



Futureplay advances to the next level of mobile gaming with Looker

Pioneers in ad-supported games

Case study
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Futureplay is a fast-growing mobile games studio committed to delivering quality gaming experiences to their players while maintaining maximum internal efficiency. Since pioneering view-to-play in 2015, they've continued to raise the industry standard for delivering exceptional gaming experiences. Every day, more than one million players enjoy Futureplay games and within 4 years of operations, over 100 million people have played Futureplay's 5 unique games. Futureplay has increased the number of players by using ads that offer positive reinforcement. For example, players choose if and when they want to watch ads to gain progression rewards, rather than having ads forced on them when they are "down." Giving players this choice, has resulted in better engagement with the ads and is less likely to deter them and stop their game.

The global industry spends billions of dollars on ads each year because of its critical role in gaming. Knowing this, Futureplay saw an opportunity to improve the gaming experience as well as marketing spend efficiency. Enter Looker.

Leveraging Looker's platform, Futureplay has gone beyond dashboards to monitor gaming KPIs, and track marketing performance by building custom data experiences, including bots, integrations, alerts, and more to help save time and money, prioritize urgent tasks, and gain needed visibility to make better decisions for their players and budgets.

Scattered data with no source of truth

From the start, Futureplay set out to create happy players, optimize ad spend, and grow revenue. To do that, they needed to identify which ads yielded the most conversions and pinpoint the happiest, highest-value players.

Key Takeaways

- Centralized data in Google BigQuery provides a single view of the business
- High-level overviews across all games offer deep dives on specific features of one game in one tool
- Looker's consistent, governed metrics provide self-service access to trusted data
- 100% of the company uses Looker, with 95% using data to make weekly decisions
- Custom data experiences, including bots, integrations, and alerts, deliver data to employees where they work, and automate action
- Futureplay saves time, prioritizes urgent tasks, and gains needed visibility to make better decisions for their players and budgets

Similar to many in the gaming industry, Futureplay struggled to identify the most efficient ways to meet their goals. With no standard way of aggregating and defining the metrics from each tool, it was challenging to understand how players were interacting with content, let alone make data-informed decisions.

“We had a big issue with siloed data,” explains Camilo Fitzgerald, Futureplay's first hire who leads Product and Analytics. “Because we were using a variety of tools, there were multiple sources of truth.” For example, Futureplay uses tools such as Firebase to collect product analytics to help understand how players are interacting with games. They also use AppsFlyer for marketing metrics such as details around user acquisition. The information existed but was spread across multiple tools. With no clear view of the user journey, it was difficult to understand everything from user acquisition to ad-related revenue.

As Fitzgerald says, “Employees were juggling anywhere from 10 to 100 different logins to access data. Not to mention, there were multiple sources of truth across these tools. It became very hard to manually manage and validate the data stored within them all.”

For example, if the team wanted answers to questions around validating revenue streams, they first had to confirm if the number of installs charged by the user acquisition networks matched the number of players using the game. Because of the manual process of bringing data together from multiple tools and consolidating definitions, most employees weren't able to fully leverage data to improve the user experience and optimize their own budgets and effort.

Futureplay needed a solution that would help more users across the company access, understand, and trust data.

Increasing trust and access

From the start, Futureplay realized the importance and power of Looker's modeling layer, LookML, which serves as a data model to ensure consistent data definitions across platforms and users. Futureplay knew this would help to create a clear view of players and ads across platforms while ensuring anyone who ran a query would be following the same data definitions. The team also liked how Looker made it easier for everyone to access self-serve analytics, and that the platform could power data experiences beyond basic reports and dashboards. In addition to product capabilities, they were impressed by Looker's customer experience focus— from trial support to the Department of Customer Love's in-product support.

Fitzgerald reports that "since implementing Looker, we've never looked back. For us, it's not just that Looker is the best-in-class visualization solution, but that it goes further. It allows us to make decisions and automate actions by using Looker's built-in integrations."

To get started with Looker, Futureplay centralized data from AppsFlyer, Firebase, and Libring, and more tools in Google BigQuery. This brought together previously siloed data, including events, gaming, and transactional in-app purchases (IAP) data. By putting Looker on top of BigQuery, the team was then able to access, analyze, and visualize data in a way that was not possible before.

While all of this has brought improvements, the Futureplay team continues to look for ways to do more. They knew they could go far beyond business intelligence to help their team analyze and take action.

From dashboards to bots

By leveraging Looker's platform and integrations, the efficiency-focused Futureplay team went beyond dashboards and built custom, data-driven workflows, saving their small team valuable time.

"Looker gave us more than just data accessibility. They provided automation that has really made a big difference," said Fitzgerald.

To better understand user acquisition, Futureplay started with one dashboard where they could monitor different reports to determine which ads, channels, and regions were bringing in the most high-value players. By being able to bring together and visualize this data alongside their internal ad spend, the number of installs, and lifetime value benchmark, the team went beyond identifying high-value activities to predicting customer lifetime value.

"We've built a predictive lifetime value model within Looker," explains Fitzgerald. "From the first time a user comes in, we can predict how much revenue they're expected to generate in their lifetime."

The team took this report a step further by building a Bidbot to help optimize and automate user acquisition from within Looker. For networks that have a bidding API—including Google and Facebook—they built an automated process that reads jobs from Looker each night to update bids accordingly. For networks that don't have this API, Futureplay has linked the data in Looker to Google Sheets to allow account managers to update bids directly, without needing to log into Looker or other platforms. These integrated insights deliver data for making decisions to external users outside of Futureplay in tools they're already comfortable with, such as Google Sheets.

Once Futureplay created the first Bot within Looker, they knew there were more ways to automate and increase efficiency. Next, they built an AdBot. This bot monitors impressions and revenue by ad stream to track the performance of each ad. Based on this information, AdBot decides which ad to show which player to maximize yield.

Integrating insights into Slack

In addition to building their own bots, Futureplay also leverages Looker's integration with Slack to integrate insights into team conversations. Using Slackbot, the team is able to set custom commands for data to be delivered within Slack.

Through SlackBot, Futureplay has scheduled monthly messages to employees that visualize how much time they spend using data and Looker. Fitzgerald and his team find this entertaining, engaging, and valuable because it uses one of their favorite tools to deliver data to employees, and serves as a reminder about data that can be leveraged for better job performance. As Fitzgerald puts it, "Slack adds some color and flavor to the data."

Changing the game

Implementing Looker changed the game (pun intended) for Futureplay. Teams can now track gaming KPIs such as daily active players, session counts, session lengths, and financial data—all from one convenient dashboard. They also can optimize and automate ads, and receive alerts if issues arise. This helps save time, prioritize urgent tasks, and gain needed visibility to make the right decisions for their players and budgets.

With 100% of employees using Looker, and a third of them leveraging it every day, everyone at Futureplay can make data-driven decisions to save the fast-growing company time and money. Teams have started building their own dashboards within Looker for deeper dives into relevant data without adding pressure to the data team.

Looker has empowered Futureplay to look at questions and knowledge gaps in a more robust and community-oriented way. Because data is easier to access, employees encourage each other to answer their own questions within Looker. As Fitzgerald explains, “Using Looker, everyone at Futureplay can self-serve to answer 95% of their own data questions.”

The future of Futureplay

As a mobile games studio, Futureplay’s primary goal is to make quality games. This hyper-focus on user experience is what led them to innovate view-to-play games in the first place.

The way Fitzgerald sees it, “I think a lot of the value that comes from gameplay data is about seeing the bigger picture of what’s going on inside the games, which allows us to make better design decisions and ultimately build better games.”

Because these decisions are coming from real user data, it’s the players who indicate what might make “better” games. With all of this user data, there will always be new opportunities to improve and benefit all players involved—Futureplay, its players, and the ad networks.

In the game of juggling quantity and quality, Futureplay has won.

“All of these integrations have allowed us to really scale our user acquisition. Everything works automatically, meaning our employees have more time to focus on strategies for improving UX and increasing ROI.”

Camilo Fitzgerald,
Futureplay