Apple said Roblox developers don’t make games, and now Roblox agrees

Massively popular game creation tool *Roblox* is now a massively popular *experience* creation tool *Roblox*, possibly in response to the ongoing *Epic v. Apple* trial.

Roblox allows a variety of user-created projects on its platform, and until earlier this week, these were all grouped under a tab called “Games” on *Roblox*’s website. *Roblox* creators could create and manage “games” through an editor, and individual games had a user limit called “max players.”

That’s all changed now. The “Games” tab now reads “Discover” on the web, although it still points to an address of “roblox.com/games.” Developers can create and manage “experiences,” and experiences have “max people” allowed. The word “game” has been replaced by “experience” across nearly the entire *Roblox* website, and the iOS and Android apps now have a Discover tab instead of a Games tab — although both apps are currently classed as games in their respective stores.

“The term ‘experiences’ is consistent with how we’ve evolved our terminology to reflect our realization of the metaverse,” a *Roblox* spokesperson told *The Verge. “Roblox* is an online community where people do things together in virtual worlds, and over the years, we began referring to these worlds as experiences, as they better represent the wide range of 3D immersive places — from obbys to virtual concerts — that people can enjoy together with their friends.”

Roblox has used the term “experience” in place of “game” before, and CEO David Baszucki called *Roblox* a “metaverse” rather than a gaming platform last year. But this change happened days after a legal fight over whether *Roblox* experiences are games — and by extension, whether *Roblox* itself should be allowed on the iOS App Store.

Goodbye games, hello Discover

The *Epic v. Apple* antitrust trial has produced a weeks-long, frequently hilarious debate over the definition of a video game. Epic wants to prove that its shooter *Fortnite* is a “metaverse” rather than a game, pushing the trial’s scope to cover Apple’s entire App Store instead of just games. Apple wants to prove that Epic is an almost purely game-related company and that the App Store maintains consistent, user-friendly policies distinguishing “apps” from “games.” It also wants to defend a ban on “stores within a store” on iOS.

Roblox blurs the line between a large social game and a game engine or sales platform. Users don’t enter a single virtual world like *Second Life*; they launch individual experiences created by users. Developers can sell items within those experiences, and there are full-fledged game studios that build with *Roblox* instead of, say, the Unity or Unreal engines. But all of this activity happens within a single *Roblox* app, instead of as a series of separately packaged games.

Apple has apparently worried about this fuzziness. In a 2017 email, Apple marketing head Trystan Kosmynka said he was “surprised” that *Roblox* (which he referred to as “Roboblox”) had been approved for the App Store. The email chain indicates that App Store reviewers raised concerns in 2014, but *Roblox* was approved without ever resolving the issues. Epic brought the decision up again in court, hoping to cast doubt on Apple’s App Store review process.

“Games have a beginning, an end, there’s challenges in place”

Instead, Kosmynka justified the choice by saying that neither *Roblox* nor its user-built projects should be defined as games. “If you think of a game or app, games are incredibly dynamic, games have a beginning, an end, there’s challenges in place,” he testified. “I look at the experiences that are in Roblox similar to the experiences that are in *Minecraft.* These are maps. These are worlds. And they have boundaries in terms of what they’re capable of.” Kosmynka said Apple considered *Roblox* itself an app (rather than a game) because the company used that label in the App Store, although this doesn’t appear to be accurate.

Besides the crucial factors of “beginning,” “end,” and “challenges,” Kosmynka seemingly argued that these experiences weren’t games because *Roblox* contained their code in a safe, Apple-vetted *Roblox* sandbox — making them less objectionable than standalone installable games. But Apple doesn’t use that same logic for cloud gaming services, which stream video of games from remote servers. In fact, it requires these services to list each game as a separate app. That would probably be a nightmare for *Roblox*, where experiences range from full-fledged professional projects to tiny personal spaces.

Some *Roblox* users have left irritated messages on Twitter, Reddit, and other platforms. But *Roblox* has promoted itself as a general-purpose metaverse in the past. It’s got virtually nothing to gain by deliberately stepping into Apple’s minefield of iOS gaming rules, particularly after such an extended courtroom debate about its status. On iOS, it turns out, the only winning move is to not play — or at least not *tell* anyone you’re playing.

Update 8:14PM ET: *Added statement from* Roblox*.*

https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/14/22436014/apple-roblox-epic-fortnite-trial-what-is-game-name-change