It's Game On at EA With Shotgun Software

MEET THE STUDIO: ELECTRONIC ARTS (EA)

SPECIALTIES	Interactive Entertainment
SHOTGUN USERS	2,400
FAVORITE SHOTGUN FEATURES	Flexible Event Daemon & API, JIRA Bridge
NOTABLE GAMES & FRANCHISES	Madden FIFA Battlefield The Sims Plants vs. Zombies

SHOTGUN

Star Wars™: Squadrons

By Stephen Schick
Technical Art Director,
Electronic Arts (EA)

Electronic Arts (EA) is one of the largest video game companies in the world – and possibly one of the largest Shotgun customers working in games. What sets us apart is scale. We have 2,400 Shotgun users across eight different studios around the globe, in addition to our outsourcing partners who also work directly in Shotgun.

 In my role as Technical Art Director, my key areas of focus are supporting internal tools at external vendor partners. I'm an EA veteran, and during the past 13 years, I've witnessed major changes in the industry first-hand and experienced our relationships with vendors evolve. The way we work today is more collaborative, and our vendors use the same tools and workflows with the same visibility into assets and project data as our internal artists.

COVER IMAGES

Madden NFL 21

Plants vs. Zombies: Battle for Neighborville™

Star Wars™: Squadrons

The Challenge

Because of the size of our team and scale of our projects, we required a centralized location to track live data and make it accessible and visible to all team members to reduce redundancies, workflow bottlenecks and communication errors across production chains.

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Previously, each project manager (PM), project team, and outsource vendor partner was using their own tools for tracking assets, tasks, statuses, and review. With each team managing their own internal tracking systems, there was no single source of truth that all parties could agree on. No centralized location for managing the daily deliverables and project statuses existed, and cycles were wasted searching for updates in email. Rather than focusing time on high-level tasks, PMs were bogged down with keeping track of artists and asking what they worked on each day. Artists were simultaneously frustrated with redundant requests to work on tasks already completed. Review cycles were also time-consuming and cumbersome, requiring feedback, notes, and imagery to be compiled in lengthy email threads.

Apex Lengeds™

The Solution

We initially brought in Shotgun as a replacement tool for asset tracking and Excel spreadsheets, in order to mitigate the potential for human error when updating and renaming files and emailing documents and reports back-and-forth between PMs and vendors.

From the start, it was critical to find the correct balance for customization and out-of-the-box features, as well as adapt and scale Shotgun for massive games workflows. It was a paradigm shift taking Shotgun—a tool that was, at the time, still primarily targeted at VFX—and modifying it to manage asset-heavy games workflows. Early on, Shotgun's task tracking features worked fundamentally differently than other bug and developer tracking tools we were using like DevTrack and Hansoft, so it was critical we find the correct level of customization to effectively adapt the tool for games workflows.

We also piloted Shotgun's JIRA Bridge integration in order to help synchronize all studio data and allow our team members to work in their tool of choice. The Bridge allows creatives to track and review art assets in Shotgun's artist-friendly platform and sync their data to JIRA, and vice versa, for software development teams who prefer working in JIRA.

The Features

Shotgun is now the central art tracking tool we use day-to-day internally, and our main site has approximately 40 projects, 15 administrators, and 2000 users. Today, Shotgun's out-of-the-box games framework is applicable for most of our projects and we can use many of the preset games templates and workflows. For customizations, I oversee API scripting in Python for event daemon scripting and custom tools that integrate with Shotgun.

Plants vs. Zombies: Battle for Neighborville™
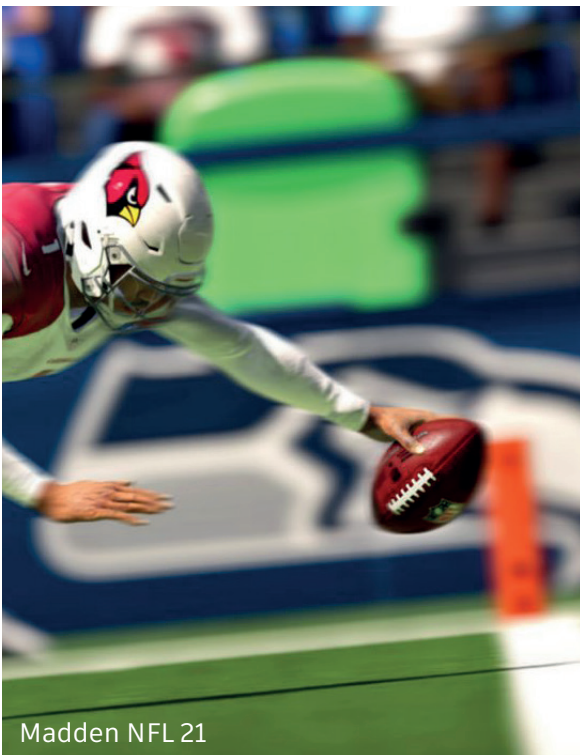
Madden NFL 21

It's fairly simple to quickly get plugins and scripts up-and-running to improve workflows and streamline how users work with Shotgun. I love the flexibility of the event daemon and API, and it's pretty straightforward to get started.

Shotgun's robust capabilities for importing and exporting data have helped PMs seamlessly transition away from spreadsheets. With Shotgun, PMs can format pages to mirror spreadsheets with the added benefit of being live and accessible to any team member who may need it in a central location. PMs can also easily export data from Shotgun for convenient reporting purposes whenever needed.

Apex Lengeds™
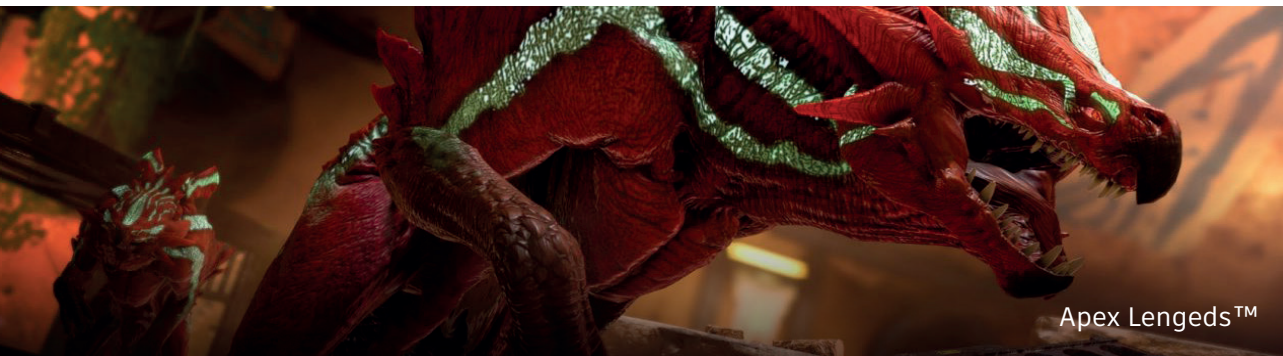
Shotgun has also helped streamline our onboarding process for new talent. Whenever we have a new studio join EA or we bring on a new vendor, we share basic documentation and automations in Shotgun, so we can immediately set them up on their own site or one of our larger internal sites. Many individuals and teams we onboard have already used or are familiar with Shotgun, and it's an easier learning curve to adopt a tool that is so prevalent in the industry. This simple onboarding process has also facilitated a seamless transition for teams and vendors who have had to go offline or work from home during COVID-19.

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Star Wars™: Squadrons

"Having a shared view of accessible project data in Shotgun that everyone treats as the source of truth is lightyears ahead of where we were before."

Our review workflow is essentially the same process with little customization on every single project, which helps align teams and our relationships with vendors. PMs assign tasks, artists make versions for review, and reviewers provide feedback notes,all within Shotgun. Looking forward, we're working on new tools and integrations to help artists bring notes and feedback directly to the apps they're using.

We've also added layers of visibility protection within Shotgun so that we can have multiple vendor partners working within a single project who are invisible to each other – for both ethical and legal purposes when working with IP. Through Shotgun, we've been able to foster trust and strengthen our relationships with vendors so that no matter their location, they feel a part of the EA team.

Plants vs. Zombies: Battle for Neighborville™

I focus on spreading best practices and helping dispersed and global teams create leading interactive titles, and Shotgun has helped streamline this process. Although we're at home socially distancing, games still have the power to bring people together and it turns out they've helped a lot of people pass the time and stay connected. It's been rewarding to be a part of an industry that's providing engaging entertainment and supporting mental health during these unprecedented times. 🆂🅶

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