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SPIRIT Brings in-Game Chat to World of Warcraft Online Gaming Community



The global online game market will pass \$13 billion by 2012, according to DFC Intelligence

INTRODUCTION

According to research analysts from DFC Intelligence, the global online game market will pass \$13 billion by 2012. Online virtual worlds provide realistic, engaging environments where people can play and interact. Gamers from all walks of life do come and play together, forming large and vibrant online communities and social networks. Interaction is the cornerstone of online gaming, and competition or collaboration within a game naturally requires to be supported by players' communication around it. Game players have been talking with each other while playing for quite some time, but only recently in-game chat has become a viable service for game developers to offer. The emergence of VoIP brought in-game communication to the new level, as it's so natural, quick and easy to talk, not type, to plan a mission, coordinate team actions, and share emotions in the midst of a game, in real time. Voice communication lets players get most of a game, making the gaming experience really exciting and immersive.

About 30 percent of game players already use some external applications for VoIP communications so they can talk with other gamers while playing, as it helps them play better and get more vivid game experience. However, the game quality suffers in this scenario because these two applications are hungry for the processor and the network, so the overall game experience is poor, unless the voice option is built into the game. In this case game experience becomes more natural and users can completely immerse into the game.

CUSTOMER

Blizzard Entertainment Inc., a division of Vivendi Games, is a premier developer and publisher of entertainment software, famous for its globally popular World of Warcraft (WoW) multiplayer online game that currently has more than 10 million paying subscribers worldwide.

Blizzard games attract players by their breathtaking sense of realism. The company's online-gaming service, Battle.net®, is one of the largest in the world, providing millions of active users with unique interactive experience.

With millions of players already using out-of-game VoIP to communicate with each other, the need for in-game voice chat was clear to Blizzard Entertainment. Blizzard's goal was to build the voice communication feature right into all their existing and upcoming multiplayer games, including WoW – and to give the game community a multimedia experience of a lifetime.

CHALLENGES

To meet the project development schedule and reduce time-to-market, Blizzard Entertainment was looking for a proven and flexible conferencing software capable of providing the highest voice quality at a reasonable cost.

Recognizing that voice chat is the next level of gaming communication, Blizzard needed to give its customers a quality in-game chat experience that's free, an added value to the game itself. The solution also had to comply with the tough resource consumption requirements to support simultaneous talks of millions of game players causing huge server load.

30-50 percent of game players use VoIP communications during the game

Besides, the solution had to support diverse user terminals and provide superior wideband voice quality under adverse conditions across both managed and unmanaged networks. And finally, to keep the ROI level efficient, the solution had to be able to reuse the existing infrastructure as much as possible.

10M World of Warcraft players enjoy high-quality built-in voice chat powered by SPiRiT IP-MR™ codec

SOLUTION

Blizzard turned to SPiRiT for its time-proven proprietary IP-MR™ codec which is in the heart of TeamSpirit® Conferencing Engine, fine-tuned for massively multiplayer online gaming (MMOG).

SPiRiT IP-MR™ codec, developed specifically for packet networks, met all the requirements set by Blizzard regarding voice quality under adverse network conditions and diverse user terminals. It has multiple coding layers of the voice data (base and enhancement layers) coded independently. The speech data is passed to conference participants with different connection speed without any transcoding on the server-side, which eliminates speech quality degradation and additional server load. SPiRiT IP-MR™ has been widely licensed by conferencing system makers.

SPiRiT IP-MR™ codec within TeamSpirit® Conferencing Engine provides up to 15% better traffic efficiency and up to 80% better server capacity, achieving a record 5000 simultaneous VoIP sessions per one Intel-based conference server, and potentially eliminating tens of millions of dollars usually spent on extremely expensive and poorly scalable conferencing hardware. Additionally, SPiRiT's Conferencing Engine based on SPiRiT IP-MR™ codec supports diverse user terminals enabling Blizzard to be completely ready for a potential migration of MMOGs to mobile platforms – the advantage that competitive solutions simply could not match.

RESULTS

The latest version of Blizzard's online World of Warcraft game was published with SPiRiT IP-MR™ inside, providing built-in voice chat options with the highest voice quality available on the market. Blizzard WoW's in-game chat feature helps to provide the complete immersion into the game, which is highly appreciated by more than 10 million subscribers.

SUMMARY

CUSTOMER	CHALLENGE	SOLUTION	RESULTS
Blizzard Entertainment Inc	Voice solution had to provide superior wideband voice quality under adverse network conditions and support diverse user terminals	SPiRiT IP-MR™ codec	Blizzard's World of Warcraft provides high-quality built-in voice chat features powered by SPiRiT IP-MR™ codec.