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Leaked Zynga Memo Justifies Copycat Strategy

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Published Feb 01, 2012, 11:20am EST, Updated Feb 09, 2012, 09:08pm EST

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I picked up the story, as did countless other news outlets, and though normally Zynga pays no mind to such accusations, as it's almost their entire business model, CEO [Mark Pincus](#) wrote an internal memo that has now been leaked to the web. Pincus once famously said "I don't f***ing want innovation. "You're not smarter than your competitor. Just copy what they do and do it until you get their numbers." This memo isn't quite as brazen, but echoes a similar sentiment. Read the full text below:

"Everyone,

There's press today about one of our mobile games, Dream Heights, that just launched in Canada and worldwide soon. As we become the Zynga of [Mobile](#) and more broadly, as Zynga grows by further innovating on best of breed social mechanics, we should expect the industry to sit up and take notice of our growing portfolio.

I'm proud of the mobile team's hard work and the industry has taken notice.

For the first time, according to App Data, Words with Friends is the #1 game on Facebook. Scramble with Friends, within 2 weeks of launching, has topped the App Store rankings in multiply categories including top free, top paid and top grossing. Last week, [Apple](#) recognized the team's work by featuring Zynga's games on the front of the App Store.

The mobile team is gearing up to launch more play across more genres and platforms. I want to congratulate them for working hard to bring great experiences to players around the world.

Google didn't create the first search engine. Apple didn't create the first mp3 player or tablet. And, Facebook didn't create the first social network. But these companies have evolved products and categories in revolutionary ways. They are all internet treasures because they all have specific and broad missions to change the world.

We don't need to be first to market. We need to be the best in market. There are genres that we're going to enter because we know our players are interested in them and because we want and need to be where players are. We evolve genres by making games free, social, accessible and highest quality.

With regard to Dream Heights and the tower genre, it's important to note that this category has existed since 1994 with games like Sim Tower and was more recently popularized in China with Tower of Babel in 2009 which achieved 15 million DAUs. On iOS there has been Yoot Tower, Tower Up, Tower Town, Tower Blocks and Tiny Tower. Just as our games, mechanics and social innovations have inspired and accelerated the game industry, its 30 year body of work has inspired us too.

And, this has always been the case for our company and the rest of the industry. Zynga Poker, FarmVille, CityVille and Words with Friends, none of these games were the first to market in their category but we made them the most fun and social, and the most popular. Our teams continue to build and improve these games every week which has been an important part of our success model. We run our games as a live service and we continue to iterate, innovate and improve on them to give our players the best possible experience.

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As I've said, our strategy since the beginning has been to develop the best game – most fun and most social – for every category of play. We are rarely first since most categories in games go back decades, but we aim to be the best.

A few of you have asked how our approach to genres relates to the situation we faced with [Vostu](#). There are rules of engagement in our industry. Companies have to respect each other's legal and IP ownership rights in the form of copyrights and trademarks. In the case of Vostu, you can [see for yourself that Vostu crossed the line](#) and chose to use our copyrighted IP and artwork. That's different than competing to build the best product or out-innovate us in the City category.

Play in the form of social and mobile gaming has become a mainstream activity, but it has the potential to be so much more. It can be one of the primary ways we connect with other people. It can surpass TV as the most popular and engaging medium of the 21st century. In order to make this vision real, we need to work as a company and an industry to continue innovating, improving and hopefully revolutionizing every major genre of games for social play. Every successful game from developers big and small has pioneered some important new facet of this experience. We are proud of the mechanics we have pioneered that are now industry standards.

Part of what makes our industry cool and dynamic is the idea that small teams can build successful games. But at Zynga we will continue to innovate and expand our possibility space in order to delight our player base too.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who emailed me on this topic. Part of what makes our company special is the open transparent dialog we can all have, and it's your passion that is shaping our future.

Thanks,

Mark"

That's a much more eloquent statement of purpose than "I don't want f***ing innovation," I suppose, and I wouldn't be surprised if this was meant to be leaked showing "nice guy" Mark motivating behind the scenes. But I don't buy it.

As I've said before to Zynga defenders who happen upon my articles (many of which turn out to be employees), this is not a case of "inspiration." Yes, every product and IP on the market is generally a derivative of some other concept in almost all cases, but what Zynga's doing is a step beyond.

The company scavenges through the most popular titles on the social market and harvests them for their own. To use an analogy I've drawn on before, the gap between Tiny Tower and Sim Tower might be the difference between [James Cameron's](#) sci-fi Avatar and the similarly themed Dances with Wolves. However, the space between Tiny Tower and Zynga's Dream Heights would be the difference between Dances with Wolves and another film set in the 1800s about Native Americans with the exact same plot, lookalike actors and titled "Cavorting with Bears."

You can repeat that analogy for countless Zynga titles, Farmville with Farmtown, Hidden Chronicles with Gardens of Time, Zynga Bingo with Bingo Blitz, Words with Friends with Scrabble. There's no "inspiration" here, only thievery. Yes, they change the code and draw up new artwork to avoid any legal trouble (after getting in hot water for not doing that when they stole Farmville), but it's the bare minimum to avoid legal retribution. And if someone did sue them? The powerful company (now with a billion dollar IPO) would crush them with a dogpile of lawyers.

Pincus would have us believe he's just continuing in the great tradition of all tech pioneers, drawing on past products to make future ones, but there's something different with Zynga. Something wrong. And to have a brand that is this creatively bankrupt does not bode well for its long term prospects.

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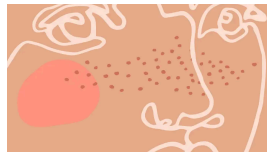
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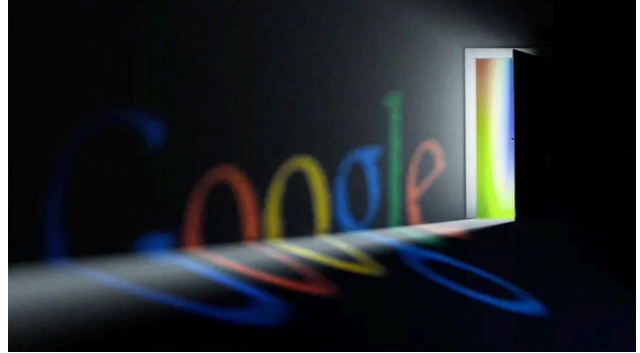
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