Netflix has a new plan for games

Netflix's gaming strategy to date has been scattershot. Since Netflix gaming debuted in 2021, the streamer has launched indie darlings, streaming tie-ins, and blockbuster ports. There have been studio acquisitions, attempts at original AAA games, and experiments with cloud streaming. A few years on, it's not entirely clear what the strategy is — or if it's really working.

So when Alain Tascan, former executive VP of game development at *Fortnite* maker Epic Games, joined as Netflix's new president of games last year, his assessment was to "readjust and focus on fewer areas with more intention." As he explains it: "we need to find our voice."

According to Tascan, that means focusing on games that fit into one of four categories. These include narrative games, like its interactive fiction titles tied to Netflix reality shows, along with multiplayer party games and games aimed at kids. Rounding out the quartet is what Netflix calls "mainstream" releases, which basically means anything with the potential for a huge audience. That could be a licensed tie-in like last year's *Squid Game: Unleashed* or original games like the just-announced *Spirit Crossing*, an ambitious MMO that looks like a cross between a Studio Ghibli film and a larger-scale *Animal Crossing*.

Tascan likens this strategy to the early days of Netflix's original programming. It started with a few series, like *House of Cards* and *Orange Is the New Black*, and now Netflix produces a huge range of shows, movies, and live programming. For games, the idea is to focus on titles that fit into the four (admittedly broad) categories and then, eventually, expand from there. "We're starting with those," he says. "Down the

road we might add more if it makes sense, but I think starting first from these four is already a lot."

This also means scaling back in some areas. Last year, Netflix shut down an internal studio focused on AAA titles, helmed by industry veterans from franchises like *Halo* and *God of War*, before it even released a game. And while Netflix has become a notable publisher of indie games on mobile, it sounds like that, too, will become a smaller part of the overall plan. "We will continue supporting some of them, but I feel that indie gamers are not really coming to Netflix to find indie games," Tascan says. Everything has to fit with the overall strategy. "If a game that has been created independently fits one of those categories nicely, we'll probably go after it," he says.

The eventual goal is to become, well, the Netflix of games — a sort of one-stop shop where it's fast and easy to find something new to play. Part of achieving that is having a broad range of games meant to appeal to Netflix's existing audience and potential new subscribers. But just as important, according to Tascan, is reducing the friction to playing games. Unlike a Netflix show, which simply involves pressing play, getting into a game involves more steps, like finding it in an app store and downloading it.

Travis Scott in *Fortnite*.
Image: Epic Games

While that's the case right now, Tascan wants the service's gaming efforts to eventually be playable "instantaneously" and to make them platform agnostic, meaning you can play them on any device. Right now, due to a combination of technical hurdles and app store restrictions, the process isn't exactly smooth. "Being accessible instantaneously on any screen is the ultimate goal," he says. "I'm coming from a world where I've

seen success by taking walls down. *Fortnite* was one of the first games to really do cross-play, and I feel that was one of the big reasons for its success."

He believes this future will happen within the next five years, citing various converging elements like streaming technology improving and becoming cheaper; an audience that now expects experiences to carry over between devices thanks to games like *Fortnite*; and Netflix's growing global audience. "We're getting really close," Tascan says. "It's all evolving in the same direction."

As a first step, the streamer will be launching its first TV-focused games by the end of this year. Currently, all Netflix games are mobile titles. But these new, unannounced games will be playable via a smart TV and controlled via a smartphone, removing the need for game controllers – another point of friction.

Perhaps even more ambitious, Tascan believes that one or several of these unknown games have the potential to have a similar impact to the Travis Scott concert in *Fortnite*, a moment that took players by surprise and permeated pop culture in a way that games rarely do. "I hope that some of the offerings we have at the end of the year will create this type of moment," he says.

https://www.theverge.com/games/633481/netflix-gaming-strategy-alain-tascan-interview