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Kuma Goes Global with IBM, Akamai Deal

By Kris Graft

New York-based Kuma Games is a small company, but a new partnership with IBM and content delivery firm Akamai may help the 40-person studio operate like a larger global corporation. "We decided that we needed to be a global company, but we're not a big group," Kuma CEO Keith Halper told Next-Gen. "We have lots of games, but we are still relatively small in terms of the number of people that work here."



Kuma is perhaps best known for KumaWar its free, up-to-the-minute episodic games that are based on world conflicts. It also has released games in conjunction with the History Channel and Spike TV.

Prior to today's announced deal, the popularity of Kuma's games began to pick up in places like the Middle East, South America and Indonesia, according to Halper.

"Having carried this audience along for a couple of years at a cost, we realized that it wasn't a problem," he said. "It was an opportunity. So we decided to turn around and embrace the audience."

Kuma says that it serves 6 million users, with 350,000 joining each month.

The company eventually took its catalog of 150 series-driven games and localized and translated them into 11 languages. Infrastructure renovations were also in order to support growth.

That's where Cambridge, Mass.-based Akamai comes into play. The company has an expanding distributor network currently made up of about 34,000 servers across dozens of countries around the world.

The partnership puts those servers at Kuma's disposal, so the game maker can deliver its products to distant audiences at higher download speeds.

Akamai has also handled distribution for Nintendo, as well as Sony's PlayStation Network.

"The great thing is that we're with the large publishers and developers, but certainly we

work with the smaller guys like Kuma Games as well,” said Akamai’s industry marketing manager for gaming Brian Harvey.

At the heart of the partnership is IBM’s BladeCenter server technology. Dave Laux, IBM’s global exec for games, said that the technology can accommodate thousands of simultaneous Kuma players and “millions” of game downloads.

He added, “From a core infrastructure perspective, Kuma is an ideal client who can demonstrate IBM’s ability to scale to meet the needs of the online game clients.”

Kuma has already implemented IBM and Akamai solutions. Halper said in a statement, “...We have seen download times slashed, and as a result conversion rates have improved by 40 percent with user time rising to substantially more than an hour per session.”