LIQUID&GRIT

RPG REPORT

Competitive Research and Actionable Product Recommendations

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APRIL

# 2020

REVENUE DRIVER

CONTENT EXPANSION SEASON

Season III in *Empires & Puzzles*

REVENUE ANALYSIS

After the release of *Empires and Puzzles'* Season III, revenue was +23% and downloads were -15% MoM. 2Mo2M revenue and downloads were +152% and +111%, respectively.

Empires & Puzzles

Revenue — Downloads
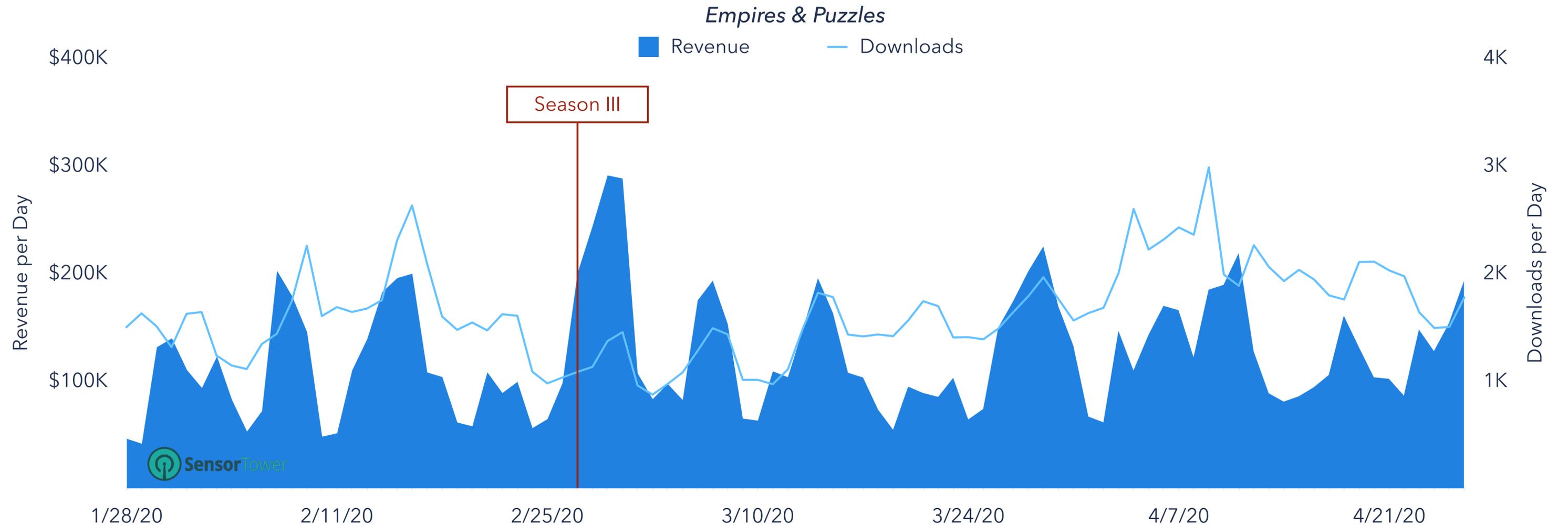
Graph data is iOS U.S. only.

MoM = This month over last month.

2Mo2M = Two months over the last two months.

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FEATURE TEARDOWN

A content expansion includes new heroes, a season-specific currency, and new map areas that unlock each month.

Details
- Players must progress to a certain point in the previous season to unlock the new content (1).
- The world map includes new areas that unlock each month (2).
- All stages can be completed on normal or hard difficulties (3).
  - Each difficulty provides its own rewards.
- Stages and purchases award a season-specific currency.
- Season currency is used to summon new heroes (4).
- A limited-time summon event awards new heroes (5 and video).

Additional Information
- See the Season III Library for more images and videos.
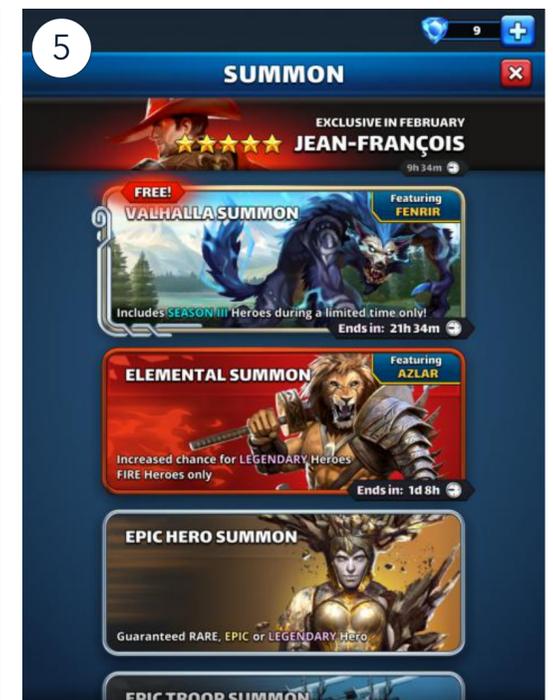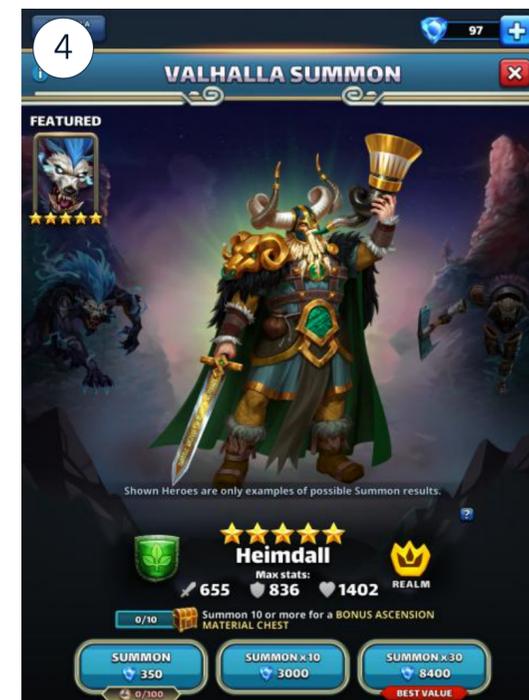
PRODUCT INSIGHTS

Build anticipation with visual previews or promotional events prior to big content releases, then increase engagement and retention by awarding "free" initial progress and offering progression accelerators.

Insight Details

- **Use promotional events and visual previews to generate anticipation for major content releases.** *Empires & Puzzles* showcases locked areas on the map to preview upcoming content. According to Stanford neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky, anticipation is a key component of pleasure *and* is critical for motivating people to complete tasks.[1]

  In a textbook example of a successful pre-release event, *Fortnite* promoted its second chapter launch by completely shutting down the game for 36 hours and replacing Epic Games' entire Twitter history with a single livestream of a black hole. The mystery and suspense generated by this event led to a record 13 million viewers watching over 50 million minutes of video ([1]).[2]

- **Give away initial progress during launch events to improve motivation and retention.** Each time *Empires & Puzzles* unlocks a new area, a free summons event grants players immediate progress on their hero collections. This has a double effect: it drives engagement in the short term *and* encourages long-term retention due to something called the endowed progress effect.

  According to the endowed progress effect, people are more motivated to work toward a goal if they are given a head start, even if that head start is *completely arbitrary*. In one study, two groups of subjects were given loyalty cards. The control group's cards required eight purchases, while the endowed progress group's cards appeared to require ten purchases—but already had two purchases filled in. Even though both groups needed to make eight purchases, the endowed progress group completed nearly *twice as many* cards as the control group (34% vs. 19%).[3]

- **Offer leveling boosts so new or lapsed players can experience the latest content.** *Empires & Puzzles* requires players to progress to a certain point in the previous season to access the new expansion. Although this ensures that older content stays relevant, it also creates a barrier to entry that may limit the game's appeal to new or returning players.

  Instead, let players quickly access the latest content with purchasable accelerators, like *Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes'* Hyperdrive Bundle—which instantly advanced players to level 85, awarded a wide range of resources, and contributed to a +70% MoM revenue increase ([2]).
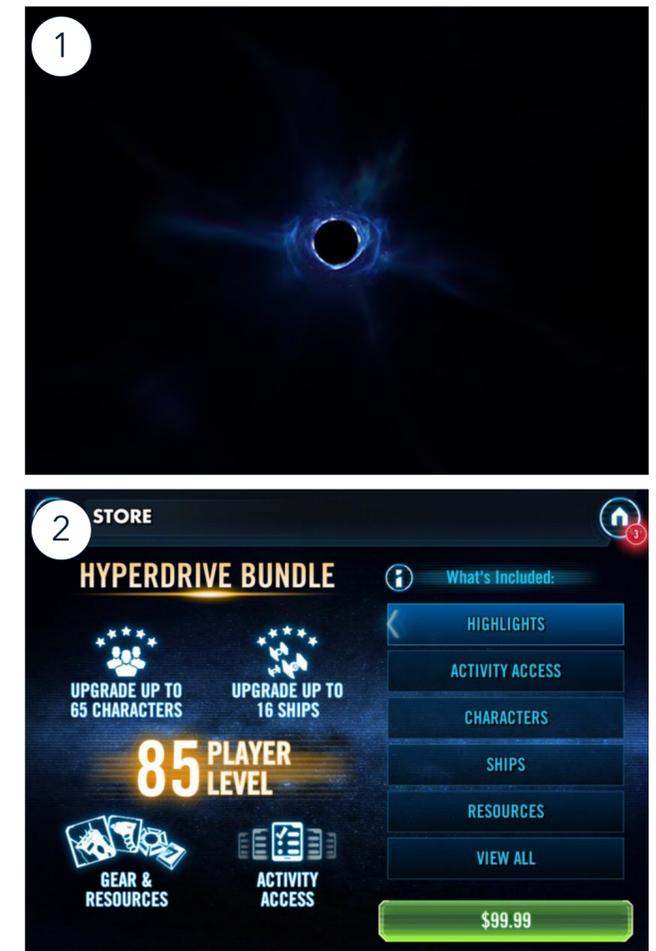
[1] Dopamine Jackpot! Sapolsky on the Science of Pleasure, 1:10

[2] Inside Epic Games' groundbreaking launch of Fortnite Chapter 2

[3] The Endowed Progress Effect: How Artificial Advancement Increases Effort, p. 506

NEW CONTENT

CONTENT RELEASES I

RPG > Content > Abilities, Equipment, and Heroes

3/9: Mezoth - Abysmal Butcher – *AFK Arena* hero (1)
3/23: Oden - Bitterblight – *AFK Arena* hero (2)
3/16: The Machine Society Summons: After the Festival – *BLEACH Brave Souls* heroes
3/31: CFYOW Summons Round 6 – *BLEACH Brave Souls* heroes
3/4: Dad...? – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/4: You've really outdone yourselves, haven't you? – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/4: Legends Beginning of Z – *Dragon Ball Legends* heroes (3)
3/4: Legends Rebellion from Evil – *Dragon Ball Legends* heroes
3/11: Awakened NOOOO! Memory No. 1 – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/11: Your Power Level Is Puny! – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/18: You're going down! – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/25: Awakened Fusion! No. 1 – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/25: The fun starts now! – *Dragon Ball Legends* equipment
3/25: Legends Rising Vol.12 – *Dragon Ball Legends* heroes
3/1: Telluria – *Empires & Puzzles* hero (4)
3/5: Charlotte Remake – *Epic Seven* hero
3/12: Black Hand of the Goddess – *Epic Seven* equipment
3/12: Kawerik – *Epic Seven* hero (5)
3/19: Cruel Mischief – *Epic Seven* equipment
3/19: Little Queen Charlotte – *Epic Seven* hero (6)
3/23: Arena Honor Season – *Epic Seven* equipment
3/6: Prompto Mastery Skill – *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* ability
3/12: Gladio Mastery Skill – *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* ability
3/19: Aranea Mastery Skill – *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* ability
3/19: Ravus Mastery Skill – *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* ability
3/29: Carbuncle – *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* hero
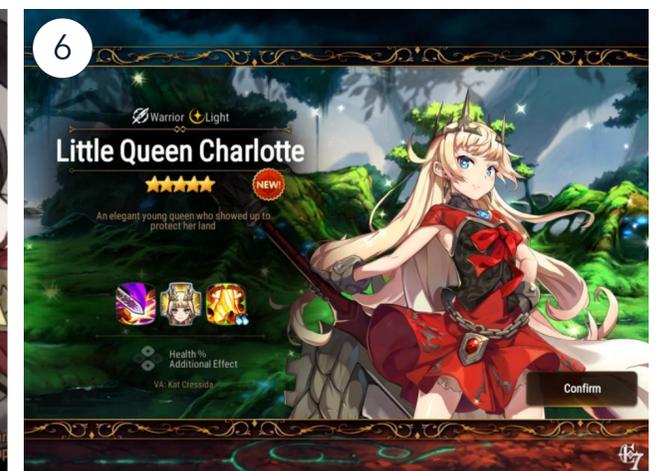
CONTENT RELEASES II

RPG > Content > Abilities, Equipment, and Heroes

3/30: Cindy Lv 200 Limit Break Skill – *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* ability
3/5: Weapon Refinery Update – *Fire Emblem Heroes* abilities
3/6: Harmony amid Chaos – *Fire Emblem Heroes* heroes (1)
3/9: Flame Emperor: Bringer of War – *Fire Emblem Heroes* hero
3/10: Ike: Young Mercenary – *Fire Emblem Heroes* hero
3/18: Familial Festivities – *Fire Emblem Heroes* heroes (2)
3/20: Bartre: Earsome Warrior – *Fire Emblem Heroes* hero
3/25: Sophia: Nabata Prophet – *Fire Emblem Heroes* hero
3/31: Bramimond: The Enigma – *Fire Emblem Heroes* hero
3/2: Ragefire Coats of Arms – *Guns of Glory* equipment
3/23: R6 Rose Curiosity – *Guns of Glory* equipment
3/18: Destruction Set – *King of Avalon: Dragon Warfare* equipment
3/10: Steampath Set – *Lords Mobile: War Kingdom* equipment
3/3: Blob – *MARVEL Strike Force* hero (3)
3/16: Red Skull – *MARVEL Strike Force* hero
3/11: Champion Rebalance and Fixes – *Raid: Shadow Legends* abilities
3/11: Platinum Tier reward system – *Raid: Shadow Legends* equipment
3/11: Daily Login Reward Champions – *Raid: Shadow Legends* heroes
3/13: Cillian the Lucky – *Raid: Shadow Legends* hero
3/10: Artemisia I – *Rise of Kingdoms* hero (4)
3/10: Ramesses II – *Rise of Kingdoms* hero
3/24: New Unimatrix Twelve Officers – *Star Trek Fleet Command* heroes (5)
3/25: Rey – *Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes* hero
3/25: Supreme Leader Kylo Ren – *Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes* hero (6)
3/13: Monster Balancing and Improvements – *Summoners War* abilities
3/27: 2nd Awakening Monster Skill Level-up Adjustment – *Summoners War* abilities
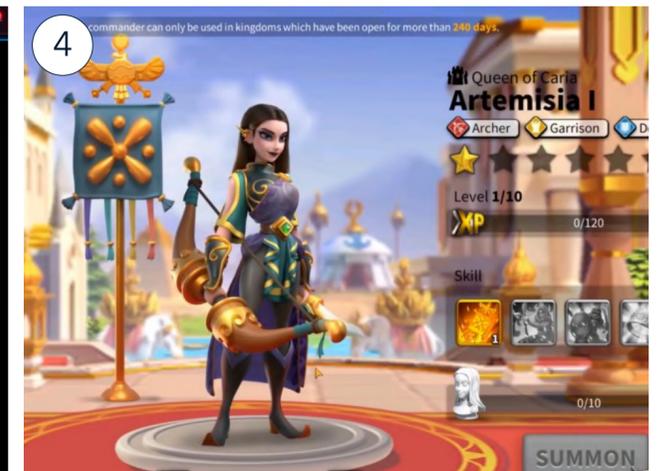
TRENDS

DOWNLOADS AND REVENUE

In 20 tracked RPG apps, downloads were +8.9% QoQ in Q1'20—a material increase from Q4'19, which saw downloads -5.7% QoQ. Revenue continued to grow steadily, up +14% QoQ in Q1'20.

Tracked RPG Apps Quarterly Numbers

Legend: ■ Revenue — Downloads

Revenue per Quarter (left axis): $200M, $400M, $600M, $800M, $1B

Downloads per Quarter (right axis): 20M, 40M, 60M, 80M

X-axis: Q1'18, Q2'18, Q3'18, Q4'18, Q1'19, Q2'19, Q3'19, Q4'19, Q1'20
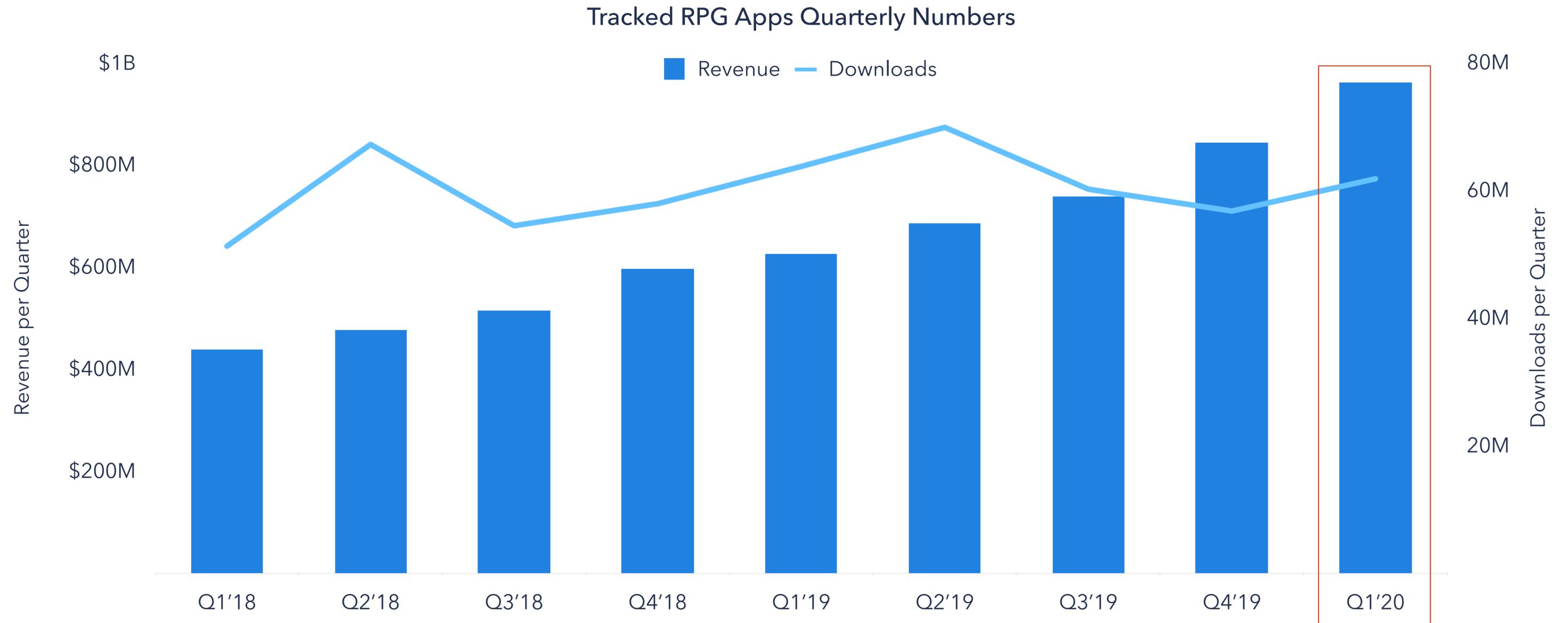
Graph data is iOS U.S. only.
QoQ = This quarter over last quarter.

SensorTower

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EVENT TYPES

Reward events continued to be the most released event type in Q1'20 for tracked RPG apps–but were slightly less dominant than in Q4'19.

Collection, accelerator, and interaction events appeared more frequently in Q1'20. The increase in collection and interaction events may indicate an attempt to attract a broader audience, as these event types are popular in other genres.

Event Releases in Q4'19 vs. Q1'20

Legend: Q4'19, Q1'20

Y-axis: Percentage of All Event Releases (30%, 20%, 10%)

X-axis categories: Rewards, Challenges, Collections, Purchases, Clubs, Accelerators, Mini-Games, Quests, Interactions, Competitions, Missions, Leveling, Notices, Expansions, Other, Currencies
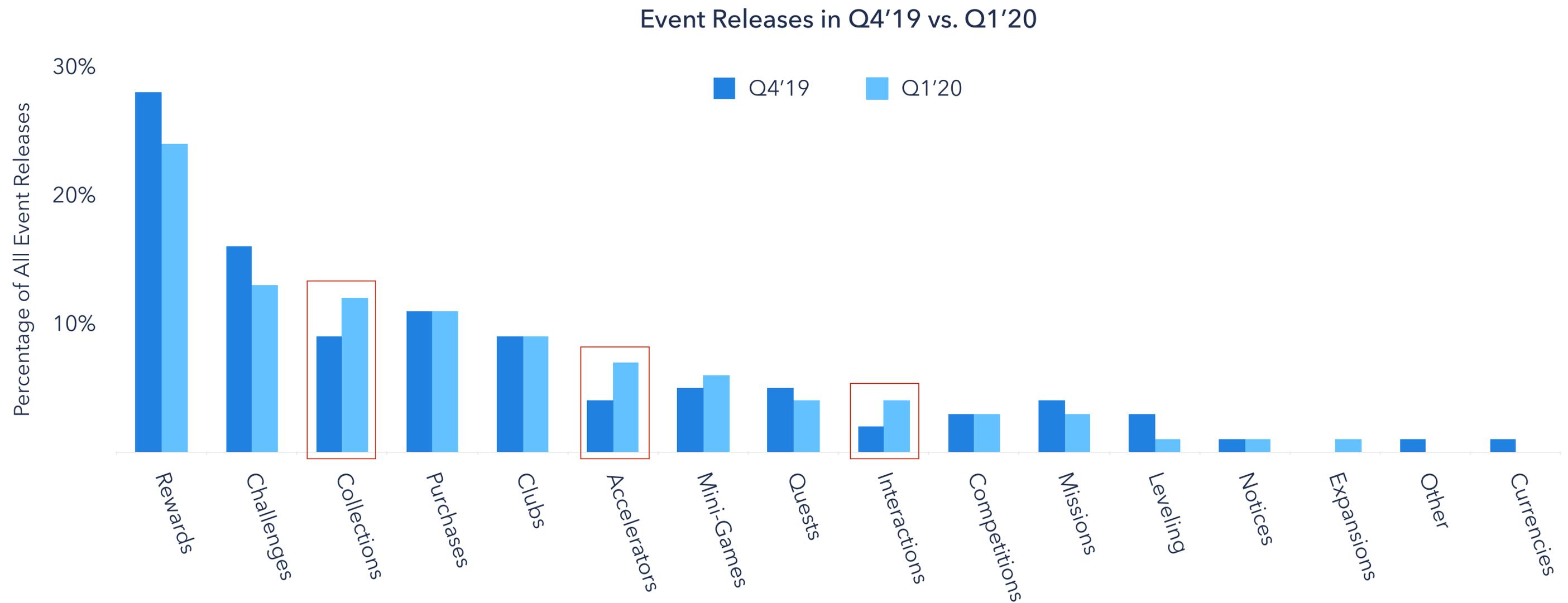
INTERACTION AND ACCELERATOR EVENTS

Lords Mobile: War Kingdom released the most interaction events in Q4'19 and Q1'20. *Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire* dominated accelerator events during the same period, accounting for 42.5% of those released (not shown).

Interaction Event Releases in Q4'19 and Q1'20

Game	
Lords Mobile: War Kingdom	▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇
Raid: Shadow Legends	▇▇▇▇▇▇▇
Summoners War	▇▇▇▇▇
Epic Seven	▇▇▇▇
Star Trek Fleet Command	▇▇▇▇
Rise of Kingdoms	▇▇▇▇
AFK Arena	▇▇▇
Fire Emblem Heroes	▇▇
MARVEL Strike Force	▇▇
BLEACH Brave Souls	▇
Dragon Ball Legends	▇

3%   6%   9%   12%   15%

Percentage of All Interaction Event Releases
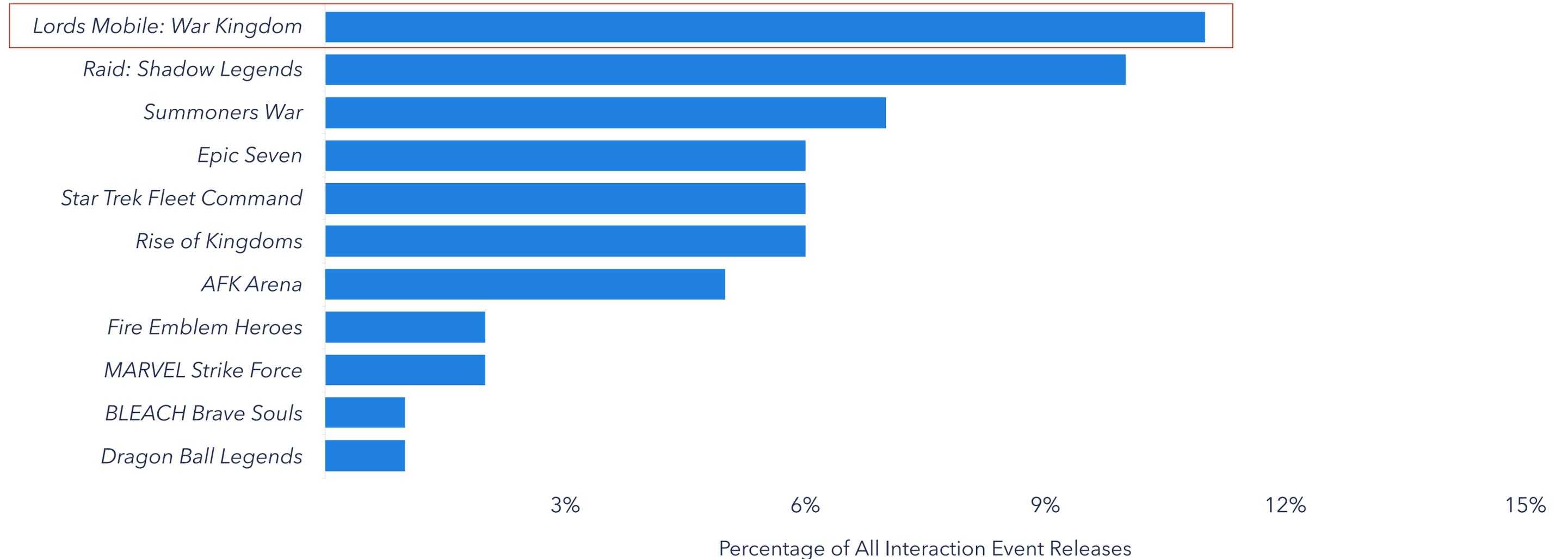
Soft-Launch & Breakout Apps

SOFT-LAUNCH & BREAKOUT APPS I

Disney Sorcerer's Arena by Glu Games

Details

- Levels require energy that regenerates on a timer.
- Additional energy can be acquired by watching rewarded ads, spending premium currency, or requesting gifts from friends (video).
- Players can earn premium currency by making purchases from partnered brands (1).

Launch Information

- Launched 3/24/20 worldwide.
- Average daily revenue since release: $15,524
- Average daily downloads since release: 39,288
- View *Disney Sorcerer's Arena* in the iOS App Store.

Knighthood by King

Details

- Players customize heroes' appearances and equipment.
- Equipment appears on heroes during gameplay.
- Combat is driven by tap and swipe mechanics (2).
- Gauntlets with special abilities are unlocked through challenge progressions and purchases (3).
- IAP bundles include cosmetic and gameplay items.

Launch Information

- Launched 2/27/20 worldwide.
- Average daily revenue since release: $6,119
- Average daily downloads since release: 10,550
- View *Knighthood* in the iOS App Store.
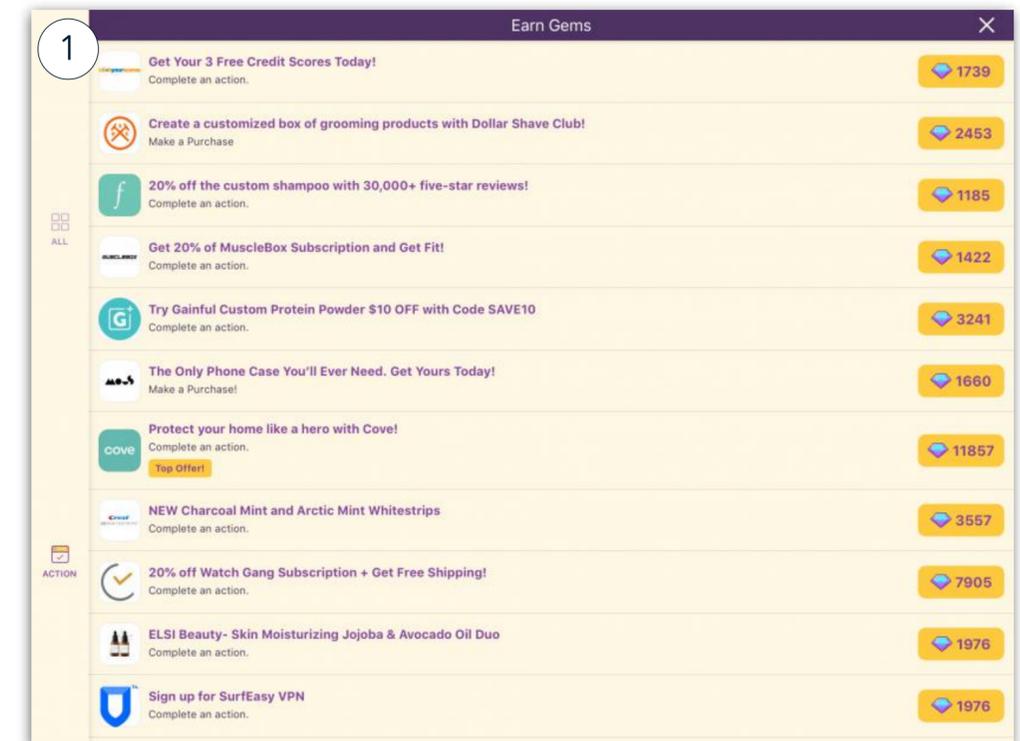
SOFT-LAUNCH & BREAKOUT APPS II

Spyjinx by Epic Games and Bad Robot Games

Details

- Players navigate squads of heroes through top-down action strategy levels to battle enemies and reach objectives ([1]).
- Each hero has a special ability that is activated by swapping them to the front of the squad.
- Heroes level up through RPG-style progression systems.
- PvP modes include pre-made levels and player-built hideouts.

Launch Information

- Soft-launched 4/1/2020 in Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia.
- Average daily revenue since release: $5
- Average daily downloads since release: 263
- View *Spyjinx* in the iOS App Store.

This mechanic serves two purposes: Swapping a hero triggers their special ability *and* determines which hero takes damage. Multi-purpose design allows for meaningful action gameplay despite limited mobile control schemes.

Action rogue-like *Downwell* successfully employs multi-purpose design to provide fast-paced action with just three controls. As players fall down a well, shooting boosts them upward, moving sideways aims, new guns increase health or ammo, and bouncing off enemies reloads.[4]

"A good idea is something that does not solve just one single problem, but rather can solve multiple problems at once."

*— Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of Super Mario Bros. and The Legend of Zelda*
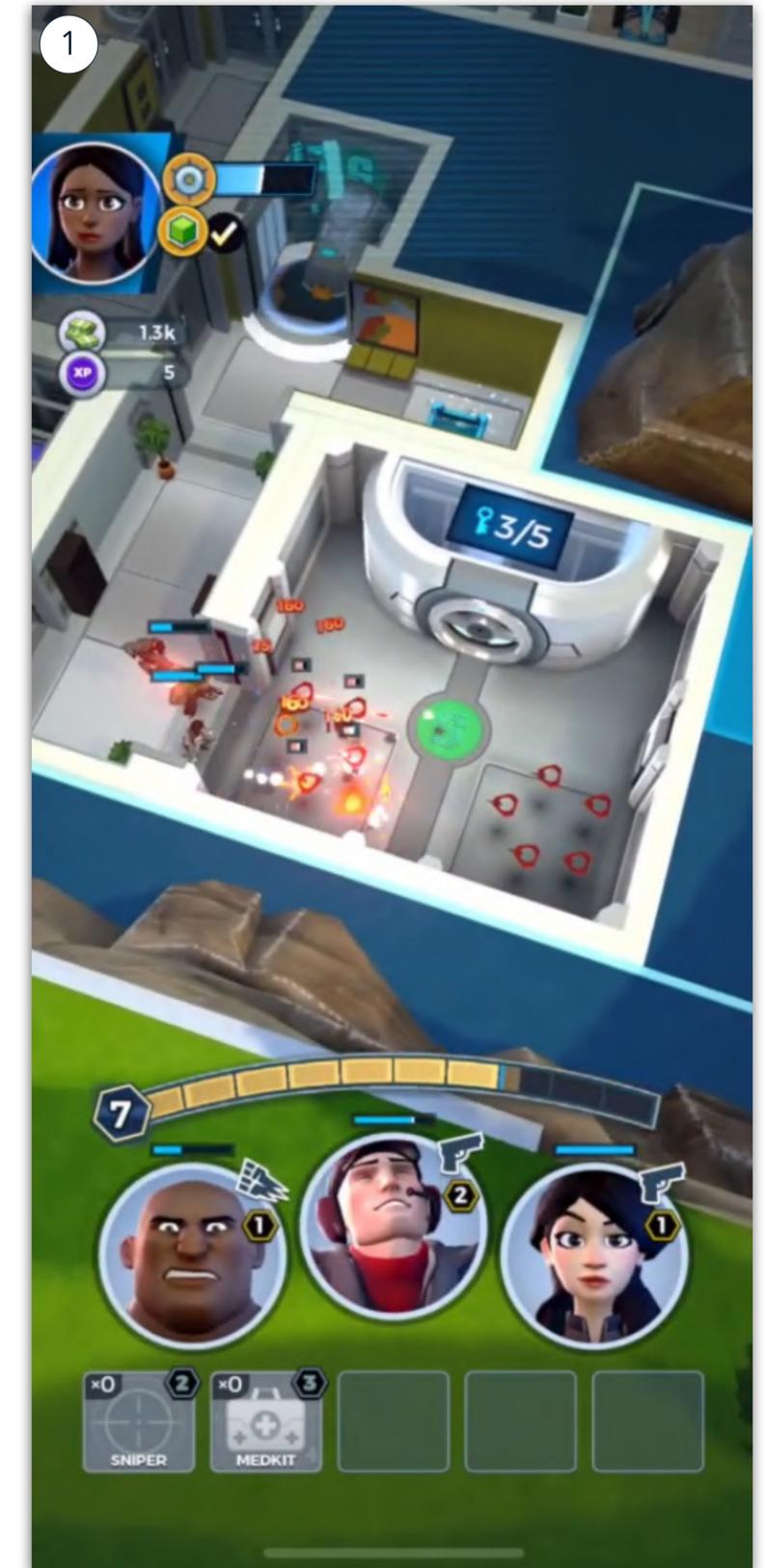
[4] Downwell's Dual Purpose Design | Game Maker's Toolkit

MARKET WATCH

NOTABLE RELEASES I

| App	Library	Description
AFK Arena	Customizable Bundles purchase event	• Four customizable purchase bundles include 2–3 item slots each. • Players select items to fill the slots (1 and video). • Available items vary by price tier. • Each bundle can only be purchased once.
Final Fantasy XV: A New Empire	Lucky BOGO Sale purchase event	• A purchasable event bundle includes a buy-one-get-one-free offer. • The free bundle has a random chance of multiplying its contents by up to 20x.
Fire Emblem Heroes	Compile Combat Manual levels feature	• Players collect Divine Codes from three game modes. • Divine Codes are used to make Combat Manuals (2 and video). • Combat Manuals can be used in place of allies in certain hero upgrade features and can be leveled like heroes. • Series of Combat Manuals must be completed in order. • Certain types of Divine Codes and Combat Manuals change with each game version.
	Forma Soul Packs purchase feature	• Each player can purchase one Forma Soul. • Forma Souls allow players to permanently add one Forma unit to their hero collection (3). • Previously, Forma units could only be used in the Hall of Forms. • Added Forma units retain skills and levels but lose merges and Sacred Seals.
Raid: Shadow Legends	Daily Login Rewards Update bonus feature	• The daily login rewards calendar has extended from 90 days to 180 days. • New 4- and 5-star heroes are awarded at 120, 150, and 180 consecutive daily logins (4).

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NOTABLE RELEASES II

App	Library	Description
Rise of Kingdoms	**Light and Darkness** club event	• Teams of four kingdoms are randomly assigned to either a light or dark camp (1). • Camps receive boosts every 24 hours: the light camp during the day and the dark camp at night. • Teams compete in 4v4 battles. • Winning teams earn points for their camp. • The camp with the most points at the end of the event wins.
Star Trek Fleet Command	**Crucible of War** challenge event	• Players earn points by collecting trophies, defeating enemies, and using and upgrading ships (video). • Points award prizes at individual and club milestones. • Club milestones are based on all members' accumulated points (2). • Members must score at least one point before each club milestone to earn its reward.
	Alliance Diplomacy club feature	• Club members above a certain rank can mark other clubs as allies, friends, or enemies (3). • Diplomacy icons set by a club are visible to members but invisible to other clubs.
Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes	**Galactic Legends** collection feature	• Galactic Legend heroes include some of the best-known *Star Wars* characters (4). • Heroes have special abilities that must be charged during battle (video). • Each hero has unique unlock requirements. • Players can use one Galactic Legend per team.
Summoners War	**Four Weeks Event** missions event	• Four weekly missions consist of five challenges each. • During each week, a new challenge unlocks on each of the first five days (video). • Players have more than a week to complete each mission.

Quickly review all features and events
Filter the Library Tool by month and year to see all new releases.
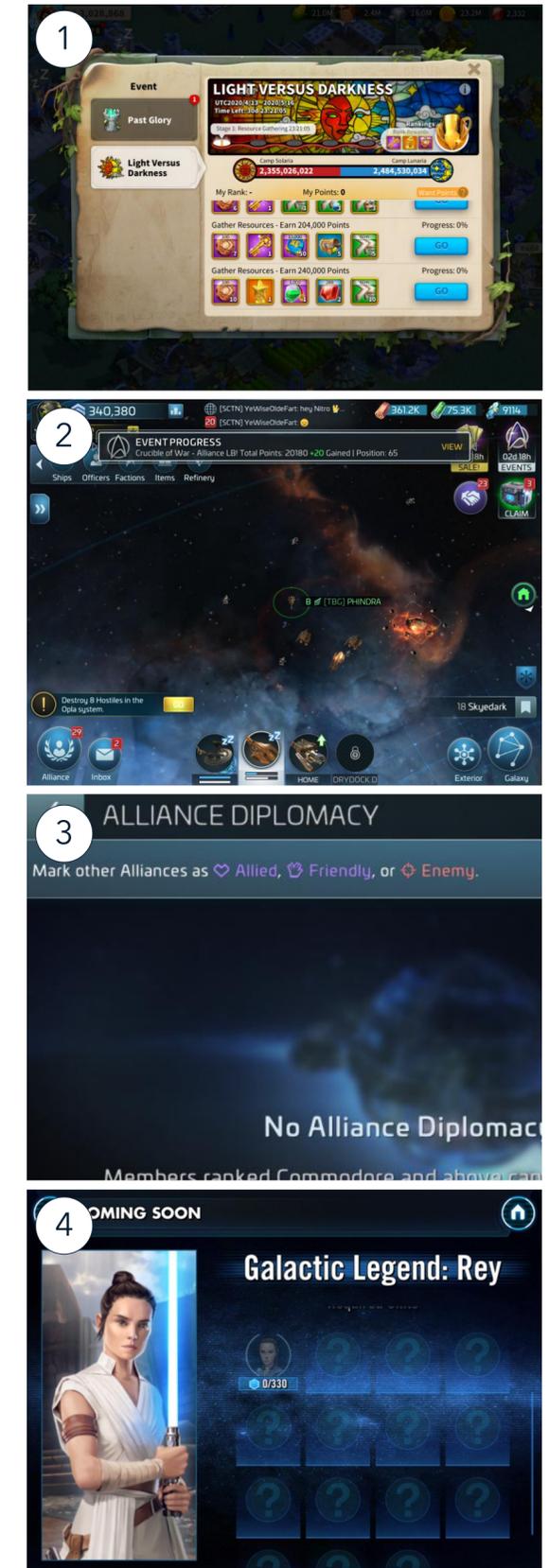
APPENDIX

PREMIUM PARTNERSHIPS

Liquid & Grit partners with these premier market research and analytics companies to infuse our reports with the most relevant and detailed gaming user personas, data, and statistics available.

Quadrant Strategies	Kinrate Analytics	Sensor Tower
Market Research	**Player Personas**	**Mobile App Store Intelligence**
Quadrant Strategies	Kinrate Analytics	Sensor Tower

Quadrant Strategies

Quadrant Strategies is a market research consultancy that uses research to help the world's most prominent technology, gaming, and entertainment companies develop strategies for building their user base, increasing user engagement and spend, and strengthening their marketing and brand plans.

We do that using a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including gamer segmentation and persona development, feature testing, message creation, and loyalty and engagement modeling. The work of our senior leadership goes back many years, and includes long-term engagements for console and gaming-PC hardware-makers, individual games in a range of genres, and across consoles, PCs, and mobile, and for some of the top game franchises.

Kinrate Analytics

Kinrate Analytics offers game developers, consultants, publishers, and cloud gaming operators the best cross-platform game recommendation engine for targeted marketing, as well as a novel profiling-as-a-service solution for intelligent market segmentation and social networking.

Other services include advanced market prediction analyses for identifying emergent gaming trends and access to unique AI-enhanced data of 140 thousand game titles and 48 million game players.

The products of Kinrate Analytics have been developed in university-led research projects in collaboration with economists, psychologists, game scholars, and data scientists.

Sensor Tower

Sensor Tower is relied upon by financial analysts, VCs, and publishers who need to leverage data to identify the fastest-growing apps, emerging markets, and more.

Clients harness Sensor Tower's suite of app intelligence tools to:

- Evaluate app economies and app vitality.
- Drive organic growth with the leading App Store Optimization platform.
- Get the best global download and revenue estimates for the App Store and Google Play.
- Discover top creatives and better shape user acquisition strategy.

RPG MECHANICS TAXONOMY

Family	Definition
Accelerators	Increases the power, impact, or efficiency of play
Banks	Saves a % of spend that can be unlocked later
Bonuses	Free bonuses given to players (e.g., retention or W2E)
Challenges	Goal-oriented tasks for players to complete
Clubs	Groups that accomplish goals or compete with other groups
Collections	A set of items players collect (often for a completion prize)
Competitions	Players competing against other players
Conflicts	Players engaging in battle with their characters
Cosmetics	Improvements or updates to the app or a feature
Currencies	Changes to currencies, economies, stores, and items
Custom Design	Options to customize aesthetics
Expansions	Additional rooms, worlds, play modes, VIP lounges, etc.
Flows	Specific flows, like the NUX, ratings, and surveys

Family	Definition
Hazards	Level elements/blockers that make levels more difficult
Interactions	Social features with direct or indirect interaction
Leaderboards	Stand-alone leaderboards
Levels	Anything to do with leveling
Mini-Games	Smaller, shorter games within a game (e.g., scratcher cards)
Missions	Linear sets of tasks that players must complete
Notices	Feature or product announcements
Other	Miscellaneous features and outliers
Profiles	Players' setups, profiles, settings, and controls
Purchases	Anything to do with purchases
Quests	Tasks that players complete to progress along a map.
Rewards	Rewards players receive for engagement or spend (other than those in the bonuses family)

"Naked power is seldom the answer to any problem."

– Adam Warlock (*The Infinity Gauntlet* #3)

LiquidandGrit.com

Brett.Nowak@LiquidandGrit.com