

The Business Interview

From child's play to creating games for top lotteries across the globe

GIANCARLO Achler is the head of studios at Scientific Games, the world's largest lottery games company. He is responsible for leading the SG Studios team based in Jersey that designs and develops exciting digital games for government-regulated lotteries around the world, including The National Lottery in the UK.

A lifelong Islander, Giancarlo attended Grands Vaux School, studied at Highlands College and built a family with his wife and two sons in Jersey.

He has been interested in games for as long as he can remember, an interest sparked from the Sinclair Spectrum +3 he had as a child, cemented playing the video game Doom for the first time on a PC, through to owning most generations of games consoles since.

What first inspired your interest in coding and computers while growing up in Jersey?

I didn't follow a traditional path. I originally studied science at Highlands College, where I discovered computing through one of the modules and realised I enjoyed it immensely. But I'd been interested in games for as long as I can remember. One of my earliest memories is getting a Sinclair Spectrum +3 for Christmas and loading games from cassette tapes.

What really fascinated me wasn't just playing games, but the creativity behind them. I was always drawing characters, making comics and coming up with ideas for video games I had no way of actually building at the time.

In 1996, I started working in web devel-

Scientific Games head of studio Giancarlo Achler tells **JEP Business** about a career that started from a childhood fascination with the creativity behind computer games

opment and later taught myself to code games when I moved into the lottery sector in 2002.

What was it like to teach yourself coding in the 1990s when formal training barely existed? How did you approach this?

It was a time of exciting chaos. The internet was brand new, there were no established courses of study, no clear rulebook and very few people you could turn to for guidance.

You learned by doing: experimenting, breaking things, working out why they broke and trying again. In some ways, that absence of a formal structure was an advantage. It forced a problem-solving instinct that has stayed with me throughout my career, and it gave me confidence that if something does not exist yet, with the right creativity and curiosity, you can figure out how to create it.

For a long time I had assumed that coding games was well beyond my abilities but I was lucky to have a great mentor who showed me it wasn't magic, just a craft you could learn. More than 20 years on, I'm still doing it and I probably still owe him a drink.

Today, I'm leading a team of data scientists, game designers and technologists at Scientific Games working to create the best games for lotteries around the globe, including for The National Lottery in the UK, so the lottery sector has come a long way.

Was there a pivotal moment when you knew you could make a career out of coding?

Probably within the first year of my career as a junior web developer, before entering the lottery sector. I was working at a local internet service provider, and I could see very clearly that this technology was going to change everything, and that the people who understood how to build things with it would have opportunities that simply didn't exist before. As a gamer at heart, I also wanted to understand how the games I love were created and make them myself.

That sense of creativity has kept me going ever since, and I still feel it to this day. At Scientific Games, science and innovation are in the DNA of everything we do.

You can have an idea and actually build it, turning something abstract into something real that entertains players and drives results for lotteries.

How did you get into game development, and what was the path you followed that brought you to the attention of The National Lottery?

It happened somewhat by circumstance,



■ Giancarlo Achler, front left, with the Scientific Games Jersey studio

which I think is how a lot of the best career moves come about. I had been working as a web developer when the company I was at then began working on digital games for The National Lottery.

Almost no one had built digital lottery games before at that point, so there was no established playbook, and it was exciting to be a pioneer in the industry. That meant learning on the job and applying the same self-taught instinct I had developed in the early days of the web.

In those days, small teams handled everything from concept and design through to development and testing, which gave me experience across the full game-creation lifecycle. I love being part of that process end-to-end to create a fun experience for the user. Best of all, a significant proportion of the proceeds ultimately goes to good causes.

At Scientific Games, we are still, today, trying to find new ways to make games entertaining and to create new play styles and brand-immersive experiences with licensed brands such as Monopoly, Game of Thrones, Jurassic Park and Deal or No Deal.

Can you tell us about SG Studios and its roots in Jersey?

In 2021, Scientific Games acquired Sideplay, a digital game studio founded and based right here in St Helier. Scientific Games is a global company that provides retail and digital games, technologies, analytics and services to 150 government-regulated lotteries in 50 countries. Our studio in Jersey became part of Scientific Games' wider network of digital game studios, and we have continued to operate from the Island ever since.

We are the largest studio of our kind in the Channel Islands, with a game portfolio of 300 instant game titles providing games for 30 lotteries across the US, Canada, New Zealand and Europe. For a studio based on a nine-by-five-mile island, that is a track record I am genuinely proud of.

How did it feel to be a central part of the team, creating digital games for lotteries? What were some of those games that you developed?

At the beginning, being able to build games enjoyed by tens of millions of players was surreal – and it still is today. In Jersey, we have a team of world-class talent which prioritises innovation, combining our curiosity and creativity with innovative technology to build games.

What makes it particularly special is the pace: going from concept to a finished, live game in a matter of months, many times a year.

In some industries, people spend years on a single product and never see it reach an audience. We go through that full cycle repeatedly, always driving our game innovation forward. Best of all, a significant proportion of the proceeds goes to good causes.

Some of my favourite games I've helped develop recently are Candy Coated Cash, which has been a great success in the US, and £25 Million Cash Showdown in the UK, which inspired a similarly themed retail scratchcard game sold in stores.

What would you say has been SG Studios' proudest achievement so far?

It is difficult to single out one moment, because so much of what I am most proud of has built up over time. But one of the most significant things the studio has developed is something most players would

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never see: our internal framework and building blocks that we use to develop games.

Think of it like a well-equipped kitchen. The ingredients and utensils are already prepared and laid out, so the chefs can focus on creating new dishes rather than starting from scratch every time. This gives the team a strong foundation while still allowing real creative flexibility, letting us move quickly and explore a wide range of ideas.

More broadly, I am proud of the culture. The quality of what you build is shaped by the environment in which your team works. We have always prioritised building a group of people who put innovation, creativity and curiosity first.

And, even better, they genuinely enjoy working together and share ideas openly. That's the culture we've created, and that has a direct impact on the consistency and quality of what we produce.

What makes Jersey a good base for one of Scientific Games' digital game studios?

It still feels a little surreal, even after all these years. Building digital lottery games in a small island and delivering them to some of the largest lotteries in the world is, when you step back and think about it, a remarkable thing.

Jersey is very outward-facing. As a well-established international finance centre, there is already a strong connection to global business embedded in the Island's culture.

That combination of a close-knit local environment and a genuinely global outlook

suits what we do very well. And the quality of life here is a real asset when it comes to attracting and retaining good people. I have travelled quite a bit, and Jersey holds its own.

With digital gaming constantly evolving, where do you see the industry going in the next five to ten years, and where do you see yourself within it?

AI is the big shift we'll see over the next decade, not just in lottery gaming, but across the wider gaming industry. The studios that thrive will be those that adopt it thoughtfully, using it to accelerate the creative process rather than simply trying to automate it.

Human judgment and creative instinct will still matter enormously. My own career has been defined by a willingness to adapt – from web development to game development, and from developer to leader of this studio – and I expect the next chapter to involve that same kind of evolution.

Underpinning all of this is trust. Everything we do depends on players, regulators and governments believing in the integrity of what we produce.

As AI becomes more central to how games are built, the industry will need to ensure it is used transparently and responsibly.

For us, the goal isn't just to maximise play; it is to support sustainable, enjoyable player engagement. That principle is as

important to me as any creative or commercial ambition.

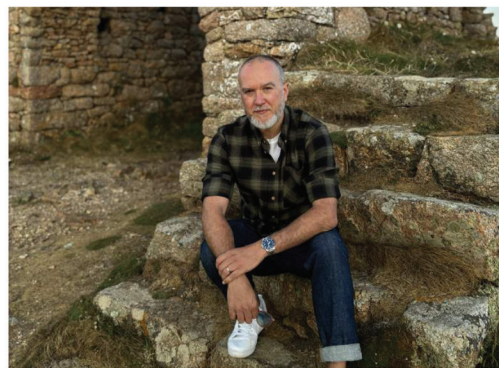
What advice would you give to young people in Jersey who are interested in a career in coding or gaming, and how many opportunities are there locally to progress such a career?

Start building things. Don't wait for the perfect course or qualification; just start creating. The tools and resources available today are unbelievable compared to what I had access to in the 1990s.

And don't assume you have to leave Jersey to build a meaningful career in tech. I'm a living example of the fact that you don't. Jersey can be your home, with the rest of the world as your market.

There are more opportunities than people realise. Scientific Games is the largest digital lottery game studio of its kind in the Channel Islands, with 40 employees, nearly all of whom are based here in Jersey. We recruit locally, develop talent over time and value practical skills over formal degrees. We also have strong staff retention, which means experience builds within the team over time.

Over the years, we have worked with my alma mater, Highlands College. There is a digital course about our studio offered to students, and we've employed quite a few graduates. We've also offered internships for local university students who return to the Island for a year of experience and have offered positions to our interns. Two of these employees just celebrated their ten-year work anniversaries.



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