

Ultimate Golf

Interview with N. Ishihara - President, Vertex

Who created *Ultimate Golf* at Vertex? How many people have been working on the project?

Everyone at Vertex has contributed to *Ultimate Golf* including a team of 12 very creative developers. Ubi Soft has also contributed to the game in the role of co-producer and adviser and has been very helpful in sharing their technical know-how with these developers.

How long has the game been in development?

The original concept was designed in 1996 with the goal of having the most playable and enjoyable golf game. After various experiments, the actual program started in fall 1997. The game is expected to be on store shelves Q1 2000.

What is unique about this game compared to the others that are on the market?

Ultimate Golf is one of the very first golf games to be created in complete real time 3D with a revolutionary first person view. This allows us to obtain a level of realism and freedom of movement that has never been seen in a golf game until now. This feeling of realism will be further enhanced by our unique "Real Feel" control system that can reproduce a real time golf swing. Our objective is to appeal to players who want a simulation experience while providing a faster pace to keep players interested.

Ultimate Golf has the best features of a simulation game: hyper-realistic ball, club and wind physics with the possibility to customize ones set of clubs and reproduce all types of swing. In addition to that, it is a fun game that gives the player some challenge and strategic choices, with a fast pace and beautiful colors. Players will have the choice of seven dynamic playing modes including stock play, match play and tournament.

Why was the decision made to develop this game in 3D? What benefit does 3D bring to the player?

Other golf games using 2D golfers set in a photo realistic environment and have a situation where each screen has to be redrawn after every shot. This causes an unrealistic delay that really slows down the pace of the game. Now that the players is able to control a 3D character who is completely integrated into a 3D background they can control their movement in real time!

We have created credible environments by implementing a series of animations and dynamic cameras (using the I-CAM TV system). In addition all the gaming information will be available and easily accessible on the screen. Now the player will not need to flip from screen to screen to get the information he needs (wind, distance, and undulations). The end result of being a fluid 3D environment and a fast paced game without the irritating lapses between each swing experienced that exists in some 2D games.

Tell us more about this "Real Feel" control system.

The "Real Feel" control system is an innovative method that acts as a user-friendly alternative to the classic "double click" method. This lets the player control, in real-time, the 2 major parameters of the golf swing: the angle of the shoulders and the angle of the wrists. Thanks to the real time factor, you will be able to decide the strength and direction of your shot just by observing the posture of your character on the screen. If you use an analogue joystick the swing feeling is just amazing!

What will the first person view bring to the game?

For the first time, the player will have the same feeling as a real golfer on the course. This 1st person view lets the player prepare and execute his swing from a natural 1st person perspective and then follow the flight of the ball from his own eyes.

If you ever searched for realism in your golf games, that is an option you will never want to play without! This view will be the default view in the game but players who are more comfortable with other views will be able to change it to any external view they want.

How did you create the game's environments?

We wanted to have three courses in totally different environment including; a traditional course in England, a desert course in Arizona and an island course in Hawaii. Each course has its own unique features and levels of difficulty.

Why did you decide not to use existing golf courses in this game?

We chose not to use existing courses so that we had the freedom to create original and challenging golf courses. You will see holes you have never seen before for example double fairways or a green on an island. This adds to the fun factor that we were looking to create in the *Ultimate Golf*. We used our creativity to create the best-suited golf courses for computer games rather than trying to simulate real golf courses, which may not have fitted so well on screen.

What about the game's characters and animations? How did you create them?

All eight characters are in proper 3D with soft jointed animation system. They stand on golf courses built in proper 3D without floating. The game player can adjust the stance of the character to the terrain and the character will automatically adjust its' standing style depending on the slope.

It was very difficult to create this soft jointed system. To get the swing to work smoothly involved a delicate and intricate understanding of exactly how each of the human muscles and joint work together to produce realistic movement. The end result was a realistic simulation of all the joints and muscle movements.

What strengths do the cameras bring to the game?

An artificial intelligence system (I-CAM) judges the best, most dynamic, most informative camera angles and displays the action using these angles and the AI can change these angles in real-time to deliver a new experience in interactive game cameras.

Will Ultimate Golf have a multiplayer feature?

The player can enjoy: TCP/IP over Internet (direct connection), IPX or TCP/IP on LAN, Microsoft Direct Play Lobby Clients and of course, the Ubi Soft Game Service.