

Rising Star: Travis Ho and Jeffrey Jiang Come On, Let's Play!

The founders of Touch Dimensions believe in having fun while playing games – and while making them, too.

SINGAPORE games development company Touch Dimensions may have been founded only in September last year, but it's already got several notable achievements to its name.

The firm has two games, namely *Autumn Dynasty*, an ink-brush strategy war game, and *Totem Star*, a puzzle-matching game, on the Windows Mobile Marketplace. The former won the best student game award at last year's Game Developers Conference in Shanghai. It was also one of the Microsoft Code 7 contest winners at last year's Professional Developers Conference in Los Angeles.

Travis Ho and Jeffrey Jiang, founders of Touch Dimensions, share about about their company and their goals for the future.

What's unique about your company and your games?

Travis: We believe that a game should be something that you can just pick up and play, so we put aside all the flashy effects and set out to make our games as intuitive as possible. We help players interact with games in familiar ways by incorporating natural user interfaces, or NUI, whether it's multitouch, accelerometers, microphones or even brain-computer interface electrodes.

Was incorporating NUI into your games part of your original plans?

Jeffrey: When we started Touch Dimensions, we wanted it to be a place where creative people could get together to do interesting projects – to make sure everyone had fun, and that we could do the projects we really wanted to do. With NUI hardware becoming widely available to consumers, exploring this area for gaming was something we got interested in.

Is there a philosophy that you subscribe to?

Travis: While making games sounds fun and exciting, it can sometimes become just a job with deadlines, with games developers often pigeonholed within their particular specialisation.

We've come to realise that everyone on our team has interesting experiences and perspectives to share, and that it's these things that will drive the creative impulse. Therefore our team culture is about having fun, creative freedom and general zaniness. I didn't know that Jeffrey was a fan of cosplay and bungee jumping, whereas he had no idea I was a professional balloon sculptor who would also visit Singapore's coral reefs after dark! Our spirit of adventure and willingness to try out new things encourages everyone to try and think out of the box – and this makes life a lot more fun and interesting.

What has been the challenge for you so far?

Travis: Sometimes there's a lot of cynicism in our industry about what we can and can't do, given deadlines, budget limitations and assumptions about what the audience will like or dislike. All of these are challenging issues, but the real challenge is shifting mindsets and getting people to dream again. When you're excited about an idea, you'll find creative ways to overcome or sidestep these limitations.

How do you see the Singapore games industry developing?

Jeffrey: Locally, we're great at the engineering aspect of games – there's been a great deal of support for development – but we need to find a way to put more heart into these games to make them memorable for audiences.

What's next for you and Touch Dimensions?

Jeffrey: We've got a backlog of prototypes that we'd like to turn into real games for our audience. Games developers have lots of ideas, but alone they seldom have the opportunity or the backing of a team to turn them into reality. At Touch Dimensions we hope to realise everyone's dreams one by one. With NUI devices becoming increasingly common, new possibilities have opened up for games design, and new, exciting platforms for games development.

What are natural user interfaces?

Natural user interfaces, or NUI, are interfaces where users can interact with computers with natural, intuitive movements. The interfaces feel seamless, or are effectively invisible, to users, as artificial devices such as keyboards and mice are not used.