

Deviation Game's Partnership With PlayStation Examined

The beginning of a new console generation is always an exciting time where the industry seems to be the most open to taking risks on new ideas, new IPs, and new studios. Some of the franchises that would go on to dominate the games industry were birthed at the genesis of a new console cycle. Assassin's Creed, Mass Effect, and Uncharted were all new ideas that came to us early in the 7th generation. This window of time is also a space for new players to enter the game and make a name for themselves. PlayStation in particular has shown interest in partnering with new talent as most of their established studios have settled into lengthy development cycles of existing franchises, and while the games they produce are of undeniable quality, completely new experiences are necessary for the PS5 to cultivate its own identity separate from the PS4. While there has been no shortage of partnership announcements in the last few years the one that I have the most interest in is that of Deviation Games. Despite there being no specific announcement related to exactly what Deviation could be working on we do have a significant amount of stuff to go off of to start to form a hypothesis about what we could see from them and how they fit into the larger PlayStation umbrella. Let's investigate.

We are going to dive into specifics about the studio and their founder's history but for now let's start with the broad strokes. The studio is made up of veteran First Person Shooter (FPS) developers and that alone makes them a logical partner for PlayStation given their current landscape. During the PlayStation 3 generation Sony invested significantly in FPS projects coming out of its First Party Studios. The "Killzone" and "Resistance" franchises were some of the flagship releases across the console's lifespan, receiving significant budgets, promotion, and support. Sony was even willing to take risks on more experimental FPS projects like "MAG", a multiplayer only title that hosted 100 player matches long before "Fortnite" found a way to make such chaos work in any practical sense. This investment in first person and multiplayer projects wasn't a coincidence. With competitive online play finally becoming broadly accessible to console players its popularity among consumers hit the feverish high. The FPS genre in general dominated the sales charts and everyone was trying to capture market share. While these efforts from Sony's First Party studios were mostly successful in both sales and reception, they failed to capture a truly competitive market share especially when compared to the undeniable titan in the space that is "Call Of Duty". The PlayStation 4 generation marked a dramatic shift in not only the markets, but also the types of projects Sony chose to invest in. All of their studios moved on to different types of games with "Killzone: Shadow Fall", a game that launched with the PS4, being the last First Person Shooter released from any first party studio. Instead of chasing the competition PlayStation struck a marketing deal with Call Of Duty and allowed their creative teams to pursue new ideas and experiences. Over the course of the PS4's lifespan Sony Worldwide Studios has seen phenomenal success with both existing franchises and new IP's, but nearly 10 years removed from their last FPS project there is a notable gap in their First Party offerings. With all their teams currently occupied, striking a strategic

partnership with a hungry, exciting, new external studio seems like an obvious way to test the FPS waters once again.

Enter Deviation Games, they are a new studio creating a new IP, and that means no preconceived expectations. Deviation is a blank slate, they don't have to resurrect an IP and "do it justice", they don't have to conform to established norms within the genre and can do whatever they want. At the same time the history of its founders and key staff provides a bedrock of confidence for the quality of the project. Let's start with Dave Anthony the CEO, he was the Director and Writer of both "Call of Duty: Black Ops" 1 & 2 which are not only fan favorites, revered for their gameplay and story, but they were also met with tremendous sales. Jason Blundell the CCO was the Executive Producer for "Call of Duty: Black Ops" 1-4 but also the Game Director of the "Call Of Duty: Zombies" and is responsible for turning that extra mode into a franchise selling feature. These two took the stage at last year's Summer Game Fest and spoke with Geoff Keighley about the inception of the studio. They noted that working on "Call Of Duty" subjected them to harsh creative limitations and that the point of Deviation was to create a studio where they were able to deviate, innovate, and create something truly new in the First Person Shooter Space. Since this initial interview information has been limited however it has been reported that the game will be "supported for years, if not generations" but will also feature a "heavily story driven single player campaign" as well as "multiplayer arcade and competitive modes".

All of this comes together to create an engaging proposition for PlayStation. Without having to fully commit to a new entry in a genre that they have historically struggled to find a broad footing in, they can test the waters by investing in a studio that should, on paper, be able to create a viable competitor in the space. Deviations interest in innovating within the genre and providing a quality single player experience fits perfectly within the PlayStation brand, while they're expertise and prior success with multiplayer projects supplements an area that Sony's first party studios were never quite able to crack. Sony has also shown a keen interest in live service projects and Deviation seems like it could fit perfectly with that long term strategy. Ultimately just as they have shown with Jade Raymond's Haven Studios, I believe an acquisition is on the table depending on how the project develops. We are very likely to see more from Deviation later this year but for now we'll just have to wait and speculate.