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# WHEN WE MADE THE DEAD RISING CREATIVE CAMPAIGN

Fluid's **James Glover** talks to **MCV** about his part in the bloody birth of horror gaming's greatest open world franchise



It's one of those facts that generally serves to make the reader feel old, but we have to get it out the way: Next year will mark 20 years since the unveiling of Dead Rising, Capcom's open world Zombie game famous for allowing players to construct outlandish weapons with which to thin out the undead hordes. Spiked baseball bats and boomsticks among them, of course, but also saw blades attached to vacuum cleaners and the compelling (if somewhat ineffective) electric rake. These weapons weren't just highly amusing gimmicks, they were necessary to deal with the hundreds of undead creatures that could fill the screen. Given that Capcom's Resident Evil franchise was to soon head down a similarly action-packed path to much less acclaim, Dead Rising was in many ways the right game at the right time to distract attention from it.

#### MCV: WHAT WAS THE RELATIONSHIP LIKE WITH CAPCOM PRIOR TO WORKING ON DEAD RISING?

**James Glover:** From the get-go we had a special working relationship with the Capcom team. Our first project, way back in 2001, was the European launch campaign for Devil May Cry, and from thereon we were creative partner for some of Capcom's most era defining titles - Viewtiful Joe, Okami, Killer7, Megaman, Monster Hunter, Dead Rising, and multiple Resident Evil titles including the seminal Resident Evil 4.

Dave Corless, our day to day contact, had an incredible creative eye, and an appreciation of the power of aesthetic and design, and the cut through that would give his titles. His briefs gave us clear parameters, purpose, and direction, but he trusted us with the freedom to be creative, and so we pitched



spectacular campaigns tailored for the European market, which strengthened Capcom's brand position as a uniquely creative publisher of exquisite and innovative games.

#### CAN YOU PAINT A PICTURE OF WHAT THE CAMPAIGN MARKETING LANDSCAPE WAS LIKE BACK IN 2006 WHEN DEAD RISING WAS... ER, RISING?

The landscape was very different. Digital and social were in their infancy, and bricks and mortar retail was the absolute king. So each publishing region (US, Europe, Japan) tended to have individual campaigns and artwork, as the sort of global reach we see now via digital platforms was minimal, and the European market didn't respond to US or Japanese creative styles. Only a few brand aspects would be globally consistent - for example, a logo - but that might be all. For European launches, core components tended to be fairly cookie cutter - so a creative campaign would encompass key art, pack art, special editions, retail point of sale and so on, and a bigger launch might extend to include print, out of home, TV and radio, and online ads such as banners.

Creative tended to play it safe, with a lot of games in a frame-style key art, and of course graphics were a long way away from current levels so might be considered pretty basic by modern standards. Many titles with lower budgets would simply adapt US art, which often looked a little basic or crude to the European consumer.

We set our campaigns apart by

*The Dead Rising series would continue through four mainline games and a number of what we once called "expandalones".*



*Zombie games were relatively few and far between in 2006, certainly compared to the years that followed.*

pushing the boundaries of media and design - through use of unique materials such as foiling, embossing and so on, for special edition packaging, or, for print advertising, through bespoke executions, such as Dead Rising's huge extended gatefold. We had fun with the game, and we had fun pushing the boundaries of print, which had previously been a very static format, because fun was a central pillar of the brand messaging - the game's protagonist Frank could use any item he could lay his hands on as a weapon, so we created a series of executions with him holding a variety of weapons - from the predictable baseball bat, to the whopping great fish. It was tongue in cheek, and gamers and media loved that. Our messaging extended across all touchpoints - our merch featured a cheeky twist on the I LOVE T-shirt format, for example.

### **DID YOUR RESEARCH INVOLVE WATCHING A FEW MOVIES?**

Absolutely! It was the heyday of tongue-in-cheek horror, and some absolute legends of UK film had premiered in recent years - Shaun of the Dead, of course, and 28 Days Later. While the game wasn't hard horror, we put in

*Dead Rising was clearly inspired by Dawn of the Dead, to the degree that the owners of the movie property took Capcom (and others) to court claiming copyright infringement.*



some hours watching classic movies to understand the tropes of the genre, so we could put our own twist on that and make it fun. There are so many classic 70's and 80's horror movies, plenty of Stephen King for example, from Carrie to The Shining - all absolutely legendary, we watched a whole stack to channel the best and then add our own twist.

### **WHAT WAS THE PITCH YOU DELIVERED AND HOW WAS IT RECEIVED?**

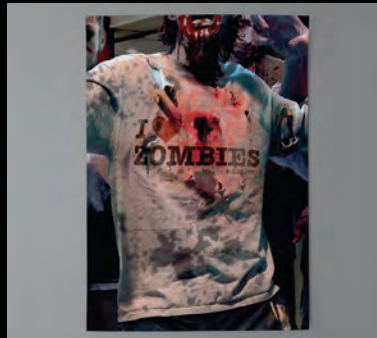
The brief focused on a few key themes - the hordes and hordes of zombies - through the cutting edge swarm tech - which the Xbox 360 facilitated; the shopping mall setting, and the freedom of choice Frank had with regards to his weaponry. Honestly, it was one of those pitches where we knew exactly things could look from the get go. We mocked up our ideas for the creative, and the pitch was a home run first time. We pitched the full campaign idea - key art, print ads, T shirts, special edition packaging, standard packaging etc, and got the immediate green light.

### **WAS THERE ANYTHING THAT CAPCOM WERE UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT? (AS IN, PERHAPS GOING "FULL DAWN OF THE DEAD" IN LIGHT OF THE LEGAL ACTION THAT WAS TO FOLLOW.)**

Capcom were completely happy with the campaign - the Dawn of the Dead challenge was of course dismissed - but we did have an unexpected wrangle with Birmingham City Council. The campaign itself was shot in Birmingham's Bull Ring - of course we applied for the necessary legal permissions prior to our shoot, and all our paperwork was in order. We shot the campaign, which subsequently went live, but Birmingham City Council then asked that the campaign be pulled - on the basis that it painted the mall and city in a bad light by insinuating that Birmingham was full of zombies! Once we pointed out that they'd already given permission and all our legal ducks were in a row, they dropped their claim.

### **HOW DID YOU GO FROM PITCH TO PLAN, TO PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION? WHAT WERE THE MILESTONES?**

Campaign production timeframes were very tightly defined. We had hard deadlines to meet for the packaging, as long lead times were required for production of physical games for retail, and similarly long lead times for special editions in print media. Multiple rounds of approval were required from each stakeholder client side, so production schedules



worked back from those hard stop dates. Each of our internal divisions collaborated throughout to ensure total consistency across each element, before sending off final files to each party for production.

### WHAT WERE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES YOU HAD TO OVERCOME?

The campaign that we pitched - huge Zombie swarms in the mall, populated across a massive gatefold for Official Xbox Magazine - required a significant production, if it was to look realistic and premium. To ensure that realistic campaign look and feel, we staged a photoshoot with ten models in multiple poses, then gave each image multiple paintovers and retouches to transform each model, creating hundreds of "different" people. There were no shortcuts, it just took a lot of time and attention to detail to make the final result look as stunning as it did.

### WHAT (AND/OR WHO) WAS PIVOTAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CAMPAIGN?

I think the sheer size and scale of the executions, in combination with the tongue in cheek sense of humour, ensured cut through; the media buy and creative worked seamlessly to ensure stand out, with Frank's use of different weaponry as a simple, effective messaging device. Of

course, a superb working relationship with a client on the same creative wavelength really helped - they trusted us to deliver, and deliver we did. In fact, we included some easter eggs in the campaign - if you look closely, some of the marketing team were "Zombified" and appear up on the balcony, along with other secrets like a lego head character!

### LOOKING BACK, WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN?

It was totally unique at the time, and visually compelling. Xbox 360 was still pretty new and cutting edge, so swarm technology was a big deal, and the campaign perfectly conveyed all key messages - humour, weaponry, subject matter, swarm technology - in a simple, effective way. It's without doubt one of my favourite campaigns of the last 30 years.

### FINALLY, IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND REVERSE ONE DECISION OR CORRECT ONE OVERSIGHT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

You know what? I can't think of a single thing. I'm still incredibly proud of the creative route we took, the execution was challenging but the result was flawless, each aspect of the multi-touchpoint campaign worked really well. Gamers were excited to buy the title, it sold well enough that a sequel was produced, and the client was more than happy. It still makes us smile to look at the creative, which has stood the test of time, as only the best campaigns can. And I still love Zombies (and shopping).

