for their Chiquititas title is an amazing example of how the right resources and the right partnerships can make a huge difference in a project.



The Challenges

To create its new expression of Chiquititas, Biodroid decided upon a third-person platform jumper, with lots of community interactivity and embedded mini-games to reinforce the whimsical brand and engage a broad spectrum of Wii players within the family. They were dedicated to creating a fantasy feel and endearing style with the artwork and overall design. Music plays a big part in the story, and needed to be an essential component of the game. They wanted to cater to the abilities of small children in the family while still providing an enticing experience for adolescents and adults – including grandparents – to play together as a competitive party game.

The team had never built a Wii game before, and they were racing the clock. They went looking for a game engine that could help them meet their biggest challenges, which included the following:

Time: The Chiquititas television show was scheduled to air for the first time in Portugal in the summer of 2007 – which is just about the time pre-production began on the video game project. Biodroid was committed to getting a Wii title to market fast to help promote and expand the franchise within their country.

Tools: Biodroid had experience with the Nintendo DS and the PC, but had never developed for the Wii before, and they had no engine, toolchain, or much experience on Nintendo's new console.

Technique: Biodroid wanted to build a full 3D whimsical world to showcase the fun characters of the Chiquititas brand, with lots of puzzles and community-based features – at a time when the Wii was still very new, and many titles were comparatively simplistic 2D games. They were pushing the envelope and needed tools to help them.

Targets: The initial goal was to create a state-of-the-art Wii game using the Nunchuk controller – yet the scope soon expanded to include the Nintendo DS, so now the requirements for a game engine included cross-platform capabilities and varying input devices.



An Accelerated Timeline

Here's a snapshot of the project's evolution:

First Steps

Pre-production started in August of 2007. By October, the key decisions for tools and technology were made: their artists would be using Autodesk Maya® 2008 and Softimage XSI® with COLLADA, while the programming staff would leverage the Wii NDEV development kits, FMOD audio, plus the Gamebryo development framework from Emergent Game Technologies. Orders were placed. The Gamebryo install DVD was quickly received and the team got it installed even before their Wii development kits had been delivered. In an attempt to minimize delays, the developers began working with Gamebryo on the PC, and by the time the Wii dev kits arrived, their first level was already running.

Fast Success

The day the Wii dev kits arrived, programmers devoted their lunch hour to installing all the software, and by the end of the afternoon, they had successfully re-targeted that first level onto the Wii. That amounts to a sum total of five hours for an initial re-targeting to run on the Wii.

With Gamebryo, they essentially went from nothing – including no previous experience on the console and no toolset installed – to a first-playable on the Wii within a matter of a week.

Essential Time-Savers

The Biodroid team discovered many benefits from using Gamebryo on the project:

- **Extendable Framework** - Programmers created a dynamic shadowing system easily integrated with Gamebryo
- **Content Tools** - Artists and designers found Gamebryo's Scene Designer tool invaluable
- **Built in Plug-ins** - Everyone on the team appreciated the time savings and efficiency from Gamebryo's included plug-ins for 3D Digital Content Creation (DCC) tools

Bruno Patatas, co-founder of Biodroid, explained, "Gamebryo for Wii allowed us to create a game with lush graphics rarely seen on Wii. It's the perfect choice if developers want to have a next-gen game done in a short period of time." The game has been aptly named Chiquititas: A Magical Journey, and with the help of the Gamebryo game development framework, the Biodroid team made quick work of the development of their fun-filled fantasy game designed to captivate the kids. As of this writing (summer 2008), the Chiquititas game is in the final polish stages of refining gameplay, and the product is on track to launch in the Fall – less than a year after the project kicked off.



Biodroid & Emergent: A True Partnership

Biodroid believes Gamebryo has been a real accelerator for their success. Patatas said, "Gamebryo is a crucial part of Biodroid's company strategy, since our main concern is the time-to-market of our products."

Biodroid's joint May 13, 2008, press release (with the show's publisher) announcing their upcoming game even emphasized the advantages gained from using Gamebryo (translated from Portuguese): "The leaders of the [video game] sector use advanced technology that allows them to constantly evolve and innovate. Biodroid developed a partnership with Emergent Technologies for the use of Gamebryo, one of the best game engines in the market. This tool has allowed Biodroid to enrich the experience of the player and simultaneously accelerate time-to-market of products. Additionally, this technology allows the development team to reach new levels of excellence and to easily incorporate concepts and constructions into video games."

“The port from PC to Wii was done in one afternoon! Now, that was just simply great.”

**Bruno Patatas,
Co-Founder, Biodroid**



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