

# Coldfire Games



**Player ID:**  
Cem Aslan

**Classification:**  
CEO and  
Co-founder



Player profile

## Player history

Cem Aslan took a calculated risk to quit his previous job, where he worked as a senior developer, and co-found German indie studio ColdFire Games. Under his leadership, ColdFire has created a string of mobile game hits, such as Idle Space Clicker and Idle Space Tycoon, with huge help from its ever-growing community. Cem started his career at Orbster, developing location-based augmented reality games.

## Studio

**Karlsruhe**  
49°01'N 8°4'E



**Founded**  
2016



**Employees**  
8





# Killer content, capturing clicks and counting on community

A restructure at their previous company led Cem Aslan and Martin Stocker to try their luck at launching their own indie mobile game studio ColdFire Games. From the earliest days in 2016, when the team worked out of Cem's living room, the studio has impressed players and pundits alike with engaging, immersive mobile titles like Idle Space Clicker which offers shoot 'em up and action gameplay, and Idle Space Tycoon, an inspired mix of the idle and tycoon genres.



To beat the odds in the notoriously fickle mobile game market, the team brings a laser-like focus to analytics and marketing, always listening to the feedback from its incredibly loyal player community. Recently, the studio blazed a fresh trail with the launch of a fun simulation game Idle Casino Manager; a gamble that's paid off, with more than a million downloads since its release earlier this year. Combined, these

three games have notched up a whopping five million downloads.

After migrating its on-premise backend to a cloud-enabled solution powered by AWS, the studio now gets to spend less time managing infrastructure, and more time creating the next generation of their highly successful mobile games.





**“We slashed our infrastructure costs by 60 percent when we made the switch to AWS.”**



### “Our head office was my living room”

A restructuring at the company where we worked threw up this now-or-never opportunity for Martin Stocker and I to set up ColdFire. A few of us had talked about doing our own thing, but not everyone had been ready to risk walking out of a secure job. When some of my super-talented programmer and artist friends suddenly found themselves free, it felt like the perfect moment to strike. But before we made the move, we thought long and hard about the financial odds: What are the risks? Can we do it? Will this work? And do we have a back-up plan? After weighing everything up, we thought: “Let’s give it a go for two years and see if we can survive.”

We started work on our first game, a pure sci-fi shoot ‘em up called Galactic Blaster Space Shooter, which evolved into Idle Space Clicker, when we were still a two-man team and our headquarters were my living room. If you strip everything back to basics, the only thing you really need to develop a game is a laptop. Once we started hiring people and had to take on a proper office, I remember thinking: “Oh, my God, we’ll never fill this.” Actually, we’ve ended up having to move to a bigger space every year since because we keep out-growing it.

### “It was a calculated risk”

Everyone in our team loves sci-fi games, so our first titles were all themed around spaceships. But we soon realized we were going to struggle in terms of revenue because they were too niche. Once we’d made the decision to widen our target market, we went with the deliberate tactic of talking to our community before choosing a theme. That was a big contrast to our earlier games, where we’d try them out on our community after we’d come up with a concept. Our first idea was a fantasy-themed store simulator, but after beta testing and listening to community feedback, the research showed that a casino was the most popular theme. That’s what we developed: Idle Casino Manager.

There aren’t many casinos near us, so we watched a lot of videos on YouTube instead. If we’d stuck faithfully to a real-life scenario, it would have been people just standing around tables, which would have been boring. So, to spice-up the usual combination of roulette, poker, blackjack and slot machines, we added a games arcade. To bring warmth and color to the game, we created all these cute little people who run around the casino like crazy. That creates a real buzz because everywhere you look, you’ll see there’s something happening.



One of the biggest challenges with Idle Casino Manager was that it started out as a tower, with each floor featuring one type of game play and players able to move up and down between levels. That was easy to generate, but because you couldn't see everything that was happening in the game, our player feedback was that it left them with a feeling of missing out. Our solution, which we beta-tested with a small group of users, was to reconfigure the whole thing, so it's all on one level and everything's visible.

### “We were able to slash our costs by almost two-thirds”

To begin with, we were working off old-style, on-premise technology and I was handling all the coding and server maintenance stuff, which took me at least one day a week.

When we made the switch to AWS, not only did everything go really smoothly, but we also slashed our infrastructure and personnel costs by about 60 percent.

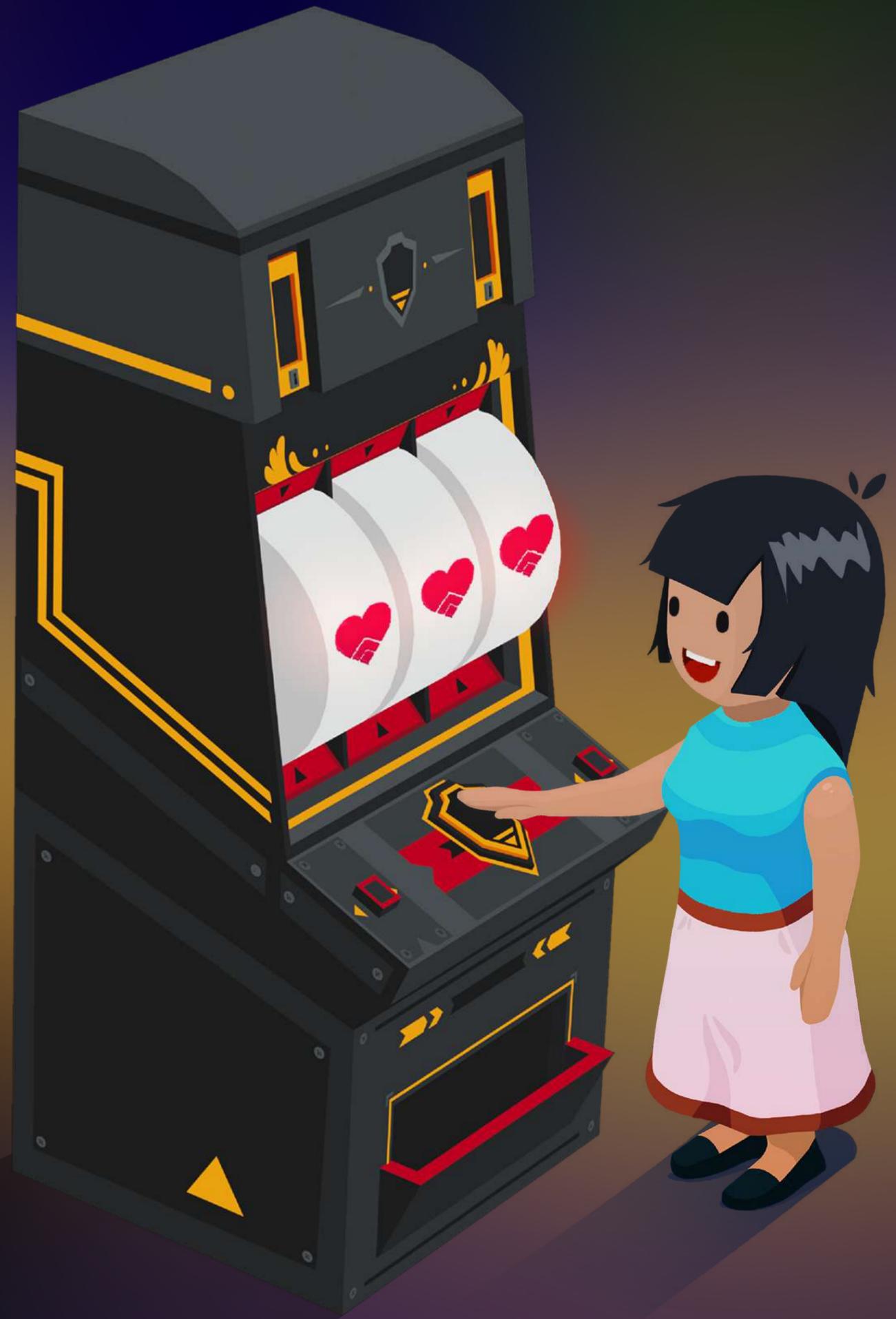
Getting featured on one of the gaming platforms is always last minute. If you're using an on-premise backend, it involves a huge amount of planning to make sure there's enough capacity and you don't lose customers because the servers can't handle the sudden escalation in the number of installs. That's no longer a problem now

that AWS handles everything, and with automatic scaling we only pay for what we use. Even if we get ten times, 50 times or even 100 times more users, it adapts without us having to do anything.

To do that, we use [Amazon API Gateway](#), [AWS Lambda](#) and [Amazon DynamoDB](#), which creates the auto-scaling backend. We also use all of the [Amazon Relational Database Service](#) clusters with [Amazon Aurora](#), [Amazon RDS for PostgreSQL](#) and [Amazon Simple Queue Service \(SQS\)](#).

One of the other products we find useful is [Amazon Polly](#) for voice-overs in several different languages for our avatars, and to help internationalize marketing campaigns. As an indie producing games with global reach, Polly's ability to turn text into life-like speech using machine learning is a super attractive alternative to the high cost of employing voice actors, both when we're developing our games and creating marketing videos and other material.

Although we're operating three games, they all share the same infrastructure, tools and code, and we use AWS tech to separate them. This really speeds things up in terms of prototyping new games, as we don't have to develop a completely new server; we can just re-use.





**“It’s a smarter bet to hire someone who gels with the team”**

Most people in the game industry aren’t in it for the money—it’s a passion and they want to have fun while they’re at work. Something I learned from my previous job at Flaregames is that when you’re recruiting, the top priority needs to be how a new employee gels with the team. If someone is lacking specific knowledge, you can train them, but if their personality isn’t a good fit, that’s really difficult to put right.

Right from the beginning, we went for a different setup at ColdFire. Instead of the typical coder/art/game design combo, we prioritized marketing. Our first full-time employee was Matthias Knopp, who’s now Head of Marketing, and it was taking him on that made us decide it was time to move

into a proper office.

With such a huge number of games coming out every day in the mobile market, if you’re a small indie, it’s hard to get seen by players and you can end up getting binned. I’m not sure if we’d still be here if we hadn’t made such an effort to concentrate on marketing at that early stage.

There’s a really close bond between us as a team, so communication is never an issue. In other companies, when people recognize something’s not working, they’re often too polite to say anything, but that’s not what we want here. If there’s a problem, I want people to tell me—even if I’m the one who made the wrong decision. We all make mistakes, but if no one calls you out, you can’t fix them.

**WHAT IS IDLE CASINO MANAGER?**

In Idle Casino Manager you start with a small casino and work hard to make your business grow. Add new games to create an exciting experience where visitors can play poker, roulette, blackjack or try their luck at the slot machine.

**GAMEPLAY**

If you like management and idle games, you’ll enjoy Idle Casino Manager. Although it’s an easy-to-play game, it takes all your strategic decisions into account. Invest your money wisely and transform your small business into a huge Las Vegas-like casino!





### “Treat all your players as though they’re high rollers”

We prioritized community from day one, by bringing in our friend Benjamin Theobald, who’d worked with us as a QA tester at Flaregames. That was on a freelance basis at first, but he later joined full-time, and is now our Head of QA, in charge of community and support. The community side of things is so crucial because players appreciate it if you talk to them and respond rapidly. Even if you can’t fix things immediately, they can see you’ve made the effort to answer.

We’re constantly gathering stats and analyzing how users interact, so we can optimize all our games, projects and

processes. We A/B-test everything we build, and track and benchmark how players are engaging with new features, while watching for negative feedback. In parallel, we run user acquisition tests and try out different styles to see what’s more appealing.

We plan to use AI and machine learning in the near future to help make better decisions and predict user behaviors. As we grow, we’ll need something to analyze and categorize user behavior more effectively, and of course, it’s also good for churn prediction. Detecting when a player looks likely to churn is important, so you can send them push messages or extra rewards to keep them engaged in the game.

“Players appreciate it if you talk to them and respond. Even if you can’t fix things immediately, they can see you’ve made the effort.”

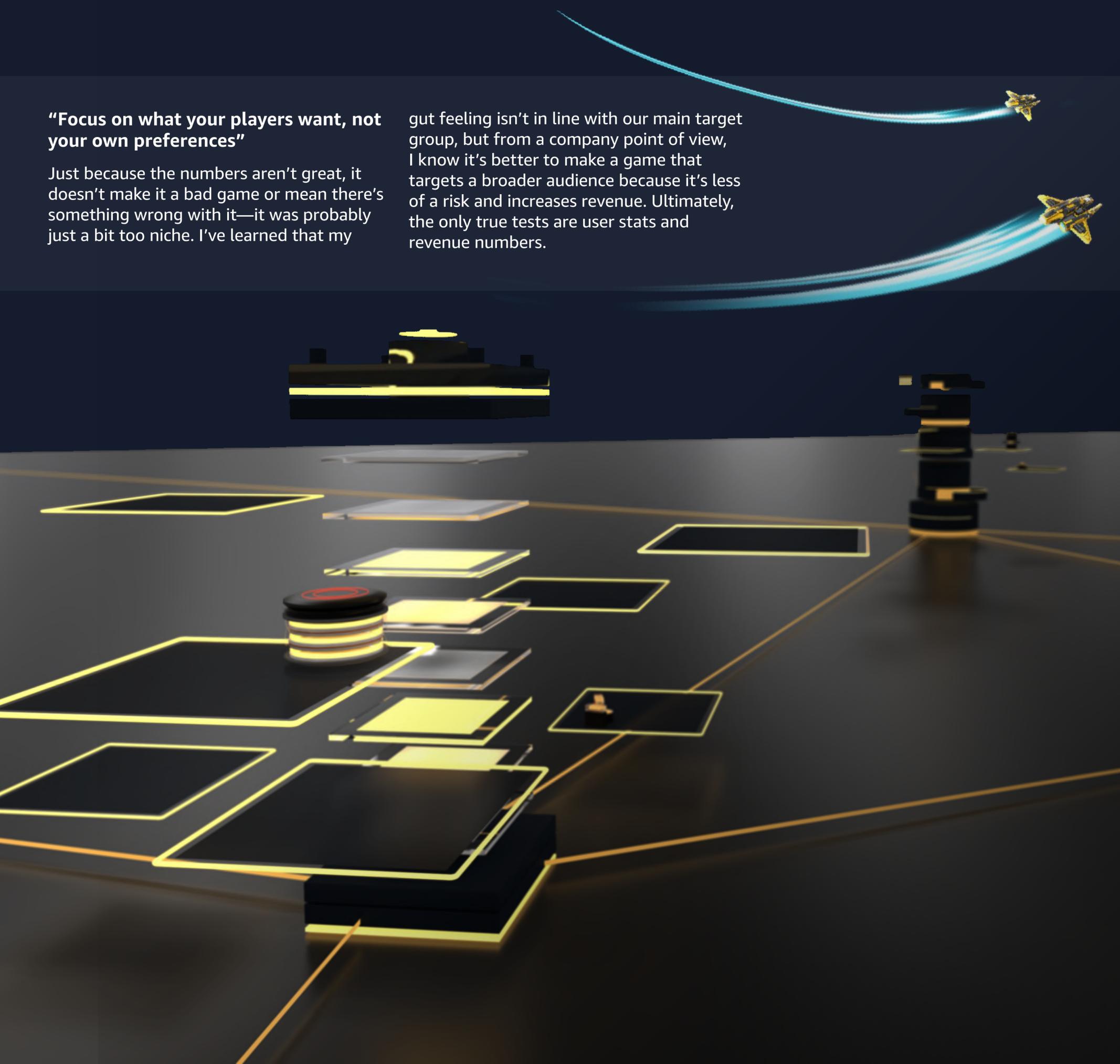




**“Focus on what your players want, not your own preferences”**

Just because the numbers aren't great, it doesn't make it a bad game or mean there's something wrong with it—it was probably just a bit too niche. I've learned that my

gut feeling isn't in line with our main target group, but from a company point of view, I know it's better to make a game that targets a broader audience because it's less of a risk and increases revenue. Ultimately, the only true tests are user stats and revenue numbers.



At-a-Glance

**AWS Services used:**

<b>API Gateway</b> 	<b>Lambda</b> 	<b>DynamoDB</b> 
<b>RDS</b> 	<b>Aurora</b> 	<b>PostgreSQL</b> 
<b>Simple Queue Service</b> 	<b>Polly</b> 	

**Key games:**

 (2016)	 (2019)	 (2020)
------------	------------	------------

**Fast fact:**

The studio's latest title is a simulation game, Idle Casino Manager, which has notched up more than a million downloads through the Play Store since its release in January 2020.

**Follow:**

- [www.coldfiregames.com](http://www.coldfiregames.com)
- [ColdFireGames](https://www.facebook.com/ColdFireGames)
- [@ColdFireGames](https://twitter.com/ColdFireGames)