Epic's News: September 1992

Epic's team has now arrived at a new level of success: We're the world's second-largest publisher of shareware entertainment. But our challenge has really just begun; to think that we're competing with other *shareware* games is to rest on our laurels. We are in the big leagues now. Our team's competitors are the big guys: Sierra. Origin. Broderbund. Microprose. Their products are the standards by which we will be judged.

But are we afraid? Nooooooooo way, we're ready to show the world some Mega ideas.

Projects

Some of the new games that Epic members are working on will truly *astound* the world of both shareware and retail entertainment. We're working on *unreal* graphics that set new standards in animation and smoothness, story lines and plots to rival (actually, to *blow away*) commercial games, and music that's ages ahead of the rest of the computer world.

The new technologies that have revealed themselves to us are nothing short of a revelation, and I'll be discussing them at length when the time is right. This poses a new challenge to us, because turning these raw technologies into blockbuster products will take many months of hard work and intense problem-solving. The end result, if we can make the long and difficult journey, will be unprecedented success for Epic's team.

Like Allen Pilgrim (author of Kiloblaster) said, "At Epic, we have a Mega Team!"

Time to Recruit!

Our future with Epic MegaGames hinges on our ability to create lots of hot new products -- we need to keep on innovating new ideas, starting new projects, and exploring new technologies with programming, artwork, music, and game design. This requires large amounts of *manpower*. So I ask all Epic team members this: Keep on the lookout for new talent, and bring new members aboard. Our standards are very high, but there is a large base of untapped talent in the world of computers -- and it's our job to find them.

Having a big team and many products will help all of us. After all, each one of our games sells all the others -- so *Jill of the Jungle* isn't competing with *Kiloblaster* or *Castle of the Winds*. In fact, *Jill* does a tremendous job of drawing customers to our other games. When Epic's new generation of games arrives, it will help all of us as a team and make Epic the leader in shareware entertainment -- no doubt about it.

Keep up the great work

We've all made a lot of progress towards our goal of developing top games, and I wish everybody the best success in reaching new levels of achievement.

Epic MegaGames
Inside News

Welcome! I'm writing another newsletter for our team members to keep you updated on the goings-on here at Epic MegaGames. We've had some exciting projects these last few months which have been keeping us all very busy; the outlook for our future is excellent -- the shareware market is *still* expanding at an amazing rate, and Epic is right there on the forefront.

First of all, exciting things are happening here at our home base in Potomac, Maryland. We now have two employees to help me run our operations, serve our customers, and keep things running smoothly. Martin Walser is our chief problem-solver and tech person here. He has things well under control here, and was able to master all our techno-equipment in a few *minutes* of experimentation. Carolyn Smith has conquered our accounting and customer service and is our "early bird". (If you call me at 9 AM, she's the one who will tell you I'm in a meeting. Just call back in a few hours, and I'll be awake then!)

We've picked up some interesting gadgets here to automate the business, including two computers on a Novell network, a Ventuno disk duplicator (this thing is *fast!*), a high-speed paper folder, and the standard stuff including several printers and a fax. The day-to-day operations are very streamlined, allowing us to focus on the important job -- creating great new products.

Already Released

Jill of the Jungle: Our bestselling arcade adventure game by myself, John Pallett-Plowright, Joe Hitchens, and Dan Froelich. (Shareware Update Magazine called it "Mega Cool"!)

Castle of the Winds: Rick Saada's brilliant fantasy role-playing game for Windows. When we released this one, we were entering totally uncharted waters -- with the first *big* game for Windows. This proved to be a great move, because Castle has become a big success!

Drum Blaster: Larry Tipton's sound-effects program for the Sound Blaster. This is Larry's first release with Epic MegaGames, and is a whole lot of fun! We're looking forward to his next project, Drum Traker, a complete drum sequencer which will prove to be even more fun and entertaining!

Coming Soon

KiloBlaster: Allen Pilgrim's newest release, an animated VGA arcade game. Allen was the first person to join the Epic team when he created part of the Super ZZT series for us long ago. KiloBlaster is his new, ground-breaking release... If you're waiting to see how a game could possibly be more fun than this one -- stay tuned for news of Allen's next project!

Brix: This is the game that brought our office to a grinding halt as we became instantly addicted to this VGA puzzle game. It's addictive, terribly challenging, and a truly *huge* game! Michael Riedel created this game from his home in Germany, and we're very proud of the excellent 256-color action and the thinking required.

Rumors

Question: What game has 72 frame-per-second, *unreal* smoothness and 256-color parallax (2-plane) scrolling effects,

and the coolest digital music ever heard in a game?

Answer: We can't tell you... Yet! But this game, created by the one person who is possibly the best programmer in Europe, has our hearts pounding. We're negotiating now, trying to bring this excellent programmer and his group into the Epic MegaGames team. We feel that the game this gentleman is developing would easily break Wolfenstein 3D's sales records.

The Market

Ouch! Our of the shareware game companies that we're in competition has just made a major, embarrassing blunder. Seems that they sent out a letter to over 700 shareware vendors demanding $250 in exchange for the right to distribute their shareware products. *That's not how it's done, folks.* Vendors are very important in the shareware process, because they bring our game into the hands of hundreds of thousands of potential customers (many of whom later register with us). How did the vendors respond to the $250 licensing fee? A few paid it, many of them dropped the company's shareware, and a huge number of them created a public outcry on Compuserve. Not a good move for that company, but it'll sure help their competition (us!)

Reselling

One strategy we're experimenting with now is selling registered copies of our products to resellers (software stores, mail order vendors, foreign distributors). We give them a discount from 35-50% so they can make a profit by selling our games. This has tremendous potential, and several deals are now in progress! In fact, we got a call from one distributor who offered to buy 1000 copies up front if he could have exclusive rights in his country (we turned him down. We can do much better in that country without giving up the exclusive rights!)

Welcome Aboard

The last few months have been good for Epic, and we are happy to welcome several new team members to the Epic MegaGames team.

Avery Pack is starting on a new educational game, and has enlisted the help of musician Dan Froelich. Avery's skills are in both programming and artwork, and his product teaches math to children while keeping them entertained with a fun maze game! Education is a huge and untapped segment of the shareware market, and we're glad to be entering into it with a new state-of-the-art product.

Thomasz Pytel (a.k.a. Tran) has just joined up with Epic for a new shoot-em-up arcade game that's sure to set new standards in graphics and music! I've seen some of Tran's other graphics demos and games, and they are truly *outstanding, amazing,* and *wonderful.* This author has programmed superb multi-plane scrolling, transparent sprites, and lots more -- all in vivid, 256-color VGA. He'll be working with musician C.C. Catch to create the most advanced, 22 kHz digital sound track ever seen in a game!

Ronald Davis is a good distance into his *Thor* project, which is an ingenious action adventure game reminiscent of Legend of Zelda for the Nintendo. We're negotiating with this author right now to make Thor an Epic MegaGames release; I'm hoping we can recruit Ronald and his crew for this project, because the game has *tremendous* potential!

Finally... A shareware adventure game to blow away all the competition: It's called *Mel Odius,* and it will be a collaborative effort between Thomas Vitacco (art & design), Jason Blochwiak (graphics & engine coding), and a yet-to-be-recruited programmer to do the game programming and integration. This one's going to be *hot* with some of the best 256-color artwork seen in shareware, and a *rocking* Sound Blaster digital sound track!

Epic moves to Software Creations BBS

Yes, in a major deal that shocked the BBS

community, Epic has moved onto Software Creations BBS and joined the growing release network there. Software Creations BBS is run by Dan Linton (Sysop), and has 33 incoming lines. (It was 33 lines the last time we checked; Dan is adding new nodes on a *weekly* basis, so it might have more when you read this!)

Now Epic will be a part of the release network that previously belonged entirely to Apogee, and we'll have the opportunity to recruit about *2000* BBS's around the world to become official Epic MegaGames release points -- with all Epic releases located conveniently in our own file area on every BBS!

Last week our office crew sent 2000 letters to Dan to be mailed to the release points as our first welcome. We're looking forward to working with Software Creations to make Epic MegaGames a name that's known on every BBS in the world.

Mailings

One of our major marketing strategies besides shareware is mail marketing; we're getting ready to send out the first 10,000 mail ads for Jill of the Jungle now. That's just the first part of over 50,000 ads we'll be sending for Jill alone.

One of the many advantages Epic has over the competition is a *mailing list* -- so when we release a new game, we can instantly advertise it to thousands of our current customers and sell lots of copies right away. This is a great supplement to shareware for us, because it does take several months for shareware games to start selling big-time.

Epic is International!

Epic now has a network of more international distributors than I can remember! Nildram Software is getting us off to a good start in the UK, with Budgetware leading our sales in Australia. CDV-Software in Germany is the most successful (Jill is *very* popular there!) In fact, I was just interviewed

by DOSshareware, the leading magazine in Germany's shareware market (we've had several reviews in German magazines, which I suspect say good things about us in a language I don't understand). We're also working with Distant Markets in Canada, and are making deals with many other companies across the world (including some far-away places like Japan, Israel, and Finland).

That's all for now!

I'll be putting together a newsletter like this with every month's mailing to our authors, to keep you posted with Epic's progress toward taking over the shareware market!

Thanks for being part of the team.

Tim Sweeney
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Epic MegaGames: Resources

Epic MegaGames is the world's second-largest publisher of shareware entertainment products. Founded in 1990 by Tim Sweeney, the company has grown by leaps and bounds. Total sales in 1991 were $25,000; Epic's current sales are now over $25,000 per *month* from shareware.

The company's current bestsellers are *Jill of the Jungle* (a Super Nintendo-style arcade game) and *Castle of the Winds* (a fantasy role-playing game for Microsoft Windows). Several ground-breaking new products are under development for 1993, including some of the most spectacular new graphics, music, and storylines ever experienced on the PC.

At Epic MegaGames, our top asset is our *authors*. This company was put on the face of the earth to assist authors in creating excellent games -- and by virtue of creating great games, to make great money for our authors. The company's president, Tim Sweeney, is a top programmer and created all of Epic's first games, including ZZT and Jill of the Jungle. Tim still spends most of his time working with authors to make successful and spectacular games.

Company Profile

Epic MegaGames is a lean and efficient shareware publisher, with a president, vice president of marketing, an office staff of three hard-working people, and a network of over twenty independent game associates including programmers, artists, game designers, and musicians. Epic's associates represent a wide variety of talents and styles, spread around the world in the USA, Canada, Germany, and Netherlands.

Marketing Resources

BBS Distribution: Epic MegaGames has established official release points on over 250 bulletin boards throughout the world, in a joint effort with Software Creations BBS. These BBS's carry Epic's popular and exclusive file area, with all the latest releases and news. Epic personally distributes its shareware to an additional 300 boards around the world with every new product release. As a result of this promotion, Epic's products easily reach over 20,000 bulletin boards within two weeks of release.

Shareware catalogs: Epic's shareware products are distributed by over 1000 catalogs throughout the world. Epic maintains special relationships with over 500 of these distributors to assure that the absolute latest versions of Epic products are available.

Shareware Retailing: Epic's top releases are carried on shareware racks in retail stores throughout the world, which is the company's single largest channel of distribution -- the five largest dealers have brought our shareware to over 200,000 potential buyers.

International Representation: In addition to strong promotion in the USA, Epic's products are promoted and sold internationally through some of the best distributors in the world: CDV-Software in Germany, Nildram Software in the UK, Budgetware in Australia, and over 20 more in far-off places like Japan, Holland, and Israel.

Advertising: Epic's advertising campaign is going through a very successful start now, with three issues of full-page color advertising in both Shareware Update and Shareware Magazine -- prominently on the back covers.

Business Plans

Epic's ongoing plans for the future include more recruiting of the world's fines game authors -- we receive several submissions from potential authors every day, in fact. As an author-oriented company, we are dedicated to serving the best game creators in the world.

Authors win, customers win. This is the Epic MegaGames way.

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Shareware Marketing Strategy

Shareware is a unique way of marketing software, and it needs to be approached with a good strategy to be profitable. The Epic MegaGames philosophy is clear, simple, and it works extremely well:

We make shareware successful by giving our customers an excellent, complete, and top-quality product for FREE -- then we sell them MORE of what they want: Even more excellent, complete, and top-quality products.

It is *this* simple strategy that is responsible for Epic's success -- this is why a good Epic game can bring in 20 orders per day, while most other shareware typically gets two orders per week. Most shareware fails to sell because most shareware authors don't know how to use *positive marketing* -- but we do, and therefore we are successful.

Here is how most authors fail: They do not make their potential customers happy. When a customer is *happy*, he will be in a good mood to order. An unhappy customer will not order.

To make our potential customers happy, we GIVE them great shareware games -- fully working, top-quality products that they can play and enjoy for free. This makes our customers happy.

Once a customer is *happy*, he is ready to buy. Our next step is to SELL him something. We do this by offering MORE games, and extra bonuses: hint sheets, cheat codes, bonus game disks, and more. These extras are *incentives* for our customers to order.

Here is why other shareware authors fail:

1. They cripple their products -- for example, a game without a "save" feature -- you have to register if you want to save your game. This fails because customers end up being *mad* at the author; unhappy customers won't order.

2. They don't offer any *incentives* to customers. Amazingly, many shareware authors basically say this:

    "If you like this program, please register by sending $30. You will receive the latest version of the program and the author's gratitude."

But what are they *selling*? For $30, the customer will receive something he *already has*! That is *not* an incentive for ordering -- you need to sell them something they do not have, and would like to have.

Here is why Epic's games sell so well in shareware:

1.   We give customers great, fully-working software FREE for them to enjoy, which puts them in a good mood -- they *like* us and they trust us, so they are glad to do business with us.

2.   We *sell* them something they want to buy: More games, hint sheets, cheat codes, bonus games, and more. Customers *love* this stuff!

Trilogies!

Epic's secret to success: All of our games are *trilogies* -- a three-volume series of games. We *give away* part 1 as shareware, and we sell parts 2 & 3 to customers. Yes, we have to work harder to create three episodes of a game, but it pays off. Customers *love* the first episode of our games, and are happy to the other episodes from us. It's a great deal!

Game Requirements

The bestselling games in shareware are all trilogies. That's why it is so important to design a game with a 3-part series in mind. Several kinds of games are very easy to adapt to become a multi-part series:

1.   Arcade-adventure games like Jill of the Jungle: Many different levels and worlds.
2.   Pure arcade games like Kiloblaster: Many different levels.
3.   Role-playing: New scenarios, creatures, and objects can be added.
4.   Strategy games: New scenarios and, creatures, and objects can be added.

Quality, Technology, and Gameplay

These three factors are the absolute *most important* pieces of a successful shareware game. Fortunes are made or lost based on quality, gameplay, and technology. Thousands of shareware games are released every year, but only a select few make it to the top. These are the absolute highest quality, best games, with the most modern technology possible.

Quality: Games these days need to be designed to be 100% bug-free, compatible, easy to operate, and extremely "clean" in terms of graphics, sound, and gameplay. When it comes time to finish a game for release, our authors are not just coders -- they are *Software Engineers* -- with the responsibility to totally test, debug, test, polish, test, and *test* their product. Customers expect only the best from the Epic MegaGames team, and we will work to deliver. It's not easy, but this is our job.

Technology: Dazzling graphics, dazzling music, dazzling sound effects, dazzling techniques.

These are the common factor linking all shareware success stories. In terms of graphics, customers will come from around the world for smooth, 256-color, animated VGA graphics that exploit their CPU's to the limit. Technology. If you've seen a technique used before, it's *not good enough* -- we need to push the PC to the end of its limits, then push it some more. That is how we'll leave the competition behind.

Gameplay: No matter how much quality and technology a game has, it can only be successful if you have a *great core game*. Customers want fun and innovative action which will keep them entertained for many days of play -- with new twists of plot around every corner, new scenarios being revealed every step of the way, and vivid variety.

Summary

Quality, technology, and gameplay make our games successful -- and gurantee that Epic's shareware will spread throughout the world and generate an instant following. The competition is good, but we're better -- and we are working very hard to be the best.

Once we have a good product, it's our customers that ultimately make shareware profitable. By giving the best, top-quality games to them, we have the opportunity to sell them *more* great games and bonuses -- by keeping the customers happy, we'll be successful.

Our customers win, our authors win. This is the Epic MegaGames way.