

People-first and passionate about creating games, a profile of Sandsoft

With #QVCS, Maddynews profiles different funds to give founders and entrepreneurs the information they need to choose the right investor. Today we interview David Fernandez, CEO at Sandsoft Games.

Temps de lecture : minute

31 July 2023

Everything started when, as a kid, I received a gift of an Atari 2600, one of the very first consumer gaming devices. Being able to play electronic games at an early age influenced both my education and work experience.

This passion drove me to start coding in BASIC when I was 10 years old and also informed my Master in Engineering at University. However, as there was no formal education in game development available in the 90s, I opted for Telecommunications Engineering instead. This gave me the chance to explore electronics and programming on top of communications systems.

When I was working for Telefonica in 2004 and I was offered to join THQ to support their mobile games business, I jumped at the opportunity of a first job in the gaming industry. Since then, I've had the pleasure of working for companies such as Digital Chocolate, Nokia, King and, now, leading Sandsoft. Across my career I've worked on over 150 mobile games including Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (THQ), Tower Bloxx Deluxe (Digital Chocolate), Bubble Witch 2 Saga (King), Candy Crush

Friends Saga (King), and, finally, DC Heroes and Villains (Jam City, Sandsoft) a game that has just been released on July 20th 2023. I have been blessed by working with so many talented people in these companies and impacted millions of people through the games we have created.

Which industries are you working in?

I wear two hats: first and foremost as CEO of Sandsoft and secondly as an angel investor.

We, at Sandsoft, are mostly focused on the gaming industry and, primarily, in mobile-first free-to-play mid-core and core gaming experiences, where we develop games (internally and externally), we publish games (our own games and third-party games) and we invest in different gaming opportunities (mostly mobile game development studios).

We're also always exploring complimentary opportunities from a games industry perspective (eSports, PC/Console Publishing) and/or technology perspective (Blockchain, Generative AI), but we haven't found the right partners just yet.

Similarly, as an angel investor, I'm interested in Technology, Media and Telecommunications, but most of my personal investments are connected to the gaming industry.

What do you look for in a founder?

For me, a founder should be the vision holder. The person from the team thinking about the break-through and where the company should focus on to deliver a great product or service that can realise a market opportunity. He or she doesn't need to have answers for everything but

should have a clear north star that will guide him as well as the whole company.

However, although having a founder is important, it's more important to have a strong founding team that can execute on that vision and make it come true. Great founders recognise the gaps in their skill sets and look for co-founders or hires that fill them. Many projects look amazing on paper but many entrepreneurs have problems executing them as they're not able to attract the right people for their ventures.

Can you talk about your current portfolio?

Sandsoft's first major investment was secured earlier this year when we invested just under £3M in *The Tiny Digital Factory*, a leading mobile racing studio with teams in Lyon (France) and Montreal (Canada). Our investment focus is in this space, mostly in mobile game development studios. We have a healthy pipeline of opportunities we're exploring but it's a little early to announce them.

As an angel investor, I have minority investments in Hannun (Sustainable Furniture), Conector (Startup Accelerator), The Breach Studios (Mobile Games), Games for A Living (Blockchain Games) and X3M (Mobile Advertising). All of them have experienced and passionate founders willing to make an impact in their respective industries.

What does the future look like?

As we know, access to capital has been much more difficult for many funds and subsequently many startups and established companies over the past year. This is a stark contrast to 2021 and early 2022 when there were major investments in blockchain/metaverse and gaming everywhere you looked.

This was perhaps a necessary reset, a little like the dotcom boom and bust at the turn of the century. However, I expect to see further growth from verticals such as LLM AI, Blockchain, GreenTech, and that's before we even get into topics like Quantum Computing!

What makes Sandsoft Games different?

One thing that makes us different is we're committed to long-term relationships, whether that's with the companies we invest in or the developers of the games we publish. Yes, return on investment is the goal, but we don't want this to be at the expense of long-term growth. Assuming the direction of travel is the right one, we're happy to be in it for the long haul.

We also have a specialism in the fast-growth Middle East and North African (MENA) region, which is a relative unknown for many. We recently partnered with Jam City, one of the best-known mobile games publishers across the globe, to help them globally publish their new game DC Heroes and Villains as well as untap the potential that audiences in MENA can offer.

What one piece of advice would you give founders?

At Sandsoft, we craft and deliver joy. We can only do that with a people-first organisation that is passionate about creating games.

As such, building the right team at the right time is key for any company's success. Founders need to make sure they engage with the right partners as an initial founding team that share the same vision, that have common values and who are determined to make an impact. This core-team will be the one building the company foundations including its culture and it's essential getting this initial team right. It's important to remind, as well,

that they should be able not just to inspire but also to execute the company vision, being hands on when required and leaving room for others to lean in as well.

David Fernandez is Chief Executive Officer at *Sandsoft Games*.

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