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JRNL 423
Q&A article

Steve 'Pendragon' Mescon is the creator and operator of the official community hub for one of the most popular player-made game mods in the world, Defense of the Ancients (DotA). As the Director of Community Relations for Riot Games he uses his years of experience to help Riot build strong relationships with their fan-base. Prior to working at Riot Games Mescon managed customer relations at Zappos and DirecTV. I interviewed Mescon about his job, working at Riot, and the recently released online game League of Legends (LoL). More information about League of Legends can be found at its official site, www.leagueoflegends.com.

Q: What are your duties as Director of Community Relations at Riot Games?

A: I have three main areas of responsibility. The first is community management. I keep what's going on at Riot as transparent as possible, and update players on new developments. To do this I try to build a deep relationship with our players. It's important for the entire company, and me specifically, to be part of the player community, and I spend a large portion of my time talking directly with the players. My second responsibility is the online face of Riot. I'm in charge of all the company's websites and their maintenance, and currently oversee a team of 2 web developers and one web designer. My last responsibility is customer service. It's my job to make sure that player issues received by our customer service department are replied to quickly and handled with the same transparent philosophy that we promote throughout the company. Basically I ensure that every company-player interaction and communication is consistently high quality.

Q: How much time do you spend browsing and replying to threads in the LoL forum, on a typical day?

A: I try to make sure that I spend at least 90 minutes a day on the forum reading threads, replying to them, or forwarding them to different parts of the company. However, we have thousands of new posts and threads each day--far more than one person can keep up with.

Q: Has the League of Legends launch gone as planned? If not, in what ways has it differed from expectations?

A: The answer to that question is really in-depth! Nothing ever goes exactly according to plan, but I think that overall we're really happy with where things are right now. We didn't have the normal launch-day downtimes that plague a lot of online games, even though we've had some great early growth.

Q: Was the decision to use a free-to-play with micro-transactions business model influenced by the high rate of piracy Demigod (a similar game that was released for a flat price) experienced?

A: Not really. The main reason we made League of Legends a free game was the desire to make it accessible. It's the same reason we chose to go with a stylized art style instead of a photo-realistic art style.

Q: In what ways does the LoL community influence Riot?

A: Far too many to list, but a great example of when we've taken player desire into consideration is when we announced that European and U.S. players would have to be on different servers. After a very vocal player movement against that decision we canceled it. Every staff member is allowed to interact with every member of the community, which is something that's different from most game companies.

Q: I remember when blogs were first becoming popular people would get fired for talking about what was going on at a company. This is kind of the opposite?

A: Yes, it's the exact opposite. We're very transparent internally and externally. That's why we even flag staff forum posts to make it easier for people to find them.

Q: DotA has a reputation for having a rude community. Having played it for more than four years I'd say there's definitely some truth to that. With LoL being a similar game and getting a lot of users with DotA experience, are there any measures planned to prevent people from cussing out someone for an in-game mistake?

A: You can't stop it completely, but there are a number of things that you can do to mitigate it, and the impact that it has. One example is a reputation system that we're working on that allows you to rate the other players within your game, and which rewards players who behave positively.

Q: Anything else to say about LoL, Riot, or yourself?

A: Riot is an awesome company to work for, and League of Legends has the best community that I've ever had the pleasure of being a part of. I look forward to many years serving the playerbase.