10 Tips for Game Audio GDC 2015

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I've had various students interested in hearing my tips for GDC this year so I decided to put together a list. Hopefully this will help make your time at GDC as effective and rewarding as possible. I first spoke at GDC in 2003 and have definitely picked up a few things along the way. Besides this list I'd also have a look for other lists online as well as there's so many ways to see how GDC can work best for you.

If you have specific questions for me just send an email to the school and I'll do my best to help out: http://SoVGA.com

1) Prepare

- If you're planning to go to GDC talks then a good way to get ready for them is by watching free GDC vault videos from last year and earlier: http://www.gdcvault.com/free. It'll just give a good idea of what type of presentations you like and can also give you an idea of which ones to skip.
- If you're focused on the Expo then the Career Fair is a great place to look for possibilities although there will be a large amount of competition as well: http://www.gdconf.com/events/careercenter.html.
- There's also a list that you can use to book meetings with companies as well: http://www.gdconf.com/expo/exhibitorlist.html.
- Try to book a meeting if you can and prioritize which booths you want to visit so that you don't end up running out of time and missing the companies that you really wanted to meet with.
- Connect with people before the conference on forums, email, Twitter and social media. Add your name to lists of people going and try to get a bit of an idea of what people look like that you're hoping to meet up with for the first time.
- Get sleep and rest up. Try your best not to work up until the last minute before you head to GDC. Getting sick while at a conference sucks, trust me, I've done it a few times and do my best to pace things so that it reduces the risk that I'll get sick. If you're coming from a distance, try to take some time out to catch up to jet lag if at all possible. Keeping your energy and spirits up while at GDC

will definitely help your chances of having a fun and rewarding time.

- Download the GDC app to your phone. Sometimes the GDC wi-fi is overloaded or spotty so make sure that you have all the material you need printed out or otherwise offline (maybe on your phone or tablet as well) so that you can reference it in case you don't have access.

2) Book Your Calendar

- Make a calendar of all the sessions you'd like to see at the conference. The site makes this fairly easy but I tend to add things to my phone's calendar as well. It's a good idea to over book a bit but keep them ranked by priority so that you can easily adjust things later. While at the conference you might hear that there's a "must see" session that will bump your other planned session(s) which is fine. Keeping the sessions ranked also makes it easier to decide which other session to go to if your first choice is full or not as interesting as you thought.

- Most of the audio talks are pretty close to each other but if you're moving between areas, especially the Expo, make sure to give yourself enough time so you don't make yourself late for meetings.

- Book meetings at companies in the Expo before GDC if possible: http://www.gdconf.com/expo/exhibitorlist.html. I haven't done this myself but anytime I visit the expo there seems to be long lines of people waiting to get into certain booths with their materials ready.

- Overbook your evening parties and events since there can often be long lines and sometimes its difficult to find the "coolest" party and get an invite for each evening. I usually use Google Calendar so I can sync with my phone. Party-hopping can be fun but it's often tiring so it's good to have a bit of a plan. This way you're more effective rather than just wandering around which is especially easy after a few drinks. If you really get turned around then the "W" hotel is likely a good spot to catch up and find others that know what's going on each evening. There's a good unofficial list of parties here: https://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=qbi1va78rtqpqlok3jblush6u0@group.calendar.google.com

- Keep an eye on Eventbrite by searching for GDC parties in San Francisco and also ask around on the Expo floor: https://www.eventbrite.com/d/ca--san-francisco/gdc/

3) Contact Companies

- Once again, the list of companies at GDC is here: http://www.gdconf.com/expo/exhibitorlist.html. Prepare for each of your meetings by keeping clear notes. Have objective feedback ready to give companies that you're planning to meet with and describe the best way that you can help them. Making a large detailed spreadsheet and being organized is a good starting point. Many companies won't respond to your emails but hopefully a few will and your demo reel is a great way to show how your skills are aligned with their company and games. Bringing a printed one page resumes to the actual meeting is a good idea as well. It's good to be brief with an email that is just a few lines long stating who you are, what you're looking for and a link to your website and demo reel. You want to be persistent with companies you're interested in but not annoying, sadly there's no way to generalize how to do this properly except through experience.

4) Promote Using Business Cards, Website, Twitter, Email, LinkedIn...

- The best bet is to have a strong set of skills shown in your reel, convey your personality as clearly as possible and listen to their needs as a company.
- I don't recommend sending the default "add me" message in LinkedIn. Give a small bit of background to help the other person remember when they met you, who you are and how you might help them in the future. I try to keep my LinkedIn with people I'd be interested in sitting down and having a chat with about business or otherwise.
- Social media can be like a big party where conversations can be frozen in mid-air. It's good to be careful with what you choose to share. If you've got something that other people would be interested in and could really help people then feel free to post it on Twitter with #GameAudioGDC. I personally don't feel like I "meet" people online but I do feel that seeing someone's posts online help frame my first meeting in person with them. If you have interesting things to say then people will hopefully be drawn to you but if you're just shouting about all the

amazing stuff you're always doing and that you're amazing and having amazing times in your amazing life then people might find it a bit tiresome.

- Business cards are essential. I use stickers these days since I think they're a bit more fun and I'm not promoting myself anymore but cards are definitely a staple during networking at GDC. What card you bring is entirely up to you but having one that smudges or rips too easily isn't a good idea. Your card (as well as your attire) reflects who you are and you don't want to be continually apologizing when giving out your card as it'll get tiring for you. If you leave a side blank then this allows you or the other person to write a bit on the back. Sometimes you can offer to write a short note to the person that you're talking with just to help them remember what your conversation was when looking back at a stack of business cards at the end of the conference. People will be less inclined to recycle a card that has useful information on it.

5) Be Present & Proactive

- Make sure that you're not just thinking about how people can help you. Be invested in the time that you spend with people. Find common points to talk about and really be in the moment.
- Don't take rejection personally since it's just about finding matches with your skill set. If there isn't a match there's no need to force things. You may find out that someone is interested in skills that you don't have, but you might be able to recommend a peer that could help them out. It might be that they'll look to you in the future when there's a need for your skills. I've had this happen to me a few times in the past as you've shown that you're trying to genuinely help them even if it means recommending someone else. Game audio is a highly competitive field and it may take a long time to find the gigs you want. At GDC, you're planting seeds for the future and seeing what comes up.
- Trade business cards with everyone. I have a poor memory (plus I'm terrible with names) so I typically write a bit about the person on the back of their card and sometimes include the place and day that I met them just to be able to jog my memory later. If there's a possible connection on a gig for the future then it's good to write down these details as well. You may end up talking with hundreds of people at GDC and things can become a bit of a blur so having a method of remembering who you talked with is a good idea. I haven't done this before but one idea you could try taking a picture of important cards (maybe in a lit area without a flash) with your phone once you leave the conversation. This way you'll have the details, your phone will arrange the photos

chronologically and time stamp it plus other other photos you take will also jog your memory when you look at it later.

- Hang out in the hallway next to the audio sessions and get a good feel for your community. It's a great way to get into some really interesting discussions with some of the top people in the field. Also feel free to talk to speakers after their talk since they'll be more relaxed and interested to hear reactions to their presentation.

- I would suggest going to the Audio Bootcamp and sitting in on the sessions if you have an Audio Pass. It's a great way to meet both the speakers and other peers in the crowd as things get rolling at GDC.

6) Pace Your Eating, Party & Sleepy Times

- Usually parties is where I chat with new people the most and talking over meals is a great way to connect with people whenever you can.

- It's important to be respectful of others and the GDC has a great set of guidelines to help out: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/237132/Reminder_Know_your_GDC_Code_of_Conduct.php. Everyone wants to have a fun time at GDC and it's good to do what you can to support this great community.

- Try to stay health by drinking plenty of water if you happen to go out drinking and book in your sleep. Although morning coffee is fine, I'd recommend getting up later and getting more sleep if you're just going to be a zombie all day. Basically you have limited time, focus and energy so you'll need to know where your balance is.

- GDC is like a workout. Eat healthy when you can and stay rested. You'll be walkin', talkin', drinkin' and shoutin' a lot, which is fun but also really tiring.
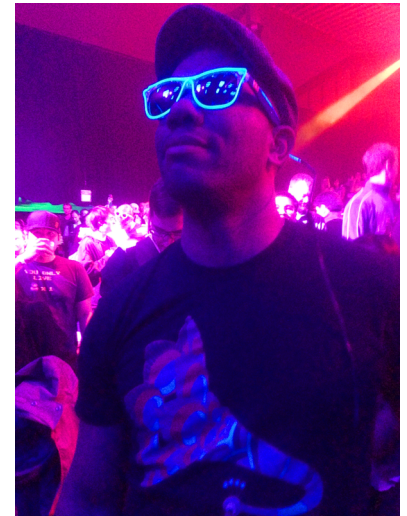
7) Talk with Everyone

- It's good to take a chance, dive in and just talk with people. You'll never know what the future holds if you're not willing to take some risks.

- I feel it's often best to just make connections first and see if people are interested in helping you out later. Trade business cards with everyone and you might find that the person you've been chatting to for fun is a lead at a company you're interested in or knows of someone that is looking

for audio help. I think it's just good to be friendly and have fun. This can be difficult if you're really needing work since people can smell desperation so being calm and focused is the best approach. I'm not an expert on the perfect approach and I've definitely made a lot of mistakes at GDC (and other conferences) but it hasn't destroyed my career yet. Taking risks is definitely the way to go.

- GDC is not the end of things but really just the middle. You're bringing skills to show and trying to find out people that have good projects that you can help out with.

8) Stay Connected

- Follow #GameAudioGDC since Twitter is a great way to stay connected and find out where the audio "crowd" is heading each day for lunch and whatnot. The morning coffee crew is a fun discussion bunch and a great way to get to know others in the game audio community. Try to book a few extra days just to enjoy San Fran as it's a beautiful city!

- Check out the companies on the Expo floor that are having parties and talk with your peers about getting into parties as well. The more you network with people, the better you'll have an idea of the best places to spend your time during the evening at GDC.

9) Talking with Indies

- GDC doesn't just have the "big players" but also the growing indie community as well. It's a great place to meet people from a bunch of small companies, many of which might need audio. A lot of smaller companies might not be able to pay much up front but you then you can still talk details. Maybe you can split your regular fee so that it is 25% up front before the game is released and another 75% paid up to when the game starts making money. I have done exactly this in the past and it has worked out great. Since the money after release is a bit of a risk you might be able to get some additional bonuses once things start to make a profit or have a small percentage share in the overall profits.

- I believe that working entirely for free is a bit dangerous since it makes it difficult for you to gain respect with the same company later and can negatively influence your peers as well. I think it's

fine that sometimes small companies need a bit of an "audio kick-start" at the beginning but once their game starts making money it doesn't seem fair that they wouldn't share their success with the people that helped make the game a success.

- After working on both Vessel and Retro City Rampage, I'm looking forward to working more within the indie game community in the future!

10) Follow Up

- Email people back using their business cards. Just write a line or two about how it was good to meet them and then a short note about how you could help them out in the future in a way that follows up on your connection with them and include a single link to your work if they expressed some interest. If it was more of a brief connection then I'll just write a one line that it was good to meet them at GDC and put my website and twitter in my signature so that they can "look me up" if they're interested.

- I don't put people on my mailing list unless they specifically ask me and in Canada the laws now require opt-in so it's good to be careful. If I had a good connection with someone then I might try to connect with them on LinkedIn as well.

- People working in games are often quite busy so don't be too discouraged if you don't hear back or it takes a while for them to get back to you. It's difficult to say in general but if there's a lead that you really want to follow up on then emailing back in a month might be the way to go.

Conclusion

GDC is a truly inspiring experience as you're around thousands of people that share a similar passion for working with games. If you're open, it's possible to not only make connections with peers but also make a great friends as well.

If you have any questions about your own prep for GDC just let me know. If you're interested in meeting me at GDC just email me and we'll figure out a time to talk!