EP 14: From PC to mobile: Lessons in expanding to multi-platform gaming

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Tamzin Taylor: I love games that have this immersive storytelling **[00:00:10]** experience that really brings you to another world. By the way, if anyone here works in software, you'll recognize that phrase. If you ask anyone how long something will take to build, **[00:00:20]** "It depends".

The way that we approach taking our PC games to mobile was, number one, if you're a newer game, making sure that **[00:00:30]** you choose an engine that can help you do that.

Dirk Primbs: From PC to mobile, for many game developers, this journey can pose some challenges. **[00:00:40]** Today mobile devices are a big part of our weekly, daily, and hourly lives. With mobile being more popular than ever, what are the best ways to succeed **[00:00:50]** when expanding to additional platforms?

Taylor: Welcome to another episode of *Apps, Games, and Insights podcast*. We're your hosts, Tamzin Taylor and Dirk Primbs. **[00:01:00]** The topic of today's show is From PC to Mobile, Lessons in Expanding to Multi-platform Gaming, really hot topic at the moment.

We'll be exploring the major **[00:01:10]** differences between PC and mobile, how to succeed on both, and some of the factors that come with adaptation. We're very lucky today because joining us is Jen Donahoe, **[00:01:20]** Marketing and Growth Lead for *Teamfight Tactics* at Riot Games.

Dirk: Welcome, Jen. Great to have you with us today.

Jen Donahoe: Thanks so much for having me.

Dirk: I'm curious, a little bit about yourself to get this going. **[00:01:30]** How did you get involved in gaming and what is your current role exactly?

Jen: Well, the story of me getting to gaming is pretty interesting as a kid. I think many of us who are in the game industry **[00:01:40]** grew up playing games. It was no different for me. I also just absolutely loved toys, so half of my career has been in the toy industry, and the other half was in the gaming industry. **[00:01:50]**

I started off, my very first job was making Star Wars toys and it's literally been all downhill since there, but it allowed me **[00:02:00]** really to get to the journey to getting to video games. After working at Hasbro for a number of years and Disney, I was able to find my way into EA.

One of the things **[00:02:10]** that was really interesting is that the video game industry is actually really difficult to break into. Getting into EA, I was able to leverage all my work on the toy industry, **[00:02:20]** and partner with a veteran in the game industry named Chip Lange, who ended up founding a lot of EA Sports and was working on this new business from Hasbro **[00:02:30]** actually, ironically. I brought kids and family marketing, he brought video game marketing experience. From there we did just amazing things at EA around **[00:02:40]** all of the business.

There was my kickoff into video games, and from there we came in on the founding of the DS and the Wii **[00:02:50]** and console gaming. I think many of us remember Wii Bowling and all those great moments. That quickly declined and then we noticed this thing called

the **[00:03:00]** iPhone app store launched. I was actually there at the birth of getting apps into the App Store.

I remember actually going to Hasbro and asking them to let us put **[00:03:10]** Scrabble on the App Store for free and they literally said, "You must be effing kidding me? Why would we ever put a game on an app store for free?" We had to **[00:03:20]** explain, "Hey, there's this advertising model and this is how it all works."

Since then, I've been able to work at a few different gaming companies, Zynga, Scopely, **[00:03:30]** and now Riot Games, I ended up at Riot because there was this PC game, you may have heard of it called *League of Legends.* We really wanted to figure out how to grow that game **[00:03:40]** and make it really reach around the world.

The other thing that they were doing was starting to develop games on different platforms, and that being mobile. **[00:03:50]** It was a great way to come in leverage my mobile gaming experience, work on literally the biggest game in the world. That's how I got to where I am today.

Dirk: I'm **[00:04:00]** speechless. This is such a cool story. [chuckles] In two minutes, and I already would like to pick your brain over dinner or something and get all those war stories collected. [chuckles] **[00:04:10]**

Jen: I'm game, let's go.

Taylor: Jen, I have to ask the question, what did you enjoy most about working on physical toys and what do you now really enjoy about mobile games?

Jen: In the toy industry, what's great, **[00:04:20]** and it actually is in both industries, you get to put a smile on people's faces. When you're playing with toys, and you see that child pick up the physical product that you **[00:04:30]** helped to make, you just know that you're bringing magic to their lives and it's the same thing in gaming.

When I was at Disney, I don't know if you remember, well, I think we all remember **[00:04:40]** 9/11. We were all wanting to go to New York to really help and our leader at the time said, "You know what, the most important thing that we can do **[00:04:50]** is to make sure that those children who have lost their parents have that Disney Toy in their hands come this Christmas, so let's all make sure that we can **[00:05:00]** deliver that to the kids."

We were all bawling and crying thinking we never thought that making toys could actually help the world and help kids feel better, but it actually was the case. **[00:05:10]** Ever since then, I've always wanted to be involved in products that really help elevate that feeling of belonging, which gaming does because you can play with your friends, putting a smile on **[00:05:20]** your face, and escape everything that's going on in the world.

I think we have a couple things going on in the world right now. Gaming really helps you get **[00:05:30]** away from some of those things and really remember what's good about life.

Dirk: It also is what you're into says a lot about who you are. People identify a lot with what they play with **[00:05:40]** and how they spend their free time. Yes, I totally can see that. Do you have any games that particularly inspired you or toys that inspired you on the way?

Jen: **[00:05:50]** Yes, for me, growing up, there was this thing called the Apple II Plus and my very favorite game as a kid was called *Wizardry* and if you love RPG games, you **[00:06:00]** should really go back and take a look at this game. It was the birth of RPG games. I love games that have this immersive storytelling experience that **[00:06:10]** really brings you to another world.

Fast forward to today, I get to have a lot of those experiences on mobile. There's this tiny micro company called Glitch Games. **[00:06:20]** They make games like *Forever Lost* or *Veritas*. I have no affiliation to these guys. I just love that experience because it's like a modern escape room **[00:06:30]** on your mobile device.

For me, that is my personal experience like these immersive puzzle games like *The Room.* I don't know if you guys played *The Room* series. **[00:06:40]** Again, hats off to those guys. I don't know them, but they make kick-ass games.

Taylor: Excellent, Jen, take us through a bit of background about Riot Games for some of the listeners who might be more on the app **[00:06:50]** side than the game side. What's the history and why are they so important?

Jen: Well, if you didn't know about Riot, then you will know about us now. Riot Games was founded in **[00:07:00]** 2006 by Mark and Brandon, who had just a huge love of games, and they wanted to create the most player-focused game company in the world. In doing that, their idea **[00:07:10]** was to break the mold of how games made money.

They created this game called *League of Legends* and said that, "Hey, instead of making money with pay-to-win, we're going to focus **[00:07:20]** only on customization as our revenue model. We're going to make a game that players absolutely love, and you can give us some money if you want to but the very first thing that **[00:07:30]** we ever think about is making players happy with the gameplay."

We celebrated, I think right around now it's our 11 years of *League of Legends* on **[00:07:40]** PC being the biggest game in the world that actually reaches almost every country. We have offices in over 20 countries around the world. LA is our headquarters, **[00:07:50]** but so many different countries have experienced this game.

What's awesome about being at Riot and again, why I joined Riot is going multi-platform and multi-game. **[00:08:00]** This year we have launched- we're now at five games, with the launch of *League of Legends Wild Rift* in Southeast Asia, Japan, and Korea recently, which is basically **[00:08:10]** *League of Legends* on mobile.

I work on a game called *Teamfight Tactics*, which is a strategy based game on PC and mobile with crossplay. *Valorant* is a **[00:08:20]** tactical shooter that has launched on PC and *Legends of Runeterra* is a card game on mobile and PC with crossplay. Last year, **[00:08:30]** it was *League of Legends.* This year, holy crap, we have five games.

Taylor: That's really incredible. What was some of the drivers behind expanding to mobile? I guess you've got a great following **[00:08:40]** already, why move to mobile as well?

Jen: I think as many of us know, mobile gaming is the future. In many, many countries around the world, mobile gaming is the primary way that players **[00:08:50]** play games. PCs can be very expensive and in some countries, you have to go to a PC Bong or a PC bar to actually play PC-based games. **[00:09:00]** So knowing that mobile gaming was the future, knowing that with the Pixel 5, the iPhone 12, that gaming power in your hand and in

your pocket was now **[00:09:10]** pretty much a rival to the power that you get in PC gameplay.

Riot was like, "Okay, we used to be all about only PC, but we see where **[00:09:20]** the future is going. We can now deliver that core gaming experience in your hand. We need to be there. We need to be there for players because that's what players are going to want."

Taylor: Excellent. That **[00:09:30]** makes total sense. Especially, I imagine in Korea and Asia that would be particularly the case. What were some of the challenges that you faced when looking at moving to mobile?

Jen: I think some of the biggest **[00:09:40]** challenges were in two different areas. One was making sure that the control scheme and the gameplay felt the same way it does on PC on mobile. **[00:09:50]** I think when you've got a mouse and you've got a keyboard, how do you take that and make it work in the mobile gameplay and the mobile UI? That was really difficult and took **[00:10:00]** a really long time to make sure that we got that right.

The other thing that was really hard was making sure that players had a great experience, that it worked fast enough. We had set up servers **[00:10:10]** all around the world to make sure that-- On PC, it's called ping, the ability for you to move at such a lightning speed. Setting up the servers around the world was **[00:10:20]** another pretty core challenge. You had a technical challenge, you had this UI, UX challenge as well, and we spent years solving both of those.

Taylor: Some feedback **[00:10:30]** from listeners might be, well, how do you make sure that the competition is fair and that the mobile user is getting the same experience, the same advantages because obviously, with a mouse, it's easier to do things than a small **[00:10:40]** screen? How do you counter those UX challenges?

Jen: The team spends a lot of time playtesting with players. What we do, for example, on *Teamfight Tactics*, we're **[00:10:50]** actually looking into new ways to make sure that players have the same experience that they do on PC and on mobile.

Many players actually report mobile makes it easier **[00:11:00]** to play. On each of our games, no matter what it is, that is the core focus of the team early in development, is going through setting up a scheme, testing it with **[00:11:10]** players, and then iterating on that to make sure that it feels as good as it does on both platforms. Listen, I think it's always going to be slightly different.

Then I think many people **[00:11:20]** know we're also looking at console gaming as well for a number of these games. It's then that you have to say, "Okay, now I have to put a controller in my hand and figure that out." All of this is being thought through **[00:11:30]** as one of the very, very first things for each of our games.

Taylor: Coming back to Riot's launch on mobile, one of the questions that many people might ask is, "Maybe I've got a PC game at home, **[00:11:40]** it's doing really well on Steam.How long will it take me to convert that or adapt that to mobile? What are some of the key steps I need to consider?" Do you have any advice for the listeners out **[00:11:50]** there who might be so lucky?

Jen: Yes, I think the way that we approached taking our PC games to mobile was, number one, if you're a newer game, **[00:12:00]** making sure that you choose an engine that can help you do that. There's a number of different engines that we use throughout Riot, Unity, Unreal, are really well **[00:12:10]** built to help developers easily port games from PC to

mobile to console even. Those companies have done just an excellent job, **[00:12:20]** and they're really focused on those things.

The other thing that's really important is finding the right technical help. Hiring developers who are very experienced **[00:12:30]** with mobile, who are very experienced with console, to make sure that you have the right engineering support to do these things. It is not easy. I will tell you, *Teamfight Tactics* is **[00:12:40]** actually built on a proprietary engine. We have just had the hardest time making sure to get the right talent in that we can do this correctly. **[00:12:50]**

One of the things that was really helpful to us was Google itself. Because Riot was going to the mobile platform with so many different games, we were able **[00:13:00]** to leverage Google engineers to come and help educate us to help make sure that we had the right, everything from QA, to engineering, to **[00:13:10]** support, to marketing support.

Actually, I worked really closely with a number of the different Google Play marketing team or the Google Play merchandising team. We did a really unique **[00:13:20]** launch of all of the Riot Games. Pre-register, called L10 was our code name for this that went up last October and was really the first time that I can remember **[00:13:30]** a multi-game launch like that happening inside the Google Playstore.

It was fascinating to leverage partnerships to help us launch as well. I think we talked a lot about gameplay **[00:13:40]** earlier, making sure that your gameplay can work across all of those. I think I covered quite a few but hopefully, that's helpful.

Taylor: That's amazing. Second, your comment about pre-registration, **[00:13:50]** if you've already got a brand, if you've already got a game on PC that has great following, then you use pre-registration to seek that demand and get that anticipation going early on.

Dirk: You make the **[00:14:00]** community work or get a little bit closer to your community right from the get-go, right?

Jen: Yes, our fans and players absolutely loved when we went up for pre-registration. **[00:14:10]** One of the things that they loved about it is it basically puts them in line for a closed beta. Because of the way that we work with Google, we had the opportunity to invite many of those pre-registration **[00:14:20]** players into our closed beta, which for them is just like a kid getting into the candy store with unlimited supply.

I think that's the other thing that really sets **[00:14:30]** Riot apart is how strongly we take player feedback into improving the games. The primary reason we do these closed betas and **[00:14:40]** different versions of the closed betas and even open betas is to make sure, number one, does the game technically work? Are we able to hit the ping we talked about? Is the player experience working? **[00:14:50]**

Then, two is, are there any bugs or anything that we need to fix before we go more broadly out? They actually give us a great benefit in service and we hope **[00:15:00]** that they get a great benefit by being able to preview it. Many of our players will stream on YouTube or other streaming platforms to show people how awesome the game is. **[00:15:10]** So we'd like to thank them for doing that because, in a sense, it is also free marketing for us to help other players learn about all the great things going on.

Dirk: Basically, the beat **[00:15:20]** of it comes your first marketing channel of sorts?

Jen: Absolutely, absolutely. It isn't so much that we encourage it, it's just that players want to do it, they are so excited to be able to play the **[00:15:30]** game, whether it was *Teamfight Tactics*, it was amazing when we were in this very, very small, closed beta and I think many companies use Australia as that first country--

Dirk: [laughs] **[00:15:40]**

Jen: I don't know what it is--

Taylor: It's called insight forward-thinking.

Jen: It is because of that. I actually, for a while, had an Australian **[00:15:50]** account on my phone because that's where most game companies test all of the early versions of the game and so it was really fun to be able to test early versions. When we did that, for **[00:16:00]** *Teamfight Tactics*, on our road to launch, there was this woman, Australian woman, who was streaming the game and we were so excited because we didn't ask her, we didn't even know who she was and she **[00:16:10]** became really famous for being one of the first people to show *Teamfight Tactics* on mobile to everybody.

We were watching her seeing what she was saying, where there are chances **[00:16:20]** to maybe fix some things. We were like scribbling down the notes frantically to make sure that we could make any of those changes that she was calling out and that streamers were also posting in her stream. **[00:16:30]** We utilized all those resources to make the game better.

Taylor: I think this demonstrates the power of community and how you can really leverage that if you already have a PC or console games just to **[00:16:40]** get that feedback and make the most of them and get them to give you feedback on how the mobile execution is performing.

Jen: To be honest, we were also terrified. So you may remember **[00:16:50]** back when Blizzard announced Diablo coming to mobile and redshirt guy stood up and made a joke about "Is this an April Fool's joke that you're doing this to me?" So**[00:17:00]** we, at Riot being a core gaming company on PC, we were terrified to go to mobile.

So what we wanted to make sure to do was like you were saying, to **[00:17:10]** leverage our community to let them know it was coming to show them early the integrity of bringing the game to them in a way that was not going to cheapen that was not going to **[00:17:20]** be less.

I think if you talk to many different players, you will find that, listen, they love PC and mobile for different reasons, but it fits their lifestyle, or fits their gameplay. **[00:17:30]** On TFT, we're actually seeing almost a parody of players playing on PC and playing on mobile. That's how important this platform is to us. **[00:17:40]** We actually see like, about 10% of our players play on both. They'll go from playing on a PC and then whenever it fits their life they'll play on mobile.

This is the future. This is the future **[00:17:50]** of a player being able to play their favorite games wherever they want to play it whenever they want to play it.

Dirk: Is that something that would fit most games or even all games or **[00:18:00]** would you say moving from PC to mobile sometimes you have to completely turn the game principle upside down in order to fit those different use cases? **[00:18:10]** As you said, people use the mobile in completely different scenarios.

Would you say that pretty much every game benefits from such a change or is there something where you feel like some **[00:18:20]** games are maybe not for one or the other platform or here are the changes that, pretty much, all go through?

Jen: You're going to love my answer, it depends.

Dirk: [laughs] **[00:18:30]** Love it. Amazing. How did you know?

Taylor: By the way, if anyone here works in software, you'll recognize that phrase. If you ask anyone how long something will take to build, it depends.

Jen: It depends.

Dirk: Of course, it depends.

Jen: What I **[00:18:40]** will say to answer your question is if you are a brand new game and you think about this from the beginning, yes, it's awesome. You can, absolutely, plan **[00:18:50]** for that. You can make sure that you're taking that into account. If you're an existing game or a long-standing game, and if you built your gameplay and all of your needs around **[00:19:00]** PC, it is harder, it is not impossible. That's where it depends.

It's really interesting *Valorant*, right now, one of our tactical shooter games, **[00:19:10]** obviously, all of our games we're thinking about expanding to multiplatform. One of their core challenges, how do I get a tactical shooter that is very much built for a PC **[00:19:20]** gameplay to mobile? That's what they're going through right now. We'll see how they do.

Obviously, I'm very encouraged that they'll figure it out. If anyone can figure it out, **[00:19:30]** it is Riot because you have a bunch of very focused PC gamers who for many, many years were like, "Mobile, no way. That's for kids. That's for moms playing **[00:19:40]** *Candy Crush*. That's not for us."

Slowly over time, when they start to see how powerful these devices are, now, with 5G, now with Wi-Fi, players **[00:19:50]** can now get the same experience, almost, exactly the same experience. My "it depends" is almost most people can probably figure it out.

Taylor: [00:20:00] One of the questions I have for you, Jen, is monetization models between console and mobile are pretty different. How did Riot solve that problem and users' expectations **[00:20:10]** on how the games would make money?

Jen: I've had the opportunity to work at a number of different companies, as I mentioned, like Zynga and Scopely, where pay-for-power or pay-to-win, **[00:20:20]** is a core business model. That is a lot of how people approach core game loops and keeping players engaged.

Where Riot is super **[00:20:30]** different and the core reason why I joined Riot is that is not how we view monetization. Number one, we make a game that players love. We believe that if players love a game, **[00:20:40]** they will give you money for cosmetic items because they just love your game so much and identity and the ability to express yourself in the game becomes **[00:20:50]** much, much more important to them.

I think what's amazing is customization and cosmetic-oriented business models can actually work, **[00:21:00]** but you got to have a killer game before you can go there. We have a team called the karma team, which focuses on raising money for charities around

the world. During **[00:21:10]** the start of the Coronavirus and the pandemic, we actually sold some- we call them skins in *League of Legends*.

Basically, it customizes your champion or your character **[00:21:20]** in the game. Millions and millions of players around the world offered money for these skins so that they could donate to charity. We raised millions of dollars that went out **[00:21:30]** around the world to help support what's going on, unfortunately, with the pandemic.

Players will show up with their dollars and they will do it when they love the game and they love the community **[00:21:40]** and they believe in the cause. They're happy to do it. They're happy to give you money for these things because it supports their belief in their pride in their community in the game.

Taylor: What's **[00:21:50]** the craziest skin or customization that you think Riot's offered?

Jen: When you join Riot, you're able to go into the library of skins and pick I think five different skins that you can put on some of your **[00:22:00]** champions. I picked a couple. I'm not even a huge *League of Legends* player, I actually suck. TFT is my game, *Teamfight Tactics.* The thing that I like about TFT is-- **[00:22:10]** We have these things called Little Legends which are these little avatars that are cute little kind of like animals. You can pick skins for those.

Our famous one right now, his name is **[00:22:20]** Choncc, and he plays belly bongos on himself, kind of like to the We Will Rock You drum beat. He's skinned as a panda. 60% **[00:22:30]** of all of our direct-purchase downloads were Panda Choncc, this single character that we just launched a month ago, because he looks like a panda. Who **[00:22:40]** knew that that would be the thing that players around the world love with this recent set. Sometimes we're shocked by what players love. Sometimes we know but this was a shock.

Taylor: **[00:22:50]** That's super cool. Who doesn't love pandas?

Dirk: Pandas are awesome.

Jen: Apparently the entire world loves pandas.

Taylor: Given your rich history working in the gaming industry **[00:23:00]** and seeing what's happening with this growth of multi-platform, what do you think is going to happen in the next 10 years? I know this is a broad question, so no pressure.

Dirk: It depends.

[00:23:10] [laughter]

Jen: Yes. I think I told you I actually used to work at Battelle, and so let me get my magic eight ball out and see what it says. **[00:23:20]** Here's what I think. I was doing a little bit of thinking about this. One of the things that is absolutely amazing and you're starting to see it, Riot started this and **[00:23:30]** other game companies are starting to pick it up, is using gaming IP as the foundation for pop culture moments around the world.

For example, **[00:23:40]** our eSports is basically started it all and is the premier eSport in the world. Worlds is the culmination of that season's eSport. **[00:23:50]** It just happened in China last week, actually. Part of that we launched a pop band called KDA, which is a bunch of the champions. In fact, it's an all

[00:24:00] female band who does special songs and really awesome amazing CGI videos that make this a cultural moment, not only for the game **[00:24:10]** but for our community.

It is typically some of the highest YouTube views in the world happen around this. We have partnerships with Louis Vuitton and **[00:24:20]** Mercedes and Mastercard. These moments just are becoming bigger than Super Bowl. If you look at the numbers of people who watch our eSports events it is **[00:24:30]** multiples larger than things like the Super Bowl, or the World Series, or even FIFA.

I'm a soccer player- I'm sorry, I'm a football player. I'm talking to you guys. **[00:24:40]** I'm a football player and just to know that it is bigger than soccer it's amazing that eSports has gotten to this point. I think the future is **[00:24:50]** what happens if Riot now brings entertainment to that? Which we will, we will start bringing entertainment and accommodating with games into these big, big moments. **[00:25:00]**

I think that's one thing, and when you think about eSports I was mentioning that. I think eSports is going to be in the Olympics at some point in time. How big eSports is getting, **[00:25:10]** we are either going to create our own Olympics or we're going be invited to the Olympics. It just has to be a thing. It's seen as a sport and I think it should start getting that worldwide recognition. **[00:25:20]**

Dirk: The interesting question will be what is the mix that we will see between the gaming world and the sport world and the entertainment world. Remember there have **[00:25:30]** been predictions that also went into the direction of saying games will make it into what we today see as movies and TV shows and we are halfway there.

If you turn on **[00:25:40]** the Twitch channel and watch people playing, that's like half the thing and there are the whole genre of game-created drama series almost and I think it goes on the same direction. **[00:25:50]** If we put it all together and make a big splash then you can basically navigate between sports, real-world activity, gaming, entertainment, **[00:26:00]** pretty seamlessly.

Taylor: Yes, I think I'd agree there. If you think about what's the latest Disney film? *Mandolorian* was built in the Unreal engine. This is crazy. It's almost **[00:26:10]** as though movies, TV are all molding into where people are spending most of their time which is in games.

Jen: I am so thankful that I work in the game industry and have a **[00:26:20]** job considering what's going on in the world and working in an industry that's actually thriving. I'm just so thankful and so lucky to be able to have that. When I look at eSports, **[00:26:30]** *Teamfight Tactics*, the game that I work on, we actually launched eSports recently and we ran our first championship just a couple of months ago.

What I was so shocked by is **[00:26:40]** some of the players that played in our tournament, we had to send them phones and streaming equipment and PCs because they were kids and some countries **[00:26:50]** they didn't have the equipment.

To know that we are perhaps providing an opportunity for some of these young people to find their future in gaming and **[00:27:00]** get a scholarship, a number of colleges offer scholarship, to get notoriety and maybe get sponsored and find a way out of their situation through gaming. Again, this is just another **[00:27:10]** reason. It goes back to what I said at the beginning is, I do this because I want to put a smile on people's face and make them feel good about their lives and because we're running eSports, we can do this. **[00:27:20]**

The kid from France that won TFT Championship-- I'm just so happy that we're able to do that for people. It makes me thrilled.

Taylor: Hopefully, we can all get back together soon and watch some **[00:27:30]** in real life because I went to one in Paris last year, it was mental. It was so much fun.

Jen: Yes, it's amazing. Next year, we hope to be able to be in-person and we hope that our TFT eSports **[00:27:40]** Championship will be in-person. Likely it won't be for the first half of the year, but to be able to do that next year-- The energy in those reminds me of I used to work on a game **[00:27:50]** called *WWE Champions*. I know many people love wrestling, professional wrestling, but the energy when you go to those matches is something that I've always strived to achieve **[00:28:00]** in all the products that I work on because that's the type of energy you want to replicate and have people love. It's true passion and that's what making games is about.

Taylor: WWE is like a narrative in itself, **[00:28:10]** it comes back to what you were saying in the very beginning of the podcast, which is people want to be engaged by a story and they will love the characters and helps them see them overcome the challenges they face, **[00:28:20]** so yes, there's a lot of parallels.

Jen: Absolutely. Anyone knows the term soap opera, it's a soap opera for boys and for guys and it's one of the IPs **[00:28:30]** that I've just always looked at. How do you replicate that passion because those fans are some of the most passionate in the world? They all know that it is-- I'm not going to use the word fake. **[00:28:40]** The outcomes are story-driven, but everyone knows that and they still love it because it just touches their passion with the characters like you said and that's what we take **[00:28:50]** into TFT.

We develop these little legends, these little avatars. They're not based in anything, we haven't developed stories yet, because people love them so much, we are going to actually develop **[00:29:00]** stories because we found something in just the *Kawaii* or the cute factor as the Japanese like to say, and we're just going to take that to the next level.

Dirk: Coming back to the **[00:29:10]** theme of putting smiles on people's faces, what I find astonishing is also the gaming industry as a whole, and especially mobile gaming didn't miss a beat **[00:29:20]** over the corona crisis. Corona crisis hit and we all were all of a sudden placed into this world where we have to figure out how to actually meet each other and talk to **[00:29:30]** each other and in a sense, the mobile gaming industry and the gaming industry as a whole was already there.

It's to the extent that sometimes it's even easier to have a massive **[00:29:40]** multiplayer online experience with hundreds of people at the same time than to organize a five people online video chat. It's amazing that the question I'm trying to steer towards is, was there anything **[00:29:50]** in these past months that you adopted because of COVID?

Jen: Absolutely. I don't think I mentioned this story but *Teamfight Tactics* was launched **[00:30:00]** on PC last year in June, and it took the team 82 days to make that game. Then what we did was at that moment, we realized **[00:30:10]** how successful it was. In October of last year, they were like, "All right, we want this to go on mobile."

Five months later, we were like, "Okay, we're going to launch **[00:30:20]** this on mobile." Here comes March and I'm sure you may or may not know the shutdown history in Los Angeles, we had to launch *Teamfight Tactics,* Riot's first-ever mobile **[00:30:30]** game. We've never done it before. We had to launch it during the first week of lockdown.

A team of people who all we ever do is sit in war rooms all day, we sit next to each other. **[00:30:40]** Everything we do as developers is face to face. To figure out how to do that during lockdown, I'm so proud of us because basically, we were in a Google Meet **[00:30:50]** that was just running 24 hours a day. All of us would pop in and out and pretend like it was a war room.

During that time, we figured out there are so many things that **[00:31:00]** are important for us as developers to make sure that we didn't lose our minds in that process because we're human beings too. It's been hard. It's been hard to be **[00:31:10]** able to think about what players need all the time when we ourselves are also struggling. What we did figure out during that time, and what people need is **[00:31:20]** content and making sure the service was working. Really connecting the communities together to find ways to help them get through all of this.

We focused on that **[00:31:30]** as our end goal and we launched the game successfully. TFT was number one app, again, app in all of Korea and number one in games, in many, many countries **[00:31:40]** around the world.

For a game that- it's called *Teamfight Tactics*, we are a *League of Legends* strategy game. We use all the same champions, we're in the same lore, but to launch that high **[00:31:50]** at that moment was, again, a true testament to the partnerships with Apple and Google and the featuring and the preregistration in that long, long road, but also, to all the **[00:32:00]** developers who just sacrificed themselves and sleep and everything to make sure that players get that.

Hopefully, that answers a little bit of your question. I went off tangent, **[00:32:10]** but I wanted to make sure that story was told about how the developers have been trying to keep it together and do all of this from home when we've never ever, **[00:32:20]** ever had to do this before.

Taylor: Having spoken to many developers about their experiences during lockdown, I think this is one of the most challenging aspects, which is, how do you actually work on **[00:32:30]** those creative elements and processes when you're so far apart? Are there any learnings or things you've done differently during lockdown that you think you'll keep applying when you go back **[00:32:40]** to the office?

Jen: Absolutely. One of the things that we have been challenged with is the whiteboard. We've been using Google jam board as a way **[00:32:50]** for us to all have a common place where we can write down things and literally, I love that they call it a jam board because we jam on ideas together. I think **[00:33:00]** that using technology to help us get through and continue to communicate. Like I said earlier, we have 20 regions around the world and one of my key jobs is making sure that they **[00:33:10]** are constantly updated on what we're doing and how they're supposed to activate screen sharing and showing them these types of things.

We've been able to really leverage technology in ways that **[00:33:20]** I'm almost like I don't need to do as much travel as I did before. Listen, nothing replaces face-to-face. I think we're finding that using technology **[00:33:30]** and tools can actually do more than we thought it could do.

The opportunity to take care of yourself, I think many, many developers don't do that. **[00:33:40]** As a woman, working with a bunch of guys who don't shower and eat crap all the time-- Come on, come on. You've seen it. You've seen it.

Dirk: I shower.

Jen: **[00:33:50]** Do you make games or you just podcast about games? It's different.

[laughter]

Jen: You're married, are you? You've got someone holding you accountable to it.

Dirk: Yes, that's true.

Taylor: It's true too. **[00:34:00]**

Dirk: I'm a developer.

Jen: Speaking of that, there are a number of our teammates who number one are younger and they might live with roommates **[00:34:10]** or they might not be partnered up who are absolutely struggling during this time and have to figure out how do I find and hang out with my friends **[00:34:20]** when normally we were a bunch of friends at the office at lunch, probably three times a day. We were all playing games together.

It's kind of like, you go to work and you hang out with your buddies and you also happen to make some **[00:34:30]** games. The loss of that has been really hard for people. We've had to institute a lot of times of the day where we still get out and play games together and do things like that. I think **[00:34:40]** it's cheesy to talk about taking care of yourself and wellness, but I think that's a part of this as well.

Taylor: Absolutely. Hearing you talk about that it makes it real for people **[00:34:50]** who are building games and are facing this kind of real situation of being locked down. It's almost like the day has no defined beginning and end because you're in a box **[00:35:00]** all day long. I liken it to being on a 12-hour flight.

Jen: Yes, that's a really good analogy.

Taylor: Let's just bring you back to the games aspect. This is where the sense of community can really help people feel like **[00:35:10]** they have support.

Jen: I think from a support standpoint, I was talking to someone yesterday about how-- It was their coming out story and his coming out **[00:35:20]** story was doing it within the *League of Legends* community. He did that because he felt safe. Even though, I think many of the gaming communities have issues with toxicity **[00:35:30]** and homophobia and racism, I think there are, for sure, positive pockets of our community that do allow people to feel really safe to do that. **[00:35:40]**

It was really funny because I'm like, "I had to come out the old school way and pick up the phone and call my mom, and you got to do it in a video game with a bunch of people. Congratulations." **[00:35:50]** [chuckles]

Dirk: Well, they're inspiring. In fact, is really that the technology or the kind of tools we all are blessed to work with and help building, bring **[00:36:00]** people close enough together that they share that bond that they trust each other that they can have a real personal, intimate even, exchange over these platforms. **[00:36:10]**

In a way, it's not even surprising that people use a game they love with people they love to basically make this also the stage where they **[00:36:20]** live their life to the full extent in. This is amazing. This is inspiring. I love it.

Taylor: Yes, I think it's all about the connectedness. What your game is offering is the connection to people who share common **[00:36:30]** interests and are supportive.

Jen: Yes, I think it is an identity. I think there are many types of identity in the world and now calling yourself a gamer isn't uncool like it used to be **[00:36:40]** when we were all younger. Even within gamers, now there are sub-segments of being a gamer and there's the strategy game players, there's RPG players. Do you **[00:36:50]** identify by the game you play?

I think a number of people really use that as part of like if you were to introduce yourself, I think some people would actually introduce **[00:37:00]** themselves as a gamer. Many of them do. When we look to interview and bring on new writers, one of the first things that almost all of these people say is, "I'm a gamer, I've been playing my whole life." **[00:37:10]** I do think that that identity is what helps bring this community together.

Listen, there's challenges with community, and **[00:37:20]** there's great things with community. I think everyone may have watched the *Social Media Dilemma* on Netflix, showing us the challenges with social media. I've been dealing with social media since it started. **[00:37:30]** I can connect with all my friends around the world and stay in touch. I think you have to use your powers for good or evil. We are choosing to find where the good is.

Dirk: That brings me **[00:37:40]** back to the theme of today's episode, which was from PC to mobile, that journey. Yes, gamer as an identity, but I still assume that there is that **[00:37:50]** sub-identity. A PC gamer is not the same as a console gamer, is not the same as a mobile gamer. Right?

Jen: Yes, but I think it's changing if I would have to say because of cross-platform. **[00:38:00]** *Fortnight*, for example, is cross-platform, *Teamfight Tactics* is cross-platform. There are a number of games that are starting to really make the inroads to do that. **[00:38:10]** In the world of predictions over the next 10 years, I should have said this, as well, is a majority of games are going to be cross-platform. Because, again, we want and everybody wants **[00:38:20]** players to be able to play these games whatever fits their lifestyle.

I think that is something that developers should really look at. You're able to dominate share of day because they are able to **[00:38:30]** play your game all the time. You're able to get DAU/MAU, you're able to get monetization increases because players are playing a lot. Like Red Shirt Guy, right? "I'm a PC guy, **[00:38:40]** how dare you tell me that you're going to put my game that I own that I've spent time and money on that phone thing?"

There's always going to be **[00:38:50]** subsets of people like that, but the majority of people over the next couple of years are going to forget that even existed and we are going to be gamers.

Dirk: So at some point, it's going to be not important **[00:39:00]** anymore where the game is basically sitting on, as long as it fits the moment I decide that I want to play?

Jen: Yes, I think the most important thing is the game itself. **[00:39:10]** "Is the game fun? Does this drive me to have a community? Is it in a lore, in an IP, in a story, in characters

that I love and identify with?" Then absolutely, **[00:39:20]** it goes next to, "How do I connect with that IP or that brand?"

This goes back to my other prediction about these brands becoming cultural moments, **[00:39:30]** having music, having movies and TV shows, having podcasts, having all these different touchpoints. Think about *Star Wars*. When we talked earlier about the *Mandalorian*, **[00:39:40]** and about how I started my career making *Star Wars* toys. Listen, I have *Star Wars* coins from 1983 on my wall as an art piece. **[00:39:50]** When you love an IP, you want it as part of your life in every way that you interact with things.

Dirk: Well said.

Jen: That coin poster is worth $10,000, **[00:40:00]** I just want to say. That's why it's on my wall.

Taylor: Don't give out your address yet.

Dirk: Do you have three top tips for developers, when it comes to expanding to **[00:40:10]** multi-platform gaming?

Jen: Yes. It goes back to the themes that we've been talking about throughout the whole show. Number one is, make sure your game is fun. Make sure you test it. Make sure you have a starting place **[00:40:20]** where you know that it works with players.

Number two is, make sure that you hopefully are building it on a platform that can scale to multiple platforms. We mentioned **[00:40:30]** Unity, Unreal. Those are just two examples. I'm sure there are a ton more, but those people have their stuff together and have planned for all of those platforms to work.

Number **[00:40:40]** three is finding the right talent and the right engineering talent specifically, to make sure that they know how to take the great game that you made and put it onto all those platforms so that it works. **[00:40:50]**

It is not easy to do. I am just a marketing product person, but people who code and who can figure that out are truly the heroes that make **[00:41:00]** these games work, because it is absolutely not easy. That's a pretty good starting place. I think if you get into things like play-testing and making sure that your **[00:41:10]** players are responding to it. If you get into closed betas through different platforms like Google provides, those are ways that you can make sure that you can get the game out there **[00:41:20]** to multiple platforms as best you can.

Dirk: All right, and the most important advice probably is try to put a smile on the face of your users and gamers. I definitely **[00:41:30]** have to say, you put a broad, broad smile on our faces.

Taylor: I don't want to be disparaging, but this is one of the best podcasts we've recorded because of you, Jen.

Jen: Oh, okay. **[00:41:40]** I am blushing. I'm as red as my shirt that one can see.

Taylor: Jen, we're going to have to get you back because you're a wealth of inspiration.

Jen: Thank you so much. I'm glad that all of this work **[00:41:50]** was good for something, and someone wants to listen to me talk.

Taylor: Awesome.

[music] **[00:42:00]**

Dirk: Thank you, Jen, for joining us today and sharing your insights, and thank you to you, our listeners, for tuning in. If you have any thoughts on the topics covered on today's episode, **[00:42:10]** we'd love to hear from you. You can find us on Twitter at #GooglePlayDev. Keep an eye out and subscribe to our podcast for the next episode coming soon. As always, **[00:42:20]** until next time, keep playing and learning.

[music] **[00:42:30]**

[00:42:31] [END OF AUDIO]