



Curtin University

A Curtin Ignition Case Study

Offpeak Games
Chris Parkin

This initiative is based on the successful Ignite program managed and delivered by the University of Cambridge Judge Business School's Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (CfEL)



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE
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Centre for
Entrepreneurial Learning

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Chris Parkin, one of the younger attendees at Ignition 2014, founded the startup business Offpeak Games and created an online Virtual Reality (VR) game for the Oculus Rift platform. The much-awaited release of the Oculus Rift Virtual Reality headset is anticipated in 2016. However, an alpha version of their game, Valiant, has been available since 2015 on Oculus Share, where developers and enthusiasts who own an Oculus Rift Developer Kit headset can download and test upcoming VR applications. Valiant has remained on the front page of the highest rated list on Oculus Share through 2015, meaning it has been in the top 40 highest rated apps, out of over 2,000 experiences.

Chris quit his job at the end of 2013, and with just a few hundred dollars in the bank, started Offpeak Games in May 2014. Without a scholarship from WA Small Business Development



Corporation (SBDC), he would have not been able to attend Ignition.

Fascinated by the opportunities for Virtual Reality (VR), Chris began developing Valiant with his co-founders, Liam Poli and Andrew Ravenscroft. Initially, Chris was the only full-time member of the team. Liam continued with revenue generating work and burned the 'midnight oil' to get the business going. Andrew, a full-time tax accountant, works part-time with Offpeak Games to help with the financial side of the business. Now with money in the bank, raised from competition wins and \$40K from Amcom Upstart, Liam has joined Offpeak Games full-time, quitting his position with IBM, and the business has moved into an empty dilapidated mansion owned by Liam's family. As he explains, "We'd love to be housed at SpaceCubed but they don't have the space we need there. A critical part of developing Valiant is to try out new VR headsets before they are released and we've just been lucky enough to obtain the new HTC Vive developer headset. Unlike the Oculus Rift, which you use seated in front of a PC, the HTC Vive has sensors which you place in the corners of the room. This means while users are wearing the headset, they can walk

around a real-world 5m by 5m area while interacting with the virtual world."

Currently without sales revenue, Chris and his co-founders need to be frugal with their money. Chris counts himself lucky not to have a mortgage or wife! He sees Ignition as the start of his journey and states that without it he would not have made it through to Amcom Upstart, nor would he have met the newer key members of his current team. He says, "I completed the Ignition program and went back to my team to tell them about what I had learned; one key take out for me came from my mentor Adam Clune, it was an 'ah ha!' moment. Adam advised us to focus Valiant on a niche market and that was re-iterated by something Peter Clarke said. 'Be a big part of a small market, not a small part of a big market'. My team was very resistant to these changes to our strategy and initially was very annoyed with me, but I eventually persuaded them to my way of thinking. Ignition was also important to the development of the Offpeak Games team, as it was during Ignition that I met Christiaan Gerritsen, who was in my mentor group. Christiaan's graphical capabilities impressed me and he now looks after our art and design work. The MBA facilitator

AT A GLANCE

Business name:
Offpeak Games

Web address:
<http://offpeakgames.com>

Number of employees: 5

Founders: Christopher Parkin,
Liam Poli, Andrew Ravenscroft

Date incorporated: May 2014

Ignition year: 2014

supporting our mentor was Ross Currie. Ross is the founder of Squishy Forts and had already successfully raised money through a Kickstarter campaign. We can't sell anything until Oculus Rift is released, and even then it is difficult for us to project how quickly our game will sell, so we are about to launch our own Kickstarter campaign to raise \$15K. With his expert knowledge, Ross is helping us develop and build the campaign."

Chris's philosophy on learning is to learn as much as he can, as quickly as he can. Ignition helped Chris learn how to pitch, which has proved to be an essential skill. He needed to pitch to get on Amcom Upstart and had to pitch throughout that program. These skills then enabled him to win a 2015 LESANZ pitch night - although he will admit he had no idea what he was pitching for, and was surprised to learn he had won both in-kind support from Wrays in IP as well as some help from the branding agency Red Meets Blue. Chris has also learned that pitching does not always

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go to plan. At Sydstart 2015 he was 'buzzed off' and not allowed to finish – only completing 60% of his three-minute pitch. Undeterred, he made the most of forming connections with people interested in the VR market, and, importantly, possible investors. Chris has stretched his budget to follow up opportunities in the US – he attended the invitation-only Oculus Connect conference in Hollywood and won a scholarship to the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco. He's been so busy that his girlfriend demanded he take a week of holiday – which he agreed to on the proviso that he be allowed to work for three hours a day.

With VR headsets due for release in 2016, Offpeak Games looks forward to exciting but uncertain times – the market size and uptake is unknown,

so the focus is on their online game Valiant – to make it as good as it can be, ready for the Oculus Rift headsets release. They are ensuring that they are 'making noise' in the market and are connecting with VR publications, VR bloggers and anyone in the industry who can help bring publicity to their business and their product. Other VR headsets will be reviewed as they are released, but most importantly, Valiant will launch alongside the Oculus Rift headset with the aim of making sales and growing the company's revenue, in line with another lesson from Ignition: 'Customer money is gold.'

Chris appears prepared for whatever outcomes the launch brings, and his message for aspiring entrepreneurs is this: "Have the right motivation. The dollars and the exit value are no substitute for passion about what you do. Startups are tough and you need passion to persist. If you don't have true passion for what you're doing, you won't be able to persist through the really hard times. Ignition was so cool; it gave me time to research and learn and introduced me to two key people who are now part of the Offpeak games team. The Ignition network was great!"



For more information:

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