



LIQUID AND GRIT

Puzzle Report

Competitive research and actionable product recommendations

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NOVEMBER

2017

INTRODUCTION



“I suppose my formula might be: dream, diversify, and never miss an angle.”
– Walt Disney, on his profit formula

Dear Product Owner,

Each month, we bring you the *angle*: insights and analysis from the most successful games. It is your job to dream...and diversify your product portfolio.

Key takeaways:

- **Add a few non-traditional retention features to your roadmap.** Cradle of Empires continued to experiment with *Drag & Drop* and *Augmented Reality* to drive retention and installs.
- **Utilize non-dev teams to form valuable partnerships.** King, in a partnership with Snap, released a Bubble Witch Saga 3 lens within Snapchat.
- **Add unlimited content systems to keep top players entertained.** Toy Blast added a *Legends Arena* to engage players who beat all the game levels.
- **For buildable games, consider implementing Matchington Mansion’s *Find an Item* mechanic...inspired by the successful app, Houzz.** This mechanic allows players to enter a friend’s mansion, select certain items, then purchase these items for their own mansion. In a few months, this app went from new release to 32nd grossing in the U.S. Puzzle category for iPhone.

We work hard to give you only the best, most concise information. To go deeper on any feature, click the suggested links to be taken to an online library within our [Feature Database](#) that holds detailed screenshots.

Brett Nowak
Editor-in-Chief

NEW INNOVATIONS

DRAG & DROPS

Cradle of Empires enabled players to easily add a *Drag & Drop* calendar reminder for events

- All events now have 'Add to Calendar' buttons (1)
- Players drag the event to their calendar app (2 & 3)
- App events show up with notifications in their calendar (4)

Release: 9/17/17 (available for iPad users with iOS 11)

KPI: Retention

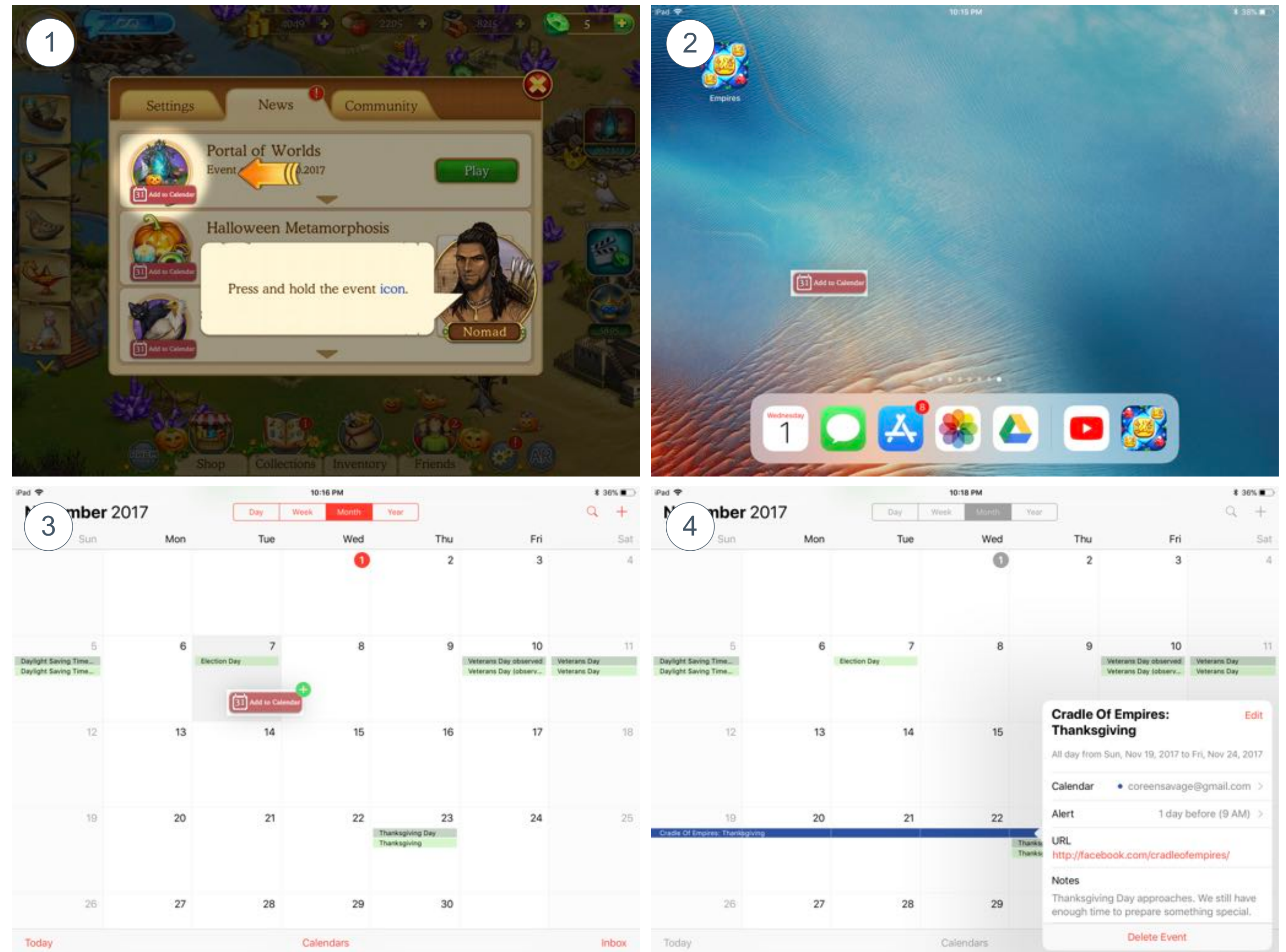
Category: Live Ops

More images: [Drag & Drop](#)

Related features: [iOS Widgets](#), [iMessage Stickers](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cradle of Empires invested heavily in their 9/17/17 release with non-traditional retention tactics: *Drag & Drop*, *iMessage Stickers*, *iOS widgets*, and *Augmented Reality*
- Because these features were only available on certain devices (and often just iOS 11), top-line impact was limited and gross rankings have *not yet* seen impact. Expect updates next month on the results
- Implement these type of retention-driving features. They are often cheap and any retention win can produce long-term gains



SNAPCHAT LENSES

Bubble Witch Saga 3 released a game-inspired lens in Snapchat to generate installs and drive retention

- In Snapchat, players scan the lens code on BWS 3's Facebook page (1)
- The game-specific lens is unlocked (2)
- Players may then take and share game-decorated Snaps (3)

Release: 10/31/17

KPIs: Installs, Retention

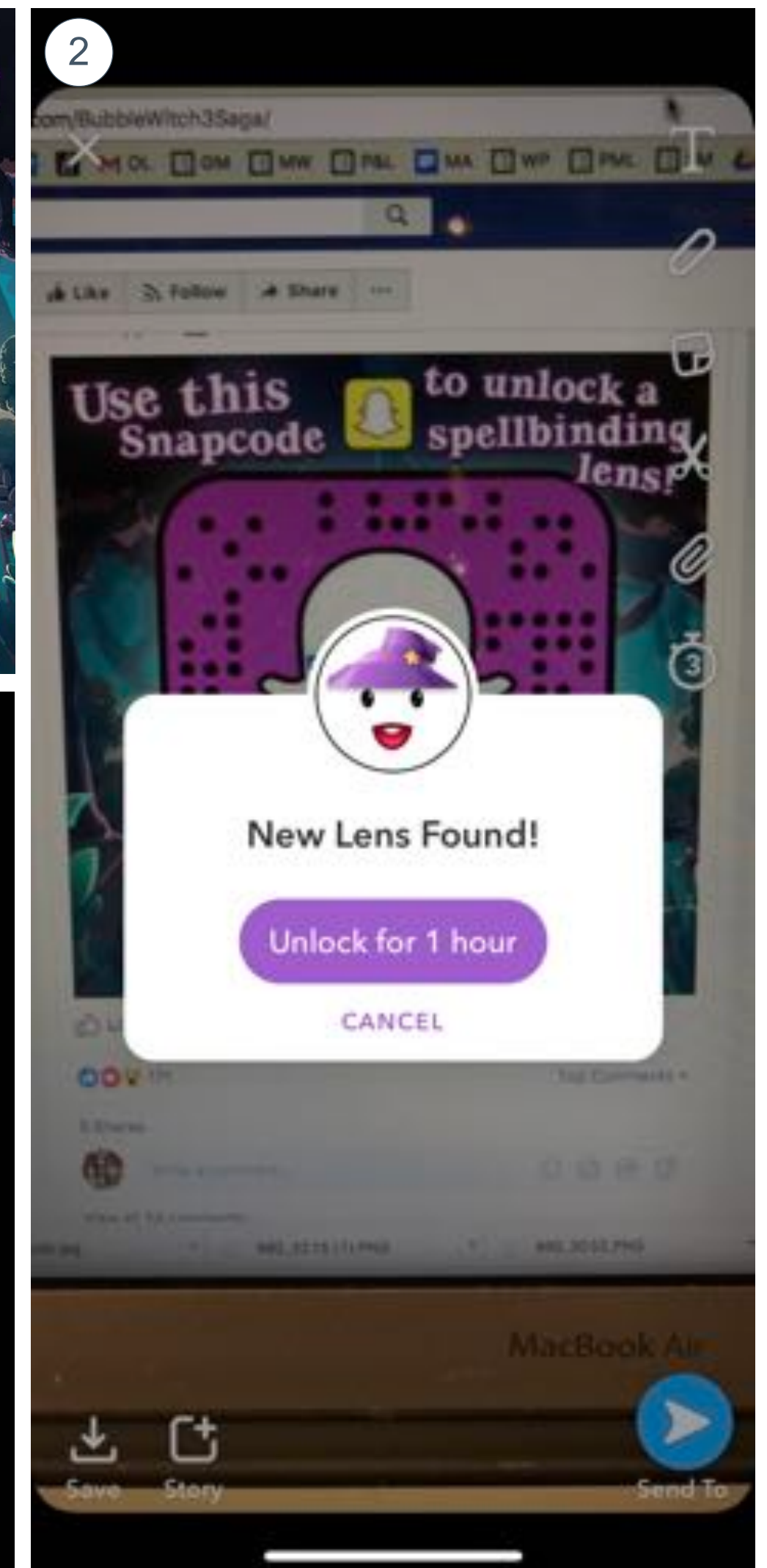
Category: Feature

More images: [Snapchat](#)

Related feature: [iMessage Stickers](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Create additional value with features that require little or no development
- Work with the business development team (and other non-development teams) to strategize and create similar opportunities
- This feature generated a decent amount of PR and was Snapchat's first ever content partnership, according to multiple sources



TOP LEVEL ARENAS

Toy Blast released a competitive feature unlocked only to players at the maximum level

- Once players complete the highest level, they unlock the arena (1 & 2)
- The arena is a competitive feature where players compete globally and are ranked for 15 days (3)
- Rank is based on stages accomplished in the arena (4)

Release: 10/4/17

KPI: Retention (for high level players)

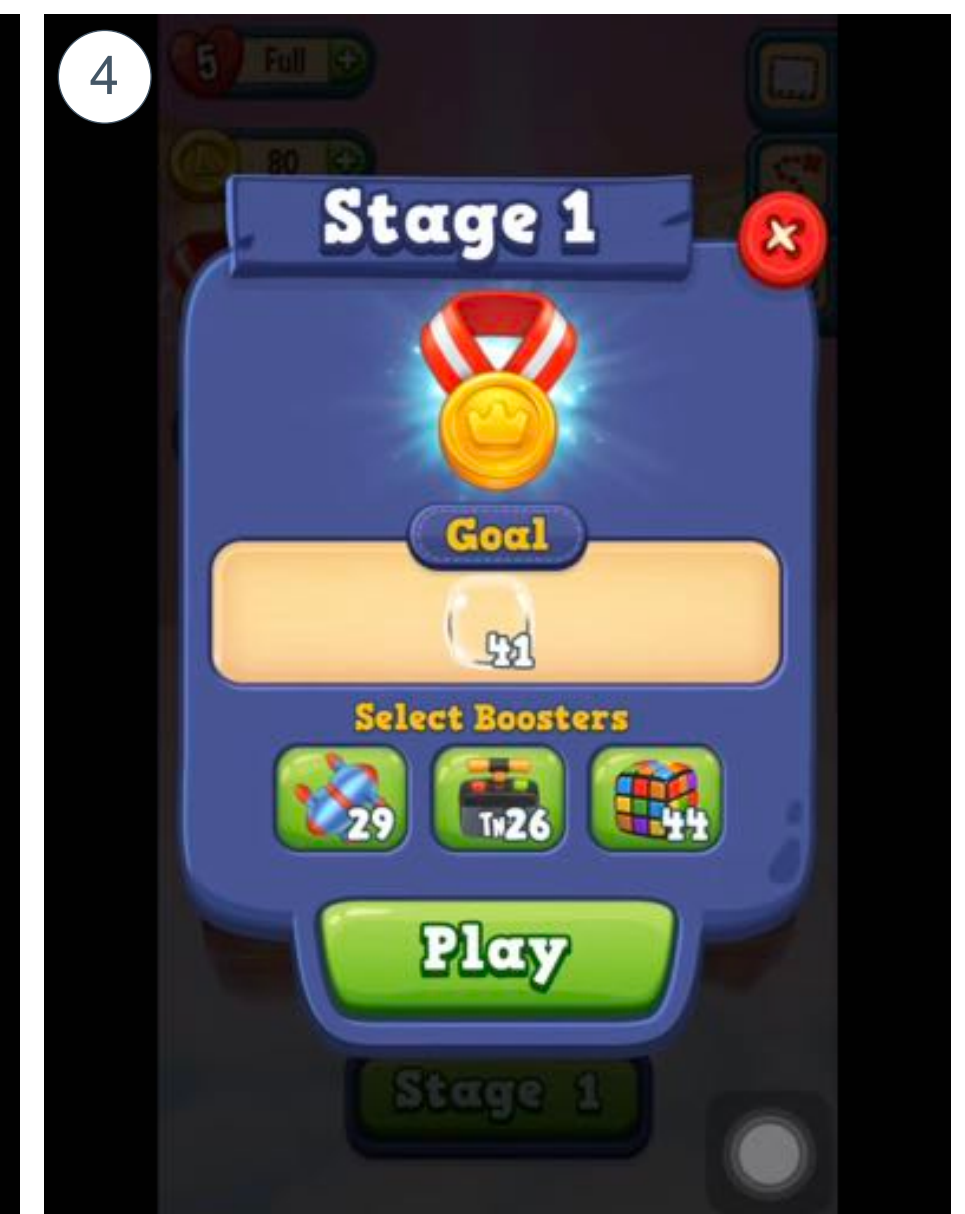
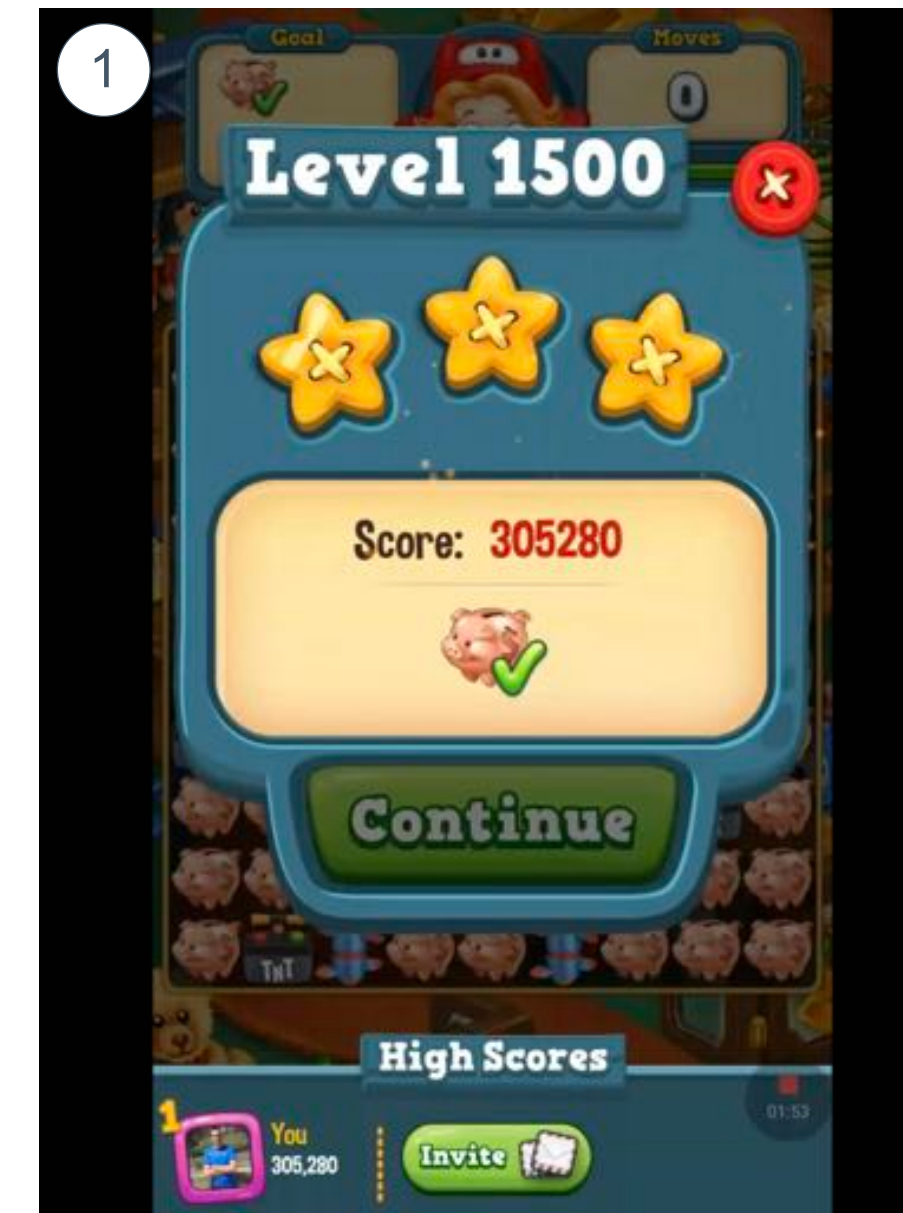
Category: Feature

More images: [Legends Arena](#)

Related features: [Scary Pranks](#), [High Roller Colosseum](#) (a competitive, high-roller feature that was removed from Jackpot Party, a Casino app)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- This feature tackles an important problem: entertaining high level players, who have already beat the game, until new content is released
- For this small, *but valuable*, group of players, consider this feature with some adjustments:
 - Don't assume high level players are competitive. Therefore, make the feature opt-in
 - Make the rules and goals clear (*Legends Arena* splits players into random groups, resulting in multiple #1 ranked players. Several high level players commented about this negatively in forums)



AUGMENTED REALITY PLAY

Cradle of Empires released a quest utilizing game-inspired *Augmented Reality (AR)*

- A quest requires players to use *AR* (1)
- After players grant camera access, they are instructed to find a surface (2)
- An empire is then shown in *AR* (3)
- The Community team used the feature to promote user-generated content (UGC) (4)

Release: 9/17/17 (available for users of iOS 11 on iPhone 7, iPhone 7 Plus, and iPad Pro)

KPIs: Engagement, UGC

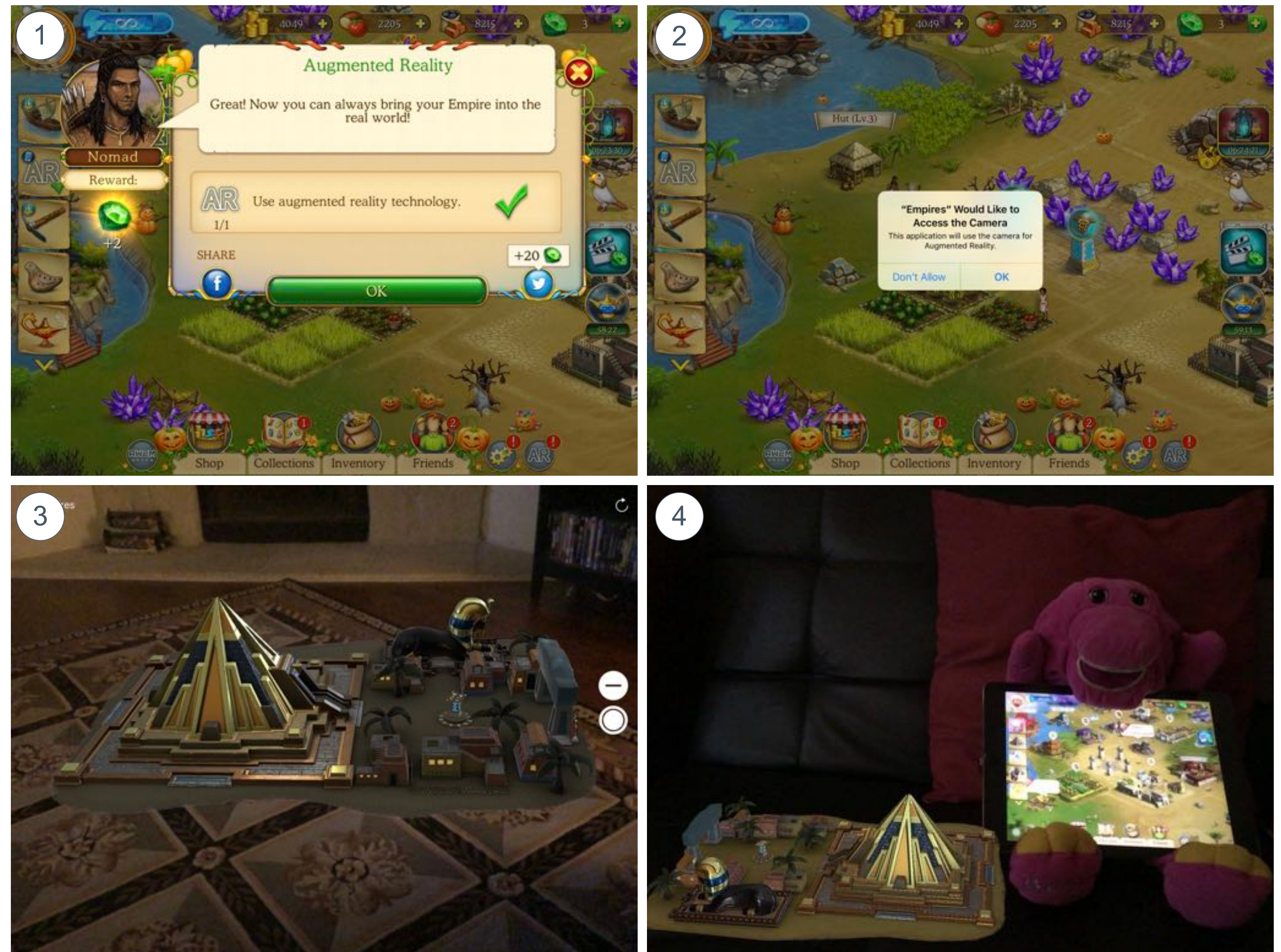
Category: Feature

More images: [Augmented Reality](#)

Related app: [Monster Park - Dino World](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- For games with buildables, *AR* may be a great opportunity to generate UGC
- Highly personalize the *AR* to drive more meaningful shares
- *Potential bonus value:* *AR* could help lead to an Apple featuring



LIVE OPS

BANISH CREATURES

Seekers Notes Hidden Mystery let players banish roaming creatures during a timed event

- Creatures roam the map (1)
- Players must collect items in rooms to banish the creatures (2)
- A progress bar increases as players banish creatures in 1 of 5 stages (3)
- The top 1,000 players in the event receive a unique sticker, and the top 3 players win specific prizes (4)
- There are 5 stages that allow latecomers to also receive prizes (5)
- There is an event leaderboard with 'global' and 'friends-only' options (6)

Release: 9/29/17

KPI: Engagement, Revenue

Category: Live ops

More images: [Scary Pranks](#)

Related features: [Legends Arena](#), [Team Battle](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Add event-specific awards for top groups of players to reward whales. This requires setting up the event with an unlimited ceiling of tasks
- Build multiple stages to keep the event rewarding for non-whales and latecomers
- Be careful with leaderboards. If a leaderboard is shown, allow players to hide their names



LEVEL DESIGN

NEW LEVEL DESIGNS

New level mechanics released this month in the top grossing apps

Break in Time

- *Evil Pumpkins* in *Cradle of Empires*
- Match 3 next to the *Pumpkins* in a given time, or the *Pumpkins* will burst and spread additional hazard spaces (1 & 2)
- **More images:** [Evil Pumpkins](#)

Collect a Number

- *Picnic Blanket* in *Gardenscapes*
- Collect the number of symbols listed on the *Picnic Blanket* (3 & 4)
- **More images:** [Picnic Blanket](#)

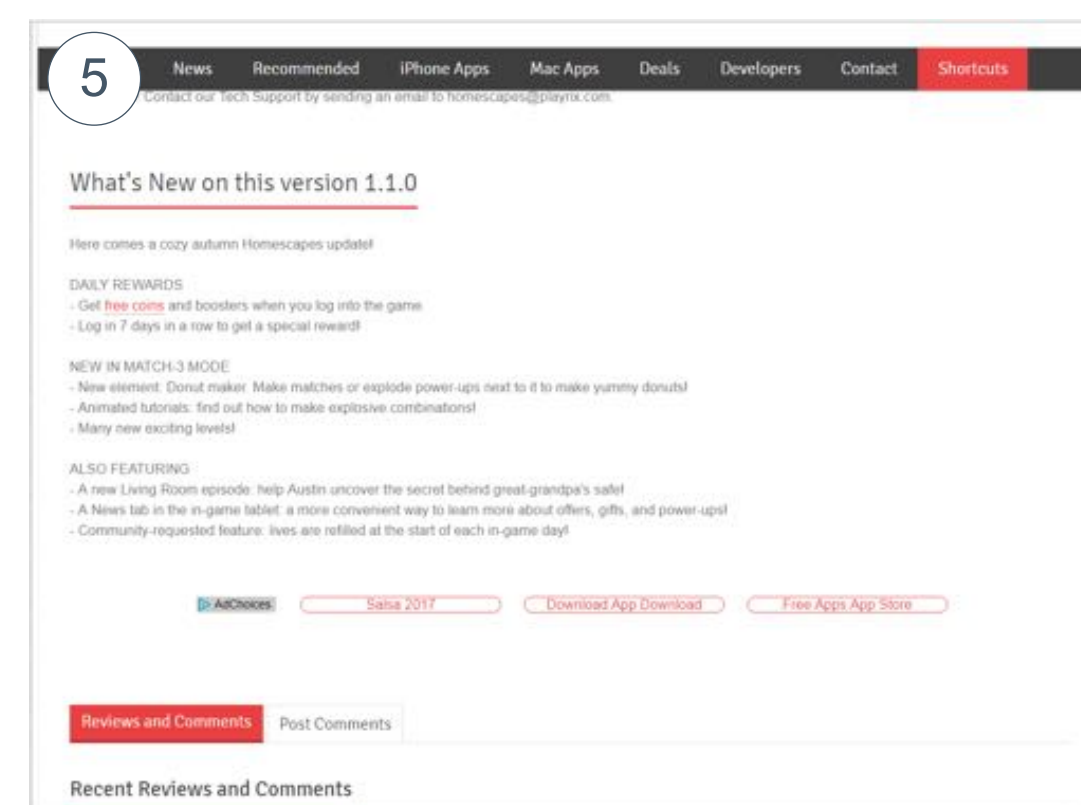
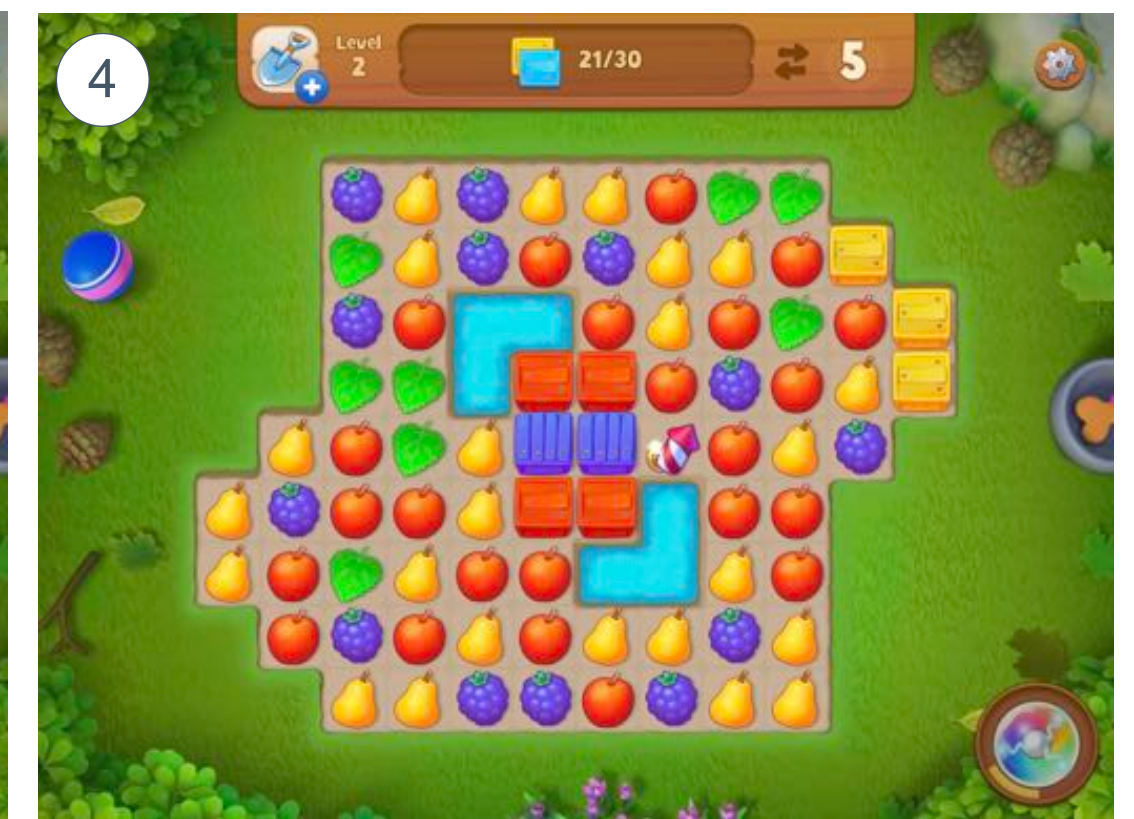
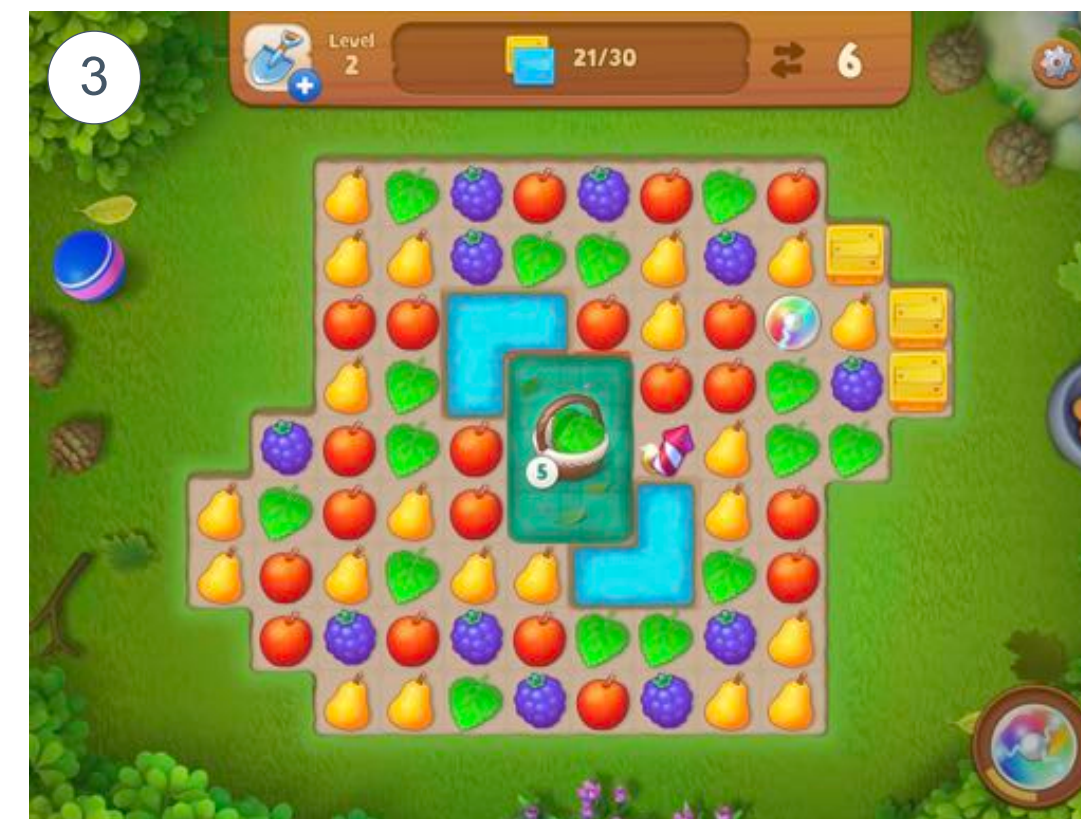
Spread Donuts

- *Donut Maker* in *Homescapes*
- Make matches or explode power-ups next to the *Donut Maker* to create donuts (5 & 6, no in-game images were found)
- **More images:** [Donut Maker](#)

KPI: Retention

Category: Feature

Related level designs: [Floats](#), [Barrel of Oil](#), [Chests](#)



MARKET WATCH

10/1/17 – 10/31/17

TOP GROSSING 1 – 21

App	Notable Features Released	Additional Information
Homescapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily bonus feature: gives players additional rewards for consecutive log-ins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Daily Bonus</u>
Fishdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leagues released: five tiers based on leaderboard placement in regular events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Leagues</u>
Seekers Notes Hidden Mystery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competitive events: Halloween event featuring 3 staged challenges, themed rooms, and event leaderboard for various prizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See Live Ops
Cookie Jam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Line breaker event: creates line break boosts to fill a meter for boost awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Dessert Dig</u>
Hidden City Mystery of Shadows	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Holiday event: 3 challenges, themed city map, rooms, and event gifts to unlock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Perfect Halloween</u>
Cradle of Empires	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drag & Drop: saves game event dates into a calendar on the same device• Augmented Reality: inserts a 3D image into a device camera image	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See New Innovations

TOP GROSSING 22 – 30

App	Notable Features Released	Additional Information
Angry Birds 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team battles feature: 24 hour clan vs. clan battle. Players ranked based on score of same-level play	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Clan Battles</u>
Mahjong Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Map progress event: collect currency to participate in a Halloween event by completing map levels for daily boost and avatar prizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Misc Features</u>
Cookie Jam Blast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily challenges: 3 specials to unlock before the timer runs out to collect awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Daily Specials</u>
Jigsaw Puzzle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Game play features: added buttons on puzzle play screen to help players	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Hint button</u>• <u>Scatter button</u>
Bubble Witch 2 Saga	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relaunch of collection feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Memories</u>

GAME TEARDOWN: MATCHINGTON MANSION

MATCHINGTON MANSION

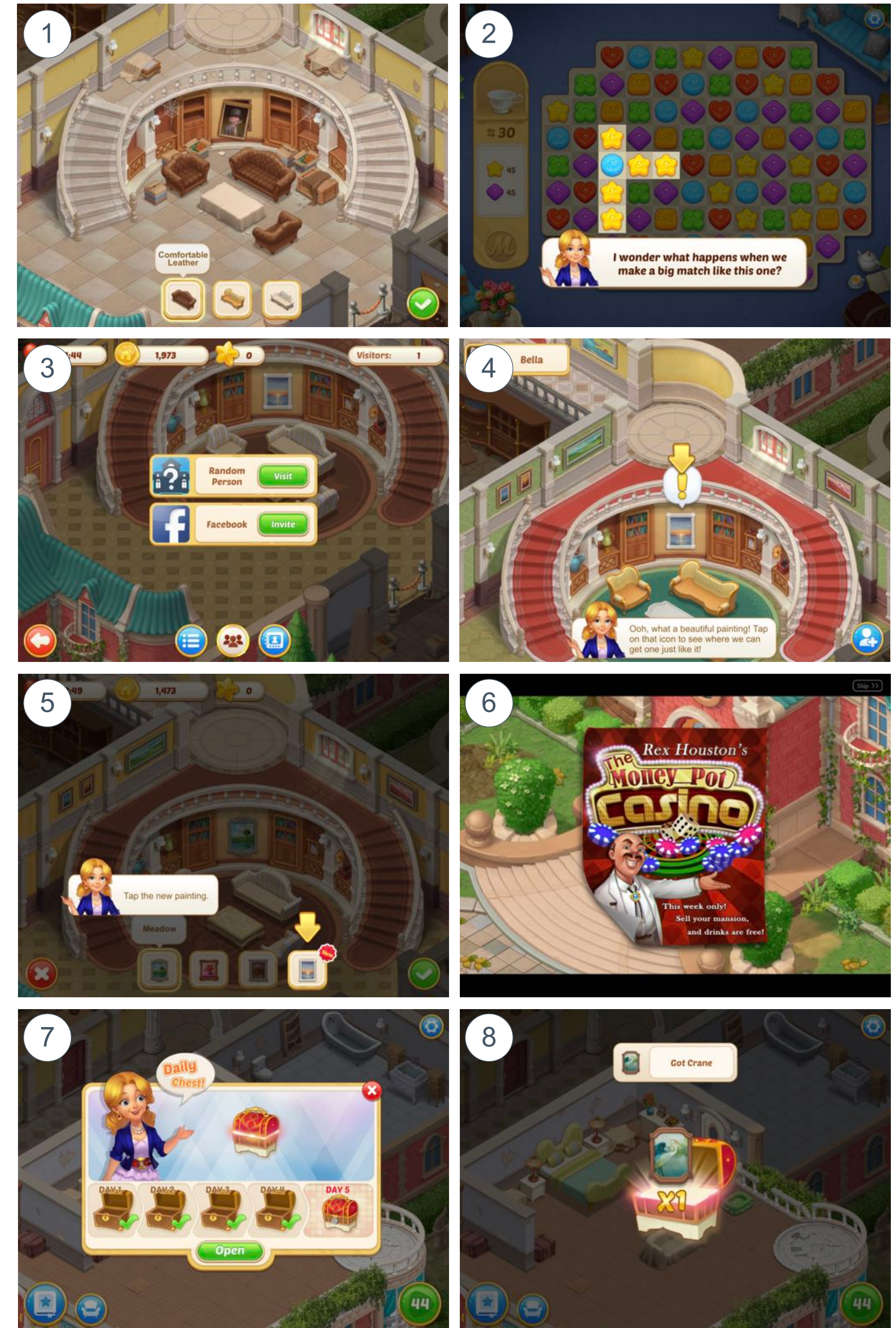
The app is very similar to Gardenscapes, but players may select items in another player's mansion to purchase for their own mansion

- A story-based game to upgrade an older mansion (1)
- The early puzzle system is relatively standard (2)
- Players may visit other player's mansions (3)
- Players tap on items in the other mansion to place in their profile (4)
- Players return to their mansion to add selected items for a price (5)
- Early in the game, a character comes to the door with a flyer, "For one of his ugly casinos", the character laments (6)
- 5 days of the daily bonus awards a custom design item (7 & 8)

- **Release:** 6/5/17
- **More images:** [Feature Database](#) > Puzzle > Game > Matchington Mansion
- **Related apps:** [Houzz](#), [DoubleU Casino](#), [Huuuge Casino](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Positioning a new app against a top grossing app is a successful growth strategy implemented in both Puzzle and Casino (e.g. Huuuge Casino on Big Fish Casino and DoubleU Casino on DoubleDown Casino)
- To optimize app search, consider a similar name, like DoubleU and DoubleDown
- Create an enemy: the dig on casino ads is one of the first we've observed and a strong positioning statement compared to top grossing apps with ads
- Adopt mechanics that are successful outside of games: the 'select items in another mansion' mechanic is clearly inspired by Houzz, a very successful real-world house decor app



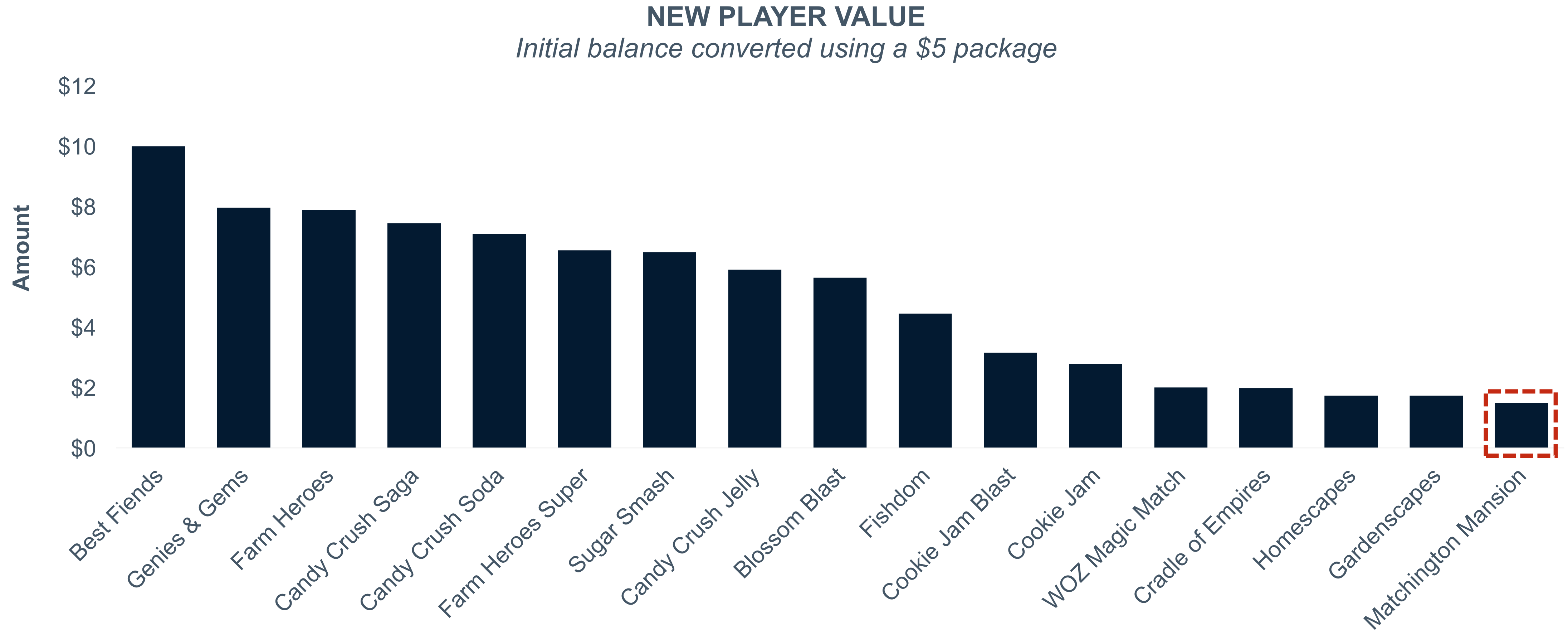
GROSS RANKING

Matchington Mansion was released 6/5/17 and showed up on the top grossing charts mid-October, jumping to the 32nd top grossing iPhone app in the Puzzle category



NEW PLAYER VALUE

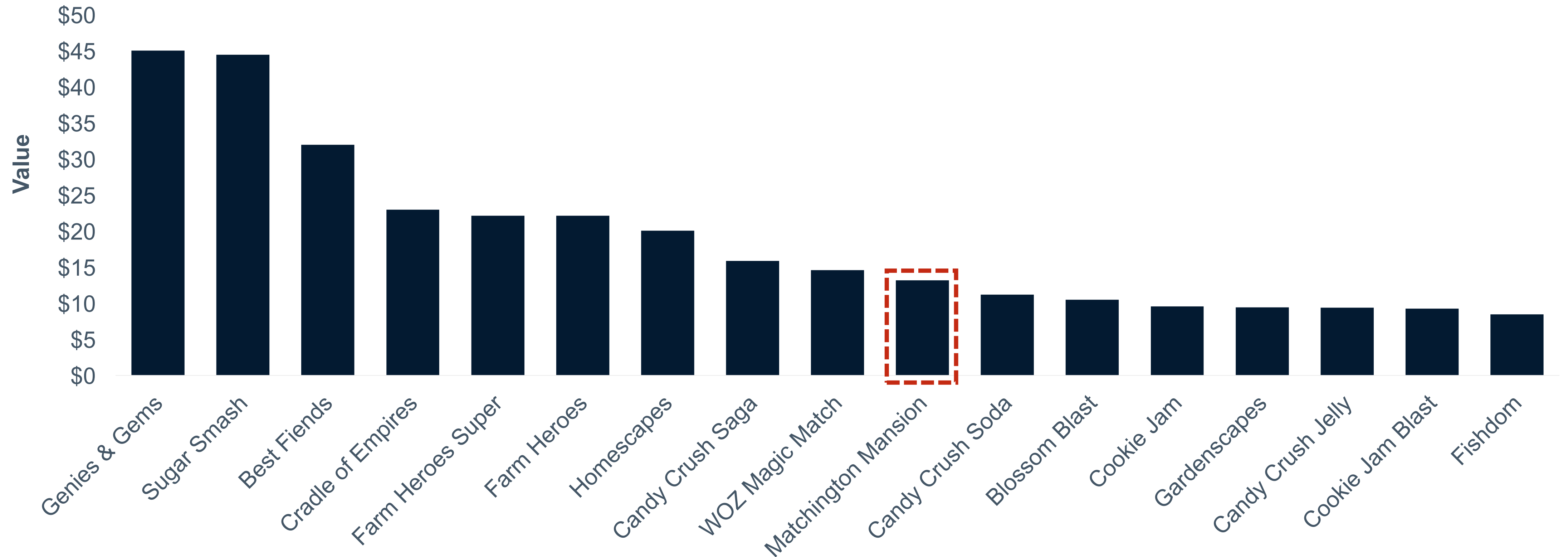
Matchington Mansion's economy, like its product positioning, is very similar to Gardenscapes and Homescapes: it gives new players a very small amount of value upon install



POTENTIAL DAILY VALUE

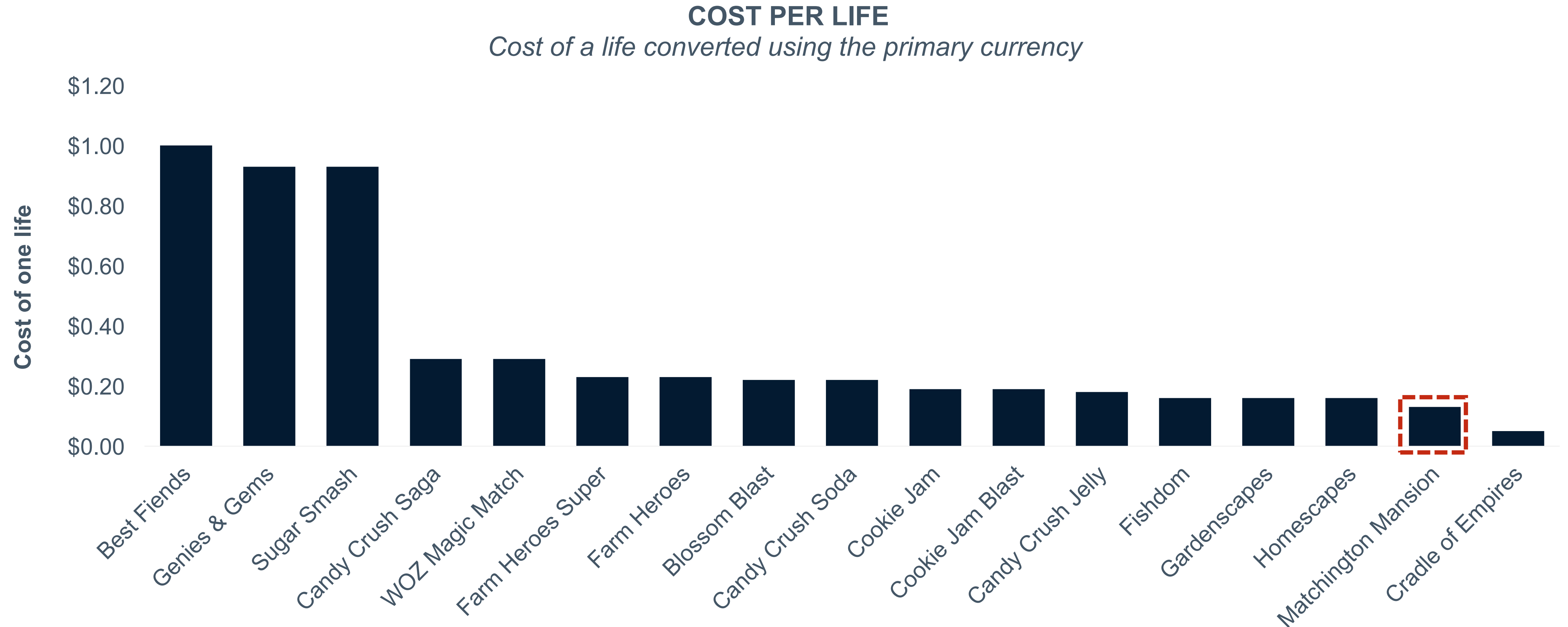
Matchington Mansion is tuned between Homescapes and Gardenscapes for returning players. Players may collect up to \$13.19 of value daily with the daily retention bonus systems: chests and lives

DAILY VALUE AVAILABLE TO PLAYERS
Daily bonuses converted using a \$5 package



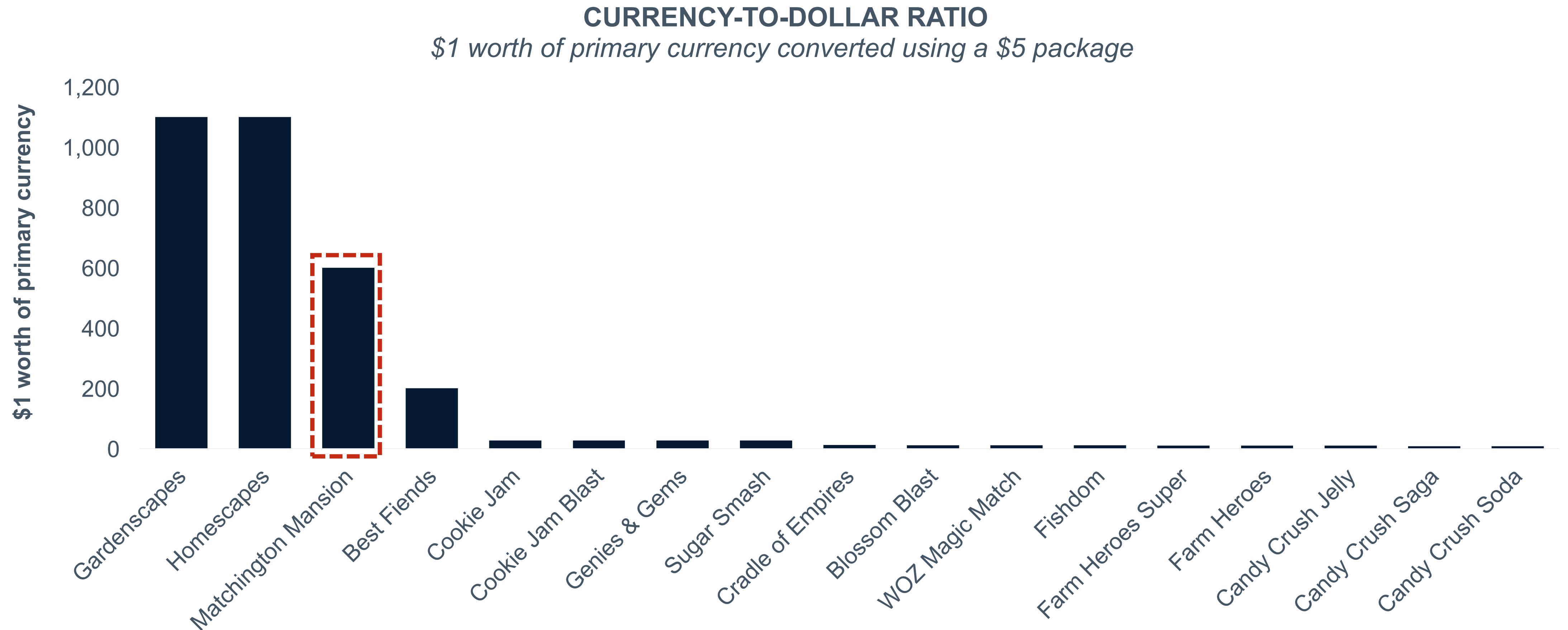
COST PER LIFE

Cost per life is almost the same as Gardenscapes and Homescapes. Life is relatively inexpensive in Matchington Mansion to allow players to be involved in the mansion-building process before experiencing a game-play pinch



CURRENCY-TO-DOLLAR RATIO

The economy is tighter than Gardenscapes and Homescapes, but inflated compared to other top grossing puzzle apps



APPENDIX

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Recommendations, information, and data comes from market research, app intelligence tools, and deep analyses of the apps

Market Research

- Each app is reviewed daily for updates, regardless of whether the app has been updated through the App Store
- Transaction information comes from the iOS App Store's In-App Purchases tab. These transactions are ranked based on the number of transactions
- Trending revenue, downloads, and package-rank data come from Sensor Tower Store Intelligence

App Information

- App information comes from a deep-dive analysis of each app
- In the Economy Teardown and economy-related slides, the currency value is determined by converting currencies into money using \$5 worth of non-sale purchasable currencies in each app.
- For example, if an item costs 1,000 of the primary currency and players can purchase 500 for \$5, the value of the item is \$10. For apps without a \$5 package, the next closest package is used

“Over at our place, we're sure of just one thing: everybody in the world was once a child.”

– Walt Disney

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