

Glu plays to win with Google

According to Newzoo’s 2018 report on gaming, the global games market is expected to grow from \$138 billion in 2018 to more than \$180 billion in 2021¹. For the first time, mobile gaming revenue is set to pass PC and console combined. With its diverse range of successful titles, including Design Home, Covet Fashion and the Tap Sports Baseball franchise, Glu has emerged as a leader in the mobile gaming industry, engaging millions of gamers around the globe and reaching \$384.6 million in annual bookings in 2018.

Over the years, Glu has worked hard to adjust to changes in the industry, which aren’t always easy to predict. “We used to be focused on single-player games and would crank out 10+ new games each year,” says Chris Akhavan, Glu’s Chief Revenue Officer. “We’ve now evolved to community-driven, LiveOps-heavy games – which we refer to as growth games. We believe that’s going to be the core of what drives this industry for future years.”

Along the way, they’ve partnered with Google to help fuel this growth. They worked with several different Google product teams to support their development lifecycle.

“Google has been an incredible partner for us across so many aspects of our business and has enabled so much of what we do. “Glu generated \$50 million in ad revenue in 2018, and Google AdMob was a key partner that helped us achieve that,” Chris says. “We really wouldn’t be where we are today without partnerships across multiple parts of Google.”

Getting games right

When he joined Glu in 2013, Chris recalls observing that much of the company’s decision-making was subjective – from choosing how to structure the gameplay to long meetings going back and forth on which icons to use. Now, their approach is based on prototyping and data-driven validation.

“We’re looking to create brands that are enduring for decades, and we give our studios enough time to craft a game,” he explains. “Our mindset has shifted to a much more measured, high-quality approach along with a lot of validation steps over the course of development. Google Play has been a tremendous platform for testing out games. It gives us a huge amount of flexibility to test things like videos, screenshots, and app icons using store listing experiments.”



Glu Mobile
San Francisco, CA, USA
www.glu.com

\$50

million in ad revenue
in 2018

\$384 million

in annual bookings
in 2018

20%

Bookings increasing
year-over-year in 2018

¹ <https://newzoo.com/solutions/standard/market-forecasts/global-games-market-report/>

In the last year, Glu's Diner DASH Adventures studio was looking for a more robust development platform, one that was stable, so gameplay wouldn't be interrupted, and flexible, so they could adapt to different markets and scale as necessary. After evaluating several options, they chose Google Cloud, and have recently launched Diner DASH Adventures in beta, built on Google Cloud infrastructure.

"In the end, our Diner DASH Adventures studio chose Google Cloud because 'things just worked,'" Chris says. "Google Cloud delivers scalability, simplicity and value, like only paying for resources actually used or making it simple to move to another server across the world. Their tools make it easy to isolate and resolve issues, and the Google Cloud team has been highly responsive: Follow-up is fast, they jump on any issues, and the team actually plays our game."

Creating a successful game isn't solely about providing a fast and reliable experience. It's also about creating a sustainable business, and Integrating monetization from the outset is an important part of that. As teams at Glu develop their games, they think of the ad experience as a critical part of the overall experience.

"Six years ago, ads were always an afterthought," Chris says. "Today, ads are part of the conversation from the very beginning, and we build them into the product early into our development cycles."

Glu integrates AdMob into all of its games. "One of the great things about working with AdMob is the quality controls they have in place. We're always confident that when we are serving an ad from AdMob, it's going to represent our product well. And the demand pool of advertisers is hard to match anywhere else. The diversity of the ads we see — from big brands to small businesses — is incredible."

Once designed and developed, preparing for launch in the market is key to setting their games up for success.

"Google Play's toolset is so robust. Using the Google Play Console, we can control how we roll out beta versions or use it to help us design go-to-market strategies," Chris explains. "The fact that we can get new builds live very quickly gives us a very fast iteration loop that is a huge advantage."

The less time the Glu team has to worry about infrastructure management, ad mediation, or developing tests for bespoke app stores, the more time it can spend making excellent gaming experiences.

Partnering with Google Cloud

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— *Chris Akhavan*
Chief Revenue Officer
Glu Mobile

Building a community

Being able to form a community around a game is now one of the most important parts of development for Glu. To engage with players and acquire new ones, they work with Google Play, App Campaigns, and Google AdMob.

When launching a new title, Glu determines the best way to give users early access through open betas on Google Play. This helps them both build enthusiasm and get invaluable early feedback on the game without impacting their store rating.

“The reach that we can tap into with Google Play is incredible, allowing us to control how we roll out a product into different territories.”

To drive acquisition, they turn to App Campaigns to promote their games across Google’s largest properties including Search, Google Play, YouTube, and Google’s network of partner apps and sites. “With [App Campaigns], Google’s ability to help us find the right audiences is really unique, and in addition to the great inventory, has made it a very effective user acquisition channel for us.”

To ensure player engagement while growing their business, Glu carefully designs its games with monetization in mind, offering players the right reward at the right moment to enhance their experience. “AdMob has grown tremendously as a monetization channel for us, and rewarded video ads have really been the key driver,” Chris says. “Our entire ad monetization strategy is completely focused on rewarded ad experiences. They’re the best combination of driving revenue and offering a great user experience because users actually get value from interacting with the ads, and we see great results because we’re getting an engaged user interacting with our ad.”

Investing in scale

Glu hasn’t just changed the way it develops games; the company has changed the way it thinks about title lifecycles, from a few years to many. They’ve been investing more in scaling the business with Google Cloud to bolster future growth so they can support millions of users, build more efficient revenue channels, and innovate, all while maintaining the high-quality experience associated with Glu.

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Chris says collaborating with the many different products, from Google AdMob to Google Cloud, is key to helping them plan at scale. “Down the line, we have the relevant expert group within Glu working with the relevant expert group within Google. We always feel there’s a very strong sense of awareness between the groups in terms of how we’re working across each.” The teams share roadmaps and work with Glu to make recommendations and uncover opportunities.

Glu has significantly accelerated growth, increasing bookings 20% year-over-year in 2018. Future plans include expanding into new territories, both by localizing existing content and by developing market-specific gaming experiences. “We are heavily concentrated in North America, and Google has helped us identify other markets. Plans are underway to capitalize on these international opportunities.”

Glu continues to make the most of technology, putting players first. With a scalable and flexible cloud foundation, wide and deep acquisition and distribution channels, and a powerful monetization model, they’ve put the pieces in place to entertain millions and grow their business for years to come.

“We know that there will inevitably be a lot of change over the next five years, but we also know that what’s not going to change is the importance of our partnership with Google. We’re very confident that Google will be a vital partner who’s going to help us tap into new devices, new platforms, and new territories.”



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