



Ayogo creates and distributes casual social games on social networks.

**Inspiration:** The name "Ayogo" is a combination of "Ayo" (one of a group of games called "mancala" which originated in West Africa approximately 4,000 years ago and are among the oldest recorded games on Earth), and "Go" (the ancient Chinese strategy game).

**Headquarters:** Vancouver, BC, Canada  
**Industry:** Computer Games  
**Type:** Privately held  
**Status:** Operating  
**Company Size:** 9 employees  
**Median Age:** 29 years

**Twitter:** [@ayogogames](https://twitter.com/ayogogames)  
**Website:** [www.ayogo.com](http://www.ayogo.com)

For more information about Ayogo, go to:  
[www.ayogo.com](http://www.ayogo.com)

For more information about IIMA, go to:  
[www.iimaonline.org](http://www.iimaonline.org)

"We believe that play is functional. Our games and other applications we build are always designed to provide specific and measurable results."

Michael Fergusson, Chief Executive Officer, Ayogo Games Inc

Ayogo creates and distributes casual social games on social networks (such as Facebook) and smartphones (such as the iPhone). Our development and marketing platform gives brands the ability to engage and motivate their customers to action, and opens up lucrative new streams of micropayment-based revenue for content creators. Ayogo helps you harness the power of play to deliver concrete, measurable business results.

**Q:** How does Ayogo use social media in house?

**MF:** That's really our specialty; it permeates everything we do at Ayogo. Internally, we use Twitter to share and collaborate with customers and consumers, and while Twitter can be pretty noisy, it allows everyone the opportunity to share in the conversation in real time.

Typically, the apps we build are designed to run in Facebook, and/or other social networks, and have their own hooks into Twitter. As a result, all of our games are inherently social.

**Q:** I'm curious to know more about how you're using Twitter?

**MF:** Sure... we have our corporate Twitter ID so you can follow us [@ayogogames](https://twitter.com/ayogogames). I'm personally, [@fergusson](https://twitter.com/fergusson) on Twitter, and each of our games has its own Twitter ID. For example, our hockey pool game, tweets at [@HockeyPoolPro](https://twitter.com/HockeyPoolPro). In addition, we have an account called [@hockeytawk](https://twitter.com/hockeytawk), which is where we publish news and information for people who have hockey pools or are interested in the business of hockey.

So: we see Twitter as a big asynchronous conversation with everyone you know. One of the misconceptions about Twitter is that each individual tweet is supposed

to be interesting. "Why should I care?" is the question. The answer to that is, well, you don't care about all the stuff that is going through Twitter, you only care about a very small portion of it, like panning for gold.

But that very small portion can be very valuable to know. What's in the minds of your customers, or partners, employees or friends at any moment could be very valuable insight, especially if a big group of people are thinking the same thing. So generally, how we see Twitter fitting in our universe is that we sift through it for interesting gems that might be useful to us or for other people in our network.



conversations than you can possibly keep track of.

The best you can hope for is to inform some of that dialogue. The way to do that is not by interrupting, by forcing yourself into the conversation, which has been the traditional role of advertising.

The key thing is that those conversations don't belong to you, and if you interrupt them then you just end up looking like a jerk. You need to contribute to them constructively, be a valuable contributor to the conversation, and build your brands by adding value.

### Q: How has social media changed the landscape for brands and marketers?

**MF:** I think it has had a profound impact. I first gave a talk on social media and branding in 2005, and what I said at the time was that companies don't own their brands anymore. I wasn't the first person to say that, certainly there was a thread of that idea among the people who had been paying close attention and following social networking.

But it was sort of a controversial thing to say at the time. I remember sitting in rooms full of marketing people looking at me slightly askance, wondering what I was talking about. But now it's accepted wisdom, that there is a conversation that's taking place about you and about your company and about your brand and you're not a part of it. People are talking to each other, and now there are so many more thousands and millions of

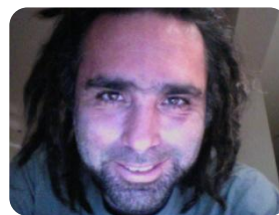
### Q: You hear a lot of conversation now about companies no longer owning their brands. That must have been difficult for companies to accept three years ago.

**MF:** At that time I was the VP of Strategy for a company called [Blast Radius](#) and we had a lot of large consumer brand clients in the entertainment space. These companies started to notice the change first because that segment of the economy generated a tremendous amount of social conversation. People speaking, for example, about how they feel about their favorite athlete, video game, or musician.

This is what the young demographic, who were the predominant group on social media networks at the time, were

talking about. The smart companies noticed early on that there were a huge number of conversations like this taking place. These conversations revealed what people thought and felt about the brands. And, in fact, the conversation itself was defining the brand. While their traditional brand marketing was certainly a factor, traditional tools didn't give them access to those conversations.

And for a long time I think those brands fought against the change that social media was bringing with it. They were trying to moderate their user forms on their websites more carefully and sending cease and desist orders and so forth. They were trying to squeeze the conversation back inside the box they knew. One of my favorite examples of that is [The Grey Album](#) put out by [Danger Mouse](#) a few years ago, and the record label that owns the source materials he ripped to create the album. The company sent him the cease and desist letter, but within hours the album was on thousands and thousands of sites all around the world and the more they fought it, the more people wanted to hear it, and the more the label became the bad guy in the story. What the record label wanted was actually irrelevant.



It is a pretty tough thing to come to grips with, if your job is to be controlling the brand conversation and you can't. The successful companies in the space have acknowledged this and have been a positive influence within the social networks rather than a disruptive one.

## Q: Why do you think play is so important? Aren't games what people do to waste time?

**MF:** Great question. When most people think of games and play they think of it as wasting time, because we use a pretty narrow definition of games. We often think of solitaire, and Quake and Halo and so forth. However, play is more fundamental than that: play is key to how we learn, how we communicate, how we compete and bond socially. It is totally essential to nearly everything that we do. Counter-intuitively, what a lot of companies do is try to take the fun out of their applications, out of their website.

They don't want people "wasting time" and maybe they see their application as a serious application to which games and play simply don't apply. But this is simply wrong-headed. As marketers, we need to concern ourselves with how people feel when they use our application, not just what they do. Play is about engaging people emotionally, and isn't an emotional connection with our customers the "holy grail" of marketing?

## Q: Why did you base Ayogo games in Vancouver? Are you originally from Vancouver?

**MF:** Well I'm not originally from Vancouver. I'm originally from Jamaica, but I settled here when I was young. I love to live in Vancouver and it's a fantastic place to work. The city is large enough, especially with the Internet based companies here, to do a lot of excellent work. There's sort of a critical mass to find partners to work with, good employees, and reach customers, and yet the city is small enough we can really develop this tight knit community. For that reason, I think it's a great place to

start a company. I've started several of my own in Vancouver and it's hard for me to imagine doing it anywhere else.

## Q: What does Ayogo offer employees that is special in the industry?

**MF:** The first and foremost important thing that we offer our employees is the opportunity to do great work. We work hard to make Ayogo a great team environment, and to ensure we have an interesting set of business problems that we set out to solve.

Interesting, not just from a technical standpoint, but also a tremendous business opportunity. When you combine those two together at the same time, you have a very attractive destination for employees.

## Q: What does your normal day look like?

**MF:** I will let you know when I have one (laughing)! As an entrepreneur working in this industry, every day is different and things are constantly changing. That said, I do have four children and so there is a necessary (and wonderful) routine I go through. I get up in the morning with the kids and spend time with them, talk about their day and then head early into the office to dig in to this enormous business opportunity.

Social media, social games and the social networking space is growing so rapidly right now, and changing so quickly that

it can be kind of intimidating. By building the company the way we have, surrounding ourselves with smart people, it forces you to always be constructively critical of yourself. It makes you constantly re-evaluate your strategy and re-evaluate your tactics. A large part of my day is to take a look at the projects that are going on, and I'm always thinking about how to create value for customers and our clients for the long term.



## Q: What does it take to make a great game?

**MF:** Well I like that question a lot, because it partly depends on what your definition of a game is. So one of the things I think is important to note is that games are not

necessarily pleasurable. If you've ever played ice hockey at a competitive level, some of those games can be very, very painful; there is a lot of hitting and bruising.

But it's triggering some very powerful primal human instincts around cooperation, competition, collecting and achievement. So what I would say is what a good game does is pushes those buttons. The textbook definition of a game is "a system of rules and artificial conflict designed to produce a measurable result". Some of the best games are very simple. They push our buttons efficiently and give us a real feeling of satisfaction from doing it.

## Q: Who are your mentors in this rapidly changing business?

**MF:** The advisory board for Ayogo is a great source of inspiration. We have Stewart Butterfield, founder of Flickr, and Dan Holmes, who worked at Disney for a long time and with a number of successful start ups. For me, it's all about establishing a community of talented people. You will always need more than one mentor to give you different points of view. This will give you the sense of what you're doing is really taking you in the right direction.

Because of that I do a lot of networking. I think that's one of the single most important activities you can do: to connect with people and ideas. That's why I love what the [International Internet Marketing Association](#) does: bringing smart people together to share ideas.

### Q: What is your take on rapidly changing technology platforms?

**MF:** The fundamental principles of games and play don't change, but delivery platforms, channels, and development tools are constantly advancing. Facebook is one of the most active gaming platforms in the world, with hundreds of millions of people playing games every day. The top 25 most popular games alone have over 200M unique plays per month, and the platform is still growing rapidly with older demographics coming online all the time.

That creates all kinds of opportunities, obviously, but it doesn't change the fundamentals. You need to know your customer, engage them in a context

where you can make an impact, and deliver moments of joy. Knowing the latest technology is important, but not as important as knowing your customer. That's always been true.

### Q: Give us an example of your perfect client?

**MF:** Our perfect client is a company or brand that needs to connect with its customers through social media; brands that need to engage people and inspire action. We believe that play is functional. Our games and other applications we build are always designed to provide specific and measurable results, in terms of the customer activity we're generating.

### Q: How do you empower your employees to do their best work?

**MF:** We empower our employees by giving them a voice. Perhaps there's there is a flaw in some element of our business process that they can see how to improve, or even something simple, like if we laid out the desks in the office sub-optimally. Whatever it is, we are constantly looking to them to tell us how we can be better. We believe when you hire bright and talented people and encourage them to speak their minds, value can be created in all kinds of unexpected ways. At the end of the day, people don't want to be treated like machines. They want to be a part of a living breathing system, where the context is always set in terms of "how can we do our best work?"



### Q: What are some of the challenges your organization faced porting games to the iPhone?

**MF:** There are many challenges developing for iPhone. What people might not realize is that the iPhone is technically very different from developing for the web. By and large you can't use familiar technologies, which requires a completely new skill set. This cascades into everything from recruitment, to finding reputable vendors and partners, to finding mature development tools.

You are also working within the confines of the Apple framework to publish the applications. While you can brace for some of the challenges, there are some which you simply have no control over, like the application review process.

To give you an example of the challenge, it could take three days or three months to have your application reviewed and either rejected or approved. This can make it very difficult to plan. Apple's review decisions are made by an individual reviewer, on an individual basis. Which means it is quite possible for your application to be rejected by one reviewer but not another.

The moral of the story is that this is a new platform and everyone has to experiment including Apple. That is some of the risk we take on in this business. That said, there are tremendous opportunities when you can put your application in the hand of your customer 24/7, but you have to be aware of both sides of that coin.

## Q: Is the iPhone the only device you port games to?

**MF:** We haven't had a lot of pull yet for applications other than iPhone. The development framework we created internally is designed for making porting easier, so as the demand appears, we'll be ready.

## Q: What is your favorite game produced to date from your company?

**MF:** The game that we're currently producing for [Electronic Arts](#) right now is my favourite. Working with a client like Electronic Arts gives you some great content to work with. I can't tell you much about it just yet, but it will be released within a couple of weeks, so stay tuned. It looks and plays really well. We're really excited about it.

The second one that I would like to mention would be Hockey Pool Pro which we designed out of love. Unlike other hockey pool games where your play is mostly passive, ours is one you more actively play, while you're actually watching the hockey game. It generates a lot of regular activity among our players, who are quite passionate about it. We started out thinking about how we could create a fun hockey-oriented application that people would visit every day, invite their friends to, and really



engage with. We're thrilled with the results so far.

## Q: From a community perspective do you have any particular causes you support?

**MF:** My eleven year old is involved in the program [Me to We](#), which helps children think of themselves as global citizens and not as individuals or consumers. [Me to We](#) empowers them to have a positive influence in the world for social justice, environmental awareness, and climate change which are all important issues. So there's an example of what matters to me in my personal life, giving tools to young people to do better.

## Q: On Blogger you mention you are very pleased to be alive in this particular time in history. Why?

**MF:** If you go back in history even 50 or 100 years ago, in order to build a pyramid, Empire State Building or the Library of Congress you needed to be someone powerful like a president, pharaoh, governor or captain of industry.

That's not true anymore. The largest, broadest, most accurate encyclopedia ever created in all of human history was created by a bunch of people working for free. Self organization - I think that's what's fundamentally different today. People today have

the ability to organize themselves in sophisticated ways without any

formalized structures. Formalized structures are important and incredibly useful in many cases, but they're not necessary anymore to accomplish great things.

I'm really excited to be a part of that revolution in human development. I can work with a lot of smart people who are anywhere in the world, totally on demand.

## Q: Can you give us some advice on books to read?

**MF:** Robin Dunbar has written a series of books that I really like. I'm currently reading [Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language](#) and I'm getting a lot of value out of it.

I would strongly recommend [Predictably Irrational](#) by Dan Ariely which is a fascinating book about behavioural economics and how human beings are totally irrational, but in totally predictable ways, and [Serious Play](#) by Michael Schrage, is required reading, in my mind.

There's also another book I like, [Kluge: The Haphazard Evolution of the Human Mind](#) by Gary Marcus, on how evolution can produce optimal systems, but just because it can doesn't mean that it will.

## Q: What is your favorite restaurant in Vancouver?

**MF:** Do I really have to choose just one? Vancouver is just a bunch of great restaurants with a city built around it. I live in East Vancouver and I'm a [Commercial Drive](#) kind of guy. There are lots of cool small restaurants on Commercial that I like.

If you like some place slicker (good to take clients) I like [Stella's on Commercial](#). A big selection of Belgian beers, great food, vegetarian choices, and good ambiance. I like [Riddim and Spice](#), it's a Jamaican restaurant. Say hello to the chef, Mr. Currie, if you go.

If you like Mexican, check out [Tio Pepe's](#). They are wonderful people and will spend time with you and make sure your meal is delicious!

### Q: Can you tell us a bit about your poetry?

**MF:** When I was nine years old, I won a medal in the Jamaica National Cultural Festival, so I guess it's something that's been in my blood since I was a child. As I've matured, I've come to appreciate how important it is in business. My job is to inspire and tell the story of what we're doing in ways that people can intuitively grasp. To slightly mangle a great quote: the job of a scientist is to explain in as dispassionate language as possible things that no one has thought before. And the job of the poet is to do the opposite.

### Q: What kind of cell phone do you have? Why did you select it?

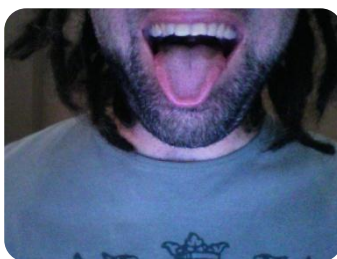
**MF:** Currently I am using an iPhone 3GS. I think it's important to experience the iPhone as it is a mature product in terms of the smartphone space and the number of applications available for it. I'm currently looking closely at the android platform and what Palm is doing. Blackberry has a lot of catching up to do and I'm looking forward to learning more what will come from RIM.

### Q: What do you do to unwind? Do you play any sports?

**MF:** I like hockey, but I tend to watch it more than I play it. Soccer (European football) is a beautiful game. I actively play in a league at a pretty high level and usually have a pickup game with friends every week.

### Q: Who is going to win the Stanley Cup?

**MF:** I feel pretty good about our chances with the Canucks this year. We have a good goalie (Roberto Luongo) who cares deeply about his profession and performance. One of the things that give me a lot of respect for him is this ritual he does.



If he is named one of the stars of the game, he goes out on the ice with the applause and he always brings his stick with him to push it over the glass to a child in the audience. That is something he started to do spontaneously on his own accord, and I think that says a lot about the kind of person he is.

He knows that he is there to be an inspiration to young people, to teach them about team work, achievement,

sacrifice, excellence and he's found a way to make a contribution that really means something in the life of a child.

### Q: Are you a Mac, or a PC?

**MF:** I'm a Mac, hacked together out of parts in a basement. Do you remember when Apple licensed the Macintosh clones? Twenty years ago you could build a Macintosh with random parts that you found. That's one of the things I miss in my Mac today. I try to be balanced: I like that the idea of creating something powerful spontaneously from what you have at hand, but at the same time, I really appreciate the aesthetic and completeness of structured design.

### Q: What do you hope people take away from your speaking engagement on November 25th?

**MF:** I'm hoping that the people take away the ideas for how to utilize the principles of play and game design to make their own companies better. Being able to connect with their customers more effectively and add value to their businesses.

And if they can just walk away with one idea I'll be happy - play is functional. We want people to think in those terms. Your application is more functional, useful and more valuable if you can use the principles of play to engage people emotionally and intellectually in getting them working with you instead of making it a chore.

Our presentation will show examples of success and failures, and we're happy to show all sides of that from our experience.

## About Ayogo Games Inc

Ayogo is a Vancouver-based lab that creates innovative gaming experiences enjoyed on social networks (Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, etc.), and mobile platforms (iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, etc.). Its dual-focus is on helping brands use "fun" to engage users and motivate specific behaviors, and helping game developers effectively monetize their applications, as well as porting their games across networks, platforms and languages.

Ayogo is best known for its technology platform that enables the rapid development and distribution of games across channels by managing user authentication and sessions, metadata, currency structures, prize trees, micro-transactions, virality, community engagement, and social network feature integration with mobile platforms.

Ayogo is currently porting the popular Facebook games Mob Wars, City of Ash and Pet Pupz to the iPhone platform. For more information about Ayogo, go to: [www.ayogo.com](http://www.ayogo.com)



## About the International Internet Marketing Association

The International Internet Marketing Association started in 1998 to bring marketers, agencies and professionals together to discuss the capabilities and potential of Internet marketing. With over ten years of experience since our first event and our association remains focused on its original mandate – education. Each year, IIMA delivers a series of networking and speaking events hosted by subject matter experts, thought leaders, experts and panels of marketing practitioners. Each event has the same objectives:

- to provide insight into current and emerging practices in online marketing
- to deliver practical insights that are immediately relevant to your business
- to challenge participants to achieve greater levels of awareness of digital marketing
- to assist in the integration of digital marketing into your big picture marketing strategy

To engage you in the community of marketing and business practitioners passionate about the future of internet marketing. The meet-ups provide a theatre for the discussion of the trends, tools and technology shaping how marketing practitioners who are using the digital space to greater involvement with their publics. By providing a series of networking and educational events, IIMA creates an environment in which the trends, tools, opportunities and risks that are shaping how people interact with the online market place.

For more information about IIMA, go to:

[www.iimaonline.org](http://www.iimaonline.org)

## Contributors to this interview



James Laitinen, Director of IIMA – James is an entrepreneur at heart with a flair for technology and marketing. Burning the midnight oil turning ideas into reality, he often attempts intimidation tactics during games of Scrabble. Connect with James online via [@jlate](https://twitter.com/jlate)



Charity Robertson, Director of Communications IIMA - Charity is a marketing, advertising and human relations professional. While not creating marketing strategies or studying, Charity can be found chasing the sun to the nearest beach. She is currently residing in Yucca Valley, California. Connect with Charity online via [@charityweb](https://twitter.com/charityweb)



Ean Jackson, Director of Events IIMA- When not running a marathon or snowshoeing in gorgeous powder conditions, Ean helps us connect with professional speakers and industry experts to present to our membership. For speaking opportunities and events contact Ean online via [@eanjackson](https://twitter.com/eanjackson)



A special thank you to [@Fergusson](https://twitter.com/Fergusson) of Ayogo Games for the intellect and wisdom shared with us.