

Brief Assessment of NFL Elite 2013's Monetization Strategy

Synopsis

NFL Elite 2013 has a great monetization strategy because of its breadth of content, excellent progression arc woven into its mechanics, and its carrot-stick philosophy, which drive users to play for just a little longer to hit that next goal or reward. It features bite-sized play opportunities via its core loop that can transition into hour long play sessions as users try to reach the next accomplishment, and all along the way, there are plenty of options for users to spend money to reach their goals faster or more easily.

Positive Monetization Aspects:

- Has plenty of content to work towards and play through, which drives engagement, retention and monetization. Users can buy as much content as they want from the start or work toward it by investing time.
- Great limited time promotional events with excellent engagement and monetization potential (example: the Gridiron Challenges).
- Gives users tons of content and rewards from playing the app at (mostly) the right amounts/proportions (example: silver and gold footballs, which contain currency and card packs).
- Daily rewards keep users engaged and retained, which further increases monetization potential.
- The objective system drives a carrot-stick philosophy by giving users short term goals with clear, valuable rewards (example: play versus mode three more times for an achievement and some card packs).
- Mechanics have an excellent progression/arc built in, so users feel like they are becoming stronger, which drives monetization potential by creating a desire/means to become stronger.
- Dual energy meters prevent users from playing too much of one mode, yet allow them to continue to enjoy the game. Additionally, user level-ups reset the meters, which also drives a carrot-stick philosophy without harm to new users (newer users get to keep playing; older users at higher levels are forced to wait or monetize).

Negative Monetization Aspects:

- Not enough pinch points to encourage users to monetize (example: the story mode is too easy; versus mode allows users to choose their opponents, which lets them “set their own difficulty”).
- Users are given too much soft currency without enough spending outlets.
- How the game rewards users is sometimes unclear (example: how users are awarded silver and gold footballs).

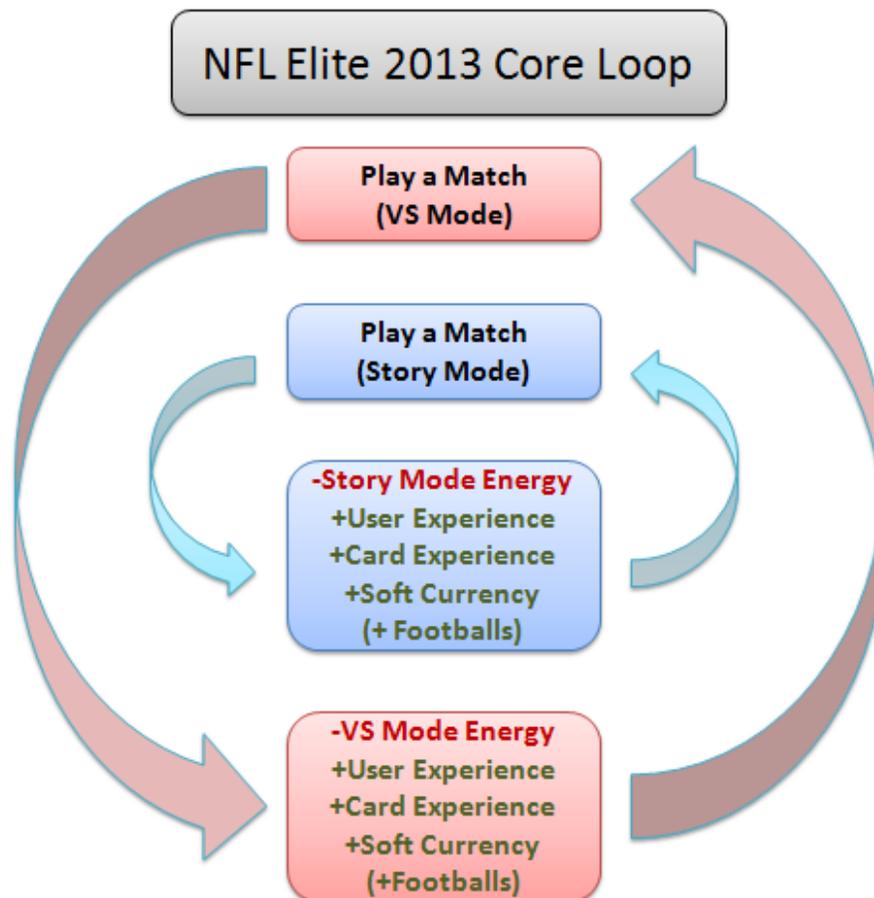
Explanation of Monetization Potential

User Resources

- Soft Currency—Cash
- Hard Currency—Gold
- Real World Currency—Dollars
- Character Cards
- Friends/Social Networks (met in game or in real life)
- Time/Energy
- Energy Packs

Core Loop

Below is a chart of the core loop present in NFL Elite 2013. NFL Elite 2013’s core loop helps drive engagement, retention, and monetization through bite sized game play (which lasts 1-2 minutes per round) and valuable rewards at the cost of one of two energy meters, depending on the mode. A dual energy meter system prevents the user from continually enjoying the game for free, capping the total amount of time spent during a single play session.



Content

NFL Elite 2013 has a lot of content for users to enjoy. Users can replay individual stages of the story mode or attempt to beat it on higher difficulties. They can try to earn as many achievements as possible, each with its own rewards of currency and card packs. Users could also challenge their friends or complete strangers and see how good their deck and their skill are. Whatever users choose to do, there is a lot of content and replay value to the game, which keeps users engaged and retained.

Another great aspect of NFL Elite 2013 is the Gridiron Challenge, a limited time event that offers great rewards to its participants. If users choose to play in the challenge, they can earn a variety of valuable rewards, such as rare cards, a lot of currency, or various accolades. The Gridiron Challenge gives users good rewards just for playing a few times, but also rewards the users who acquire the most points in a short period of time. Since the event is timed and gated (restricted by event tickets and by energy), there are serious pinch points preventing users from progressing. Users can still enjoy the event without playing a lot, but those who get the highest scores get very valuable, rare cards for their effort. To get the highest scores, it requires a great deck of rare cards to defeat your opponents in addition to enough energy to play in the event and earn points. The event rewards casual users and hard core users alike, providing clear value no matter how much you play the game, but rewarding those who play it the most. Best of all, it creates a community event that users can strive toward dominating as they progress further in the main game—if they do not have the means to compete in this week's challenge, there's always next week.

NFL Elite 2013 gives users a great deal of rewards just by playing the game—after every half, users are rewarded with experience and soft currency, and as they play, they are sometimes rewarded with silver and gold footballs, which contain random currency amounts (both soft and hard currency) or card packs. The game also gives users daily rewards, which gives them the incentive to return to the app every 24 hours.

Additionally, the objective system in the game helps drive a carrot stick philosophy because it gives users short term goals with tangible benefits. Users can try to accomplish simple goals, such as playing versus mode several times, and gain experience, soft currency, and card packs just by playing the game with some small goal in mind. This drives users to play for “just a bit longer” in order to achieve their next goal.

By giving users enough content, NFL Elite 2013 keeps them in the game and increases the monetization potential two fold. First, users are in the game, and if they want to enjoy it more, then can monetize—for example, they can pay to eliminate energy bar

restrictions or purchase card packs that give them better odds at acquiring stronger cards. Second, if users want to unlock all the content, they can do so much faster through monetization—for example, in order to obtain all the cards they want for their deck, it's a lot faster to buy premium card packs, which have better odds of containing rarer cards, than to hope to unlock the strongest cards by opening silver and gold card packs exclusively.

Mechanics

The game's mechanics have a natural arc and progression built into them. As users play, they level up their character and gain more experience (which determines what categories they fall into for versus mode and has a nice benefit of resetting energy meters to full), and their cards gain more experience as well, which increases the strength of those cards in the game. Furthermore, as users continue to play the game, they are rewarded with new cards that are more powerful and have higher final stats, which cause the users to restart the level up process for their new cards, driving retention and engagement even further.

In order to drive monetization potential, users have to feel like they are gaining value out of the rewards they are purchasing. The mechanics of the game are set up such that by spending real currency, users can achieve tangible value from more powerful cards or skip gated content, enforced by the dual energy system.

Energy Meters

Free to play games need some sort of gated content that prevents users from playing the game without pinch points—places that make it hard for the user to progress without monetizing. One of the ways NFL Elite 2013 utilizes pinch points is through its dual energy meter system. The two different types of energy in the game—story mode energy and versus mode energy—prevent users from gaining too many rewards for free in one game mode while encouraging the user to explore other ways to play the game. If a user is out of energy in one mode, he can switch to the other mode and play it instead while waiting for his energy to refill in the first mode.

The dual energy system has several advantages. First, the system resets when a user levels up, allowing the user to feel like they played the system and got a free benefit. This subtly drives the carrot stick philosophy further, because users who are close to a level up will try to earn a level up in order to reset their meters, and then have their meters reset and play more now that their meters are full again. Users will work towards the bonus of resetting their meters, and then feel accomplished that they reset them and continue to play because they are full again.

Second, because the meters reset when a user levels up, and since new users level up more frequently than older ones, newer users will not feel the pressures of the system as much—they will continue to play and enjoy the game without feeling like they have to monetize, which draws them further into the game. Older users, however, which are already drawn into the game, will not level up as frequently and thus the system will prevent them from continuing to play without monetizing.

Third, because there are meters for both story mode and versus mode, the system encourages users to explore both modes. If energy runs out in one mode, users can switch to the other mode to continue to earn benefits (or work towards the coveted level up, which resets their meters for both modes). For newer users, this is an incredible benefit, since it introduces them into versus mode much earlier than it might otherwise (as they may fear that early in the game, they don't have the best cards or skills to compete). The system encourages users to explore additional content, which creates even more potential for retention, engagement, and monetization.

Improvements

While NFL Elite 2013 has a great monetization strategy, it can still be improved upon.

First, there are not enough pinch points to encourage users to monetize. Relative to the time it takes to complete, the story mode is too easy. A user can complete the entire story mode once without monetizing, a feat that takes many in game hours to accomplish. Additionally, users can, to some degree, choose their own opponents, which allows them to set their own difficulty and avoid pinch points if they do not want to monetize to overcome them.

Second, users are given too much soft currency without enough spending outlets. NFL Elite 2013 gives users a large sum of soft currency at the start of the game while never giving them anywhere to spend it outside of upgrading individual cards. If a user were to ever run out of soft currency, they can also sell cards for more. The rate at which users acquire soft currency is not at issue; rather, it is the rate at which they can spend it. Giving the user a lot of soft currency is a good aspect of the system, as it can lead to them feeling rewarded. However, not giving them a way to spend it is a problem—users will feel like the soft currency does not mean anything, and thus will not value the rewards the game gives them highly. A simple fix could be to allow users to spend soft currency on silver packs, which have a very low chance at rewarding rare cards.

Third, NFL Elite 2013 is sometimes unclear in how it chooses to reward users. For example, it is unclear why a user earns a silver or gold football when playing story mode or versus mode. The game does not explain why it gives these rewards on certain turns,

and it appears to be completely random. Random rewards are nice, but without knowing their cause, they feel a bit lackluster.

Conclusion

Overall, NFL Elite 2013 has great monetization potential. It has plenty of content, which drives engagement, retention and monetization. There are clear, accomplishable goals which give users tangible, obvious value. It has gated content that can be circumvented through time or real money, in addition to promotional events with clear structure and rewards that drive engagement and monetization.

Users have several in game resources at their disposal—generally, the most used resources are energy meters, currency, cards, and experience. NFL Elite 2013 allows users to spend any of these resources liberally, except for soft currency—it does not have enough spending outlets for users to utilize the resource, especially given how much soft currency users can earn in the game. Users have plenty of options to accrue and use all other resources except soft currency.

NFL Elite 2013 entices users to monetize through gated content, such as its dual energy meters; promotional events, such as the Gridiron Challenges; and premium content, such as rarer and more powerful cards available from premium card packs and placing highly in competitions. The system NFL Elite 2013 has established creates a favorable environment for monetization, as legacy users are driven toward monetization in order to progress further in the game (by obtaining more powerful cards or accessing time restricted content), while newer users are given more time to be engaged and retained as they explore the game system and feel less of a burden from the dual energy system thanks to user level ups.

NFL Elite 2013 could use some additional work for its soft currency outlets and its pinch points, but so long as it has great retention and engagement, its promotional events and game mechanics should help drive monetization effectively.