

A MIGHTY SUCCESS FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GAMES DEVELOPER

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Mighty Kingdom has created games for some of the world's leading toy and entertainment giants, including Disney, LEGO and Shopkins. The South Australian company is now gearing up for even greater global success with its latest games.

Philip Mayes was working as a console games developer when the first Apple iPhone was released. Rather than investing up to three years developing a console game, it was now possible to build and deliver a game into the hands of millions of people in a matter of months. It was a groundbreaking moment for the games industry and before long, Mayes had quit his job to co-found Mighty Kingdom with a friend.

Based in Adelaide, Mighty Kingdom undertook outsourced app development work. A few years later, however, Mayes realised his heart was in creating games. He and his partner had started another company in the interim and they made a decision to divide the two entities, with his partner taking one to the US and Mayes staying in Adelaide.

'At that moment in 2013, we turned Mighty Kingdom into a pure games developer,' says Mayes. 'We primarily developed mobile apps and console games for clients, but were always doing our own games on the side. I knew that if we wanted to support our own product, we had to develop and grow bigger. That fuelled us to keep reinvesting back in the company.'

Today, Mighty Kingdom is driving the digital success of global brands such as Disney, LEGO and Shopkins. The company's successful client work has enabled it to create its own games – *Kitty Keeper* (a co-production with Adelaide company KitCatCo) and the upcoming *Wild Life* – and grow its staff from five in 2013 to 65 in 2019.



Philip Mayes (left), Co-founder and CEO, and Tony Lawrence, COO, Mighty Kingdom

'We look at what we do as entertainment rather than just games development, so we build brands and characters that people are going to engage with for a long time.'

Philip Mayes, Co-founder and CEO, Mighty Kingdom

Making the most of opportunities

Mighty Kingdom's big break came when a friend handed the company's business card to a Disney representative at a chance meeting in a hotel lobby.

'The guy from Disney called a colleague who knew someone at Mighty Kingdom – and the rest fell together very quickly,' says Mayes. 'When we switched to work on only games, we made a wish list of companies we wanted to work with in three, five and ten years' time. Disney was one of those names – and within three months we had them as a client. That doesn't happen every day!'

The Disney connection was pivotal in winning Mighty Kingdom its next major client – Moose, creator of the Shopkins brand. At the time, the Melbourne-based toy company was on a massive upward trajectory



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thanks to Shopkins and the company was eager to enter the digital space.

‘Moose is very conscious of the relationships they have with their customers and who they let into those relationships,’ says Mayes. ‘In our first “getting to know you” meeting, when they asked who we were working with, we could say Disney – and that made the rest of our conversation much easier.’

‘We ended up creating nine games for the Shopkins brand,’ says Mayes. ‘Shopkins blew up in a big way after that and we were able to ride that wave with them. Not many people experience the level of success we had with Shopkins. It was very exciting and opened a lot of doors for us.’

One of those doors was to another company on Mighty Kingdom’s client wish list: LEGO. In 2017, the Danish company was looking for a partner to work on its LEGO Friends brand.

‘Having so many Shopkins games in the top 10 for their age category caught LEGO’s attention,’ says Mayes. ‘After years of trying to get someone at LEGO to return my calls, they ended up calling us. We created the LEGO Friends: Heartlake Rush game for them.’

Know your client

While good luck may have played a part in Mighty Kingdom’s success, Mayes says its background in service work was also critical.

‘We were used to working closely with our clients, understanding their needs and removing our ego from the development process,’ he says. ‘We also have to understand who their audience is, what they like and what they’re engaging with in the gaming space. This helps us develop products that are in line with what our clients’ audiences expect.’

‘If you want to work with the major brands, you need to build relationships. Once you have those connections, when an opportunity comes up there’s a good chance someone will remember and call you.’

‘It’s one thing to have a great game – but the company that survives has a great business as well,’ he adds. ‘Talk to your potential clients to find out what they are doing and get a better understanding of their business, customers and motivations.’

‘If you’re making your own games, work out how you’re going to reach and market to your customers and how are they going to find your game, so you have a whole line of people ready to buy it.’

Mayes also recommends enlisting Austrade for assistance. ‘We went to South by Southwest a few years ago with Austrade and since then, they’ve been very good at bringing events and opportunities

to our attention. Austrade is a great resource for up-and-coming companies who need assistance navigating the global games market.’

Mighty Kingdom also received an Export Market Development Grant (EMDG).

‘The grant allowed us to send more people to trade shows, increasing our presence,’ says Mayes. ‘At a busy conference, meeting times will often overlap. Having a larger contingent allowed us to book concurrent meetings. We were also able to respond on the fly, and chase opportunities we would not have otherwise been able to. One of those opportunistic meetings was at this year’s Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, which led to a new project with a new partner in Canada.’

Supporting the local industry

Mighty Kingdom is a major supporter of South Australia’s creative industry. The company’s work with the state government led to the creation of the Games Plus co-working facility, a central hub for Adelaide’s games developers. Opened in 2018 with Mighty Kingdom as the anchor tenant, it reached full capacity within a year.

‘At the moment, Mighty Kingdom is the largest developer in Adelaide – but that’s not necessarily great for us,’ says Mayes. ‘I like the idea of having competition – it forces you to be a better company. I’m also a big believer in building an ecosystem. It shows that the industry is thriving and growing, which makes it more attractive for local and international companies and investors.’

Future plans

Mighty Kingdom is releasing new games over the next six months that the company hopes will drive its next wave of growth. Mayes says: ‘We could easily be twice the size we are in a year or two.’

Over the medium to long term, Mayes would like to work with more brands, create more original games, expand into other platforms, and explore linear narrative-style games.

‘We look at what we do as entertainment rather than just games development, so we build brands and characters that people are going to engage with for a long time,’ says Mayes.

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