



Larian Studios selects Wwise for the Future

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Larian Studios selects the Wwise audio middleware solution for its advanced authoring tool. With the decision, this innovative studio achieves significant reductions in development and engineering costs.

Belgium's Larian Studios is an independent house that has been publishing games for more than 10 years. They have produced over 25 titles, including the multiplayer real-time strategy game "The Led Wars" and the hugely successful "Divine Divinity" that was voted as one of the best games of 2002. They are currently working on a top-secret project that is sure to garner them even more attention.

Larian Studios was founded in 1996 by Swen Vincke who had just graduated with a degree in Informatics. The decision to start his own studio was based on his desire to produce video games and his spirit of independence. As Vincke explains, "I wanted to make games and I knew I wouldn't be able to work for somebody else."

Now, Larian Studios employs more than 40 people, ranging from software engineers and graphic artists to sound designers and music composers. As the CEO of this innovative and growing studio, Vincke continues to set his own course. In August of 2007, while many in the industry were waiting to see what would happen, Vincke and his team decided to try out the new audio middleware solution from Audiokinetic.

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Initially, the team at Larian Studios began by using Wwise on smaller projects. With positive feedback and mounting success, they decided to use it for larger projects and now it is their audio middleware solution for the future.

The Advantages of Sophisticated Audio

According to Vincke, the ability to develop sophisticated audio is extremely important. "Good audio makes everything more. If you have developed a realistic-looking game, sophisticated audio makes it more real; if you have a funny game or scene, the right sounds make it hilarious."

Despite the importance of sophisticated audio, Vincke admits that budgets and resources are not always allocated accordingly. He says, "Money always goes to the visuals and content because they are so labor-intensive and people tend to respect them more. But, even so, a visually pleasing scene can become 30-40% better with the right audio."

Wwise®
audio pipeline solution

Even at Larian Studios, where they hold audio in such high regard, they employ only a very small sound development group that includes a composer and an engineer assisted by interns. This makes the choice of audio middleware solution that much more important. Using Wwise allows Larian Studios to produce the quality audio they want with such a small team. Says Vincke, "Because of Wwise, we don't have a dedicated audio engineer. We don't need one."



What Sets Wwise Apart

Wwise was not the first middleware solution that Larian Studios decided to employ. They have been using a heavily modified version of Gamebryo since 2002 and appreciate the benefits of having someone else bear the cost of development and upgrades. "We're a very middleware intensive house," says Vincke. "When we decide to buy a middleware solution, it is generally based on the tools that it offers. Without a doubt, the authoring tool in Wwise is what sets this solution apart from the competition."

The authoring tool in Wwise simplifies the creative workflow and allows developers to author on-the-fly and in the context of a game. The development team at Audiokinetic worked tirelessly to ensure that their solution supports every phase of audio development and also allows developers to create, audition, and tweak sound effects or subtle sound behaviors without programming assistance. Says Vincke, "It was exactly what we were looking for. The authoring tool is a lot easier to use, and it was the biggest reason why we licensed Wwise."

Prior to Wwise, Larian Studios was using an audio middleware that did not provide the same authoring tool. This meant that they had to develop their own in-house solution. Says Vincke, "We made our own authoring tool in the past as an extra layer, but maintaining it and adding new features just cost too much. With Wwise, we get this great authoring tool right out-of-the-box."

In addition to the authoring tool in Wwise, Vincke and the team at Larian also appreciated the middleware's ease of integration. Says Vincke, "The integration was very smooth. It was done in under a week. In fact, the team got Wwise running in just a couple of days."

Meeting Challenges

With more than 2 decades of experience running his own studio, Vincke has a unique perspective on the changes that have occurred in the industry since he started out. He says that "the main difference in the

industry today is that everything is much more complex. While the basics are still the same, everything seems bigger and there is more "stuff" to do. Back in '97, a character was just a couple of pixels on the screen and relatively easy to make. Now, characters are assets that can take months to develop."

These months of development often include a large amount of time anticipating how the entire game will turn out. In fact, according to Vincke, "the biggest challenge facing us today is that it takes a long time to figure out if a game will work. We can spend six to eight months, sometimes even a year, in pre-production."

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Using Wwise can help studios, like Larian, meet this challenge for their audio. With the profiling capabilities in Wwise, developers can profile and troubleshoot the overall performance of sounds and events triggered in game as they go. In addition, the Object Profilers allow developers to profile and view the real-time position and orientation of game objects and listeners in a 3D viewer.

For Vincke, all the preparation and anticipation are definitely worth it. When it is all said and done, his favorite part of being a game producer is connecting with game players. "Personally," says Vincke, "I still think that seeing all the players playing and enjoying our games is the best part of what we do." Stay tuned to hear how Larian Studio's next project will delight and entertain gamers worldwide.

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