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Introducing Justin Ziran



Justin Ziran · Inside Magic Online
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Looking forward

First off, I'll start by thanking Dan for the warm welcome and all the hard work over the years. Your passion for gaming and *Magic Online* specifically is unmatched and will be missed. Good luck and Go Browns!

Introductions please...

For those of you who have not had the chance to read the boards, my name is Justin Ziran and I am the new brand manager for *Magic Online*. Linda Cox passed the *Magic Online* torch to me several weeks ago and I have been getting up to speed on the daily operations.

Who am I?

- Name:** Justin Ziran
- Age:** 33
- Home State:** Ohio
- Favorite Team:** Cleveland Browns
- Height:** 5'8" on a good day
- Hair:** Yes, tending toward no
- Gaming since:** **D&D:** 1982-Present, **Magic:** Nov 1996-Present
- WotC Games Played:** **Magic, D&D & Duel Masters**
- Favorite non-WotC Game:** Puerto Rico (Rio Grande Games)
- If I were a Magic card I would be:** *Birds of Paradise* (ask and you shall receive)
- Favorite Combo:** *Noble Benefactor/Lobotomy* or *Political Trickery/Undiscovered Paradise* (odd, old school combos - don't ask why)
- Favorite Card Art:** Etched Oracle (*Fifth Dawn*) – Matt Cavotta

I've worked at WotC for three and a half years and have worked on products ranging from RPGs (**D&D**), Miniatures (**Chainmail**), to TCGs (**Pokemon**, **Magic**)

Ok, the Job...

In the most basic sense, brand managers at WotC are responsible for managing several aspects of the product line including (in no particular order): marketing, product development, P&L (Profit & Loss) and brand development. I manage the brand with the assistance of my boss, Kyle Murray (Brand Director) and a cross functional team comprised of representatives from Research & Development (R&D), Technical Service (TS), Marketing Communications, Production, Finance, Logistics, Online Media, Organized Play (OP) and Customer Service (CS). My role centers on developing and communicating business and brand strategies around which "we", the cross-functional team, develop objectives that guide the decision-making process.

Where are we now?

Over the last several weeks we, the **Magic Online** (MTGO) team, have accomplished several of our short-term goals:

- Provide a stable game platform
- Deploy the E3 invitational code
- Add league functionality back into the MTGO
- Identify beta reward recipients and began processing reward coupons
- Divided Dan's responsibilities among MTGO team members
- Develop a communication strategy (I will share this with you in a minute)

Here are some details

- **Stability:** With the exception of a minor hardware failure the system has performed very well.
- **E3 Invitational:** Code was deployed successfully with no issues on 04/29/04.
- **Leagues:** Well, they're back and working perfectly!
- **Beta Rewards:** Processed rewards last week. On track for distribution starting May 17th.
- **Dan's Departure:** Dan's responsibilities have been divided between the Brand Team & Online Media
- **Communication Strategy:** On May 28th at 5:00 pm PDT, we will hold the 1st MTGO online chat. We, (R&D, TS, Marketing, Online Media, OP and CS), will answer your questions live. We'll leave some time at the end for a general discussion. The chat is scheduled to last 1 hour.

Over the next few weeks, you'll notice some significant changes in how, when, where and what we communicate with you.

Question: How, when, where and what will the MTGO team communicate with you?

Answer: We will continue to use the "announcements folder" to keep you up to date on current events, pressing issues and unscheduled downtime. Most of the posts will come from me but from time to time, Kyle Murray (my boss) or Randy Buehler will provide the update. In the event that we are not available, someone from the Development Team will provide an update for you.

In addition, a new "Tuesday column" will debut next week. Chad Ellis, will author the article. Chad is an accomplished Magic player who finished in the top 8 at Pro Tour Barcelona and is a featured writer for leading Magic websites. Not impressed yet? Chad earned his MBA from Harvard and has held executive positions with top mobile electronics and dot com companies over the last several years. Currently, he enjoys creating games and is co-founder of *Your Move Games Inc.* We're excited to have him on board and look forward to reading his column.

As I mentioned earlier, we will be having a live, moderated chat on May 28th at 5:00 pm PST. Due to the large volume of questions that we anticipate, we've decided to collect questions ahead of time. That way, we'll be able to answer the largest number of questions within the available time. Don't worry, we'll leave some time at the end of the Q & A for general discussion. If all goes well, we'll schedule a follow chat shortly thereafter.

On Tuesday May 11th, a forum where you can post (but not respond to) questions for the chat will be opened. You will have the ability to rate posted questions. The top-rated questions are the ones that will be answered in chat. If you see a great question, give it 5 stars so it has a better chance of being answered. Keep your tone civil. Questions containing insults or profanity will be removed. Tough questions are fair game, just keep it polite! The forum will turn off to new posts on Wednesday the 26th.

The MTGO chat will be held at www.wizards.com/chat and it **does require a separate sign up** as it is not connected to boards or MTGO log-ins. A screen name takes about 2 hours to confirm. Be patient.

In the Queue (Before or during the E3 invitational) 1 to 3 weeks

Beta Rewards: On schedule for May 17th distribution. Your coupon will be sent to the email account of record at the MTGO store. Please do not contact customer service about missing coupons until I have announced the completion of the coupon distribution. The distribution may take a few days so keep your eyes on the announcement folder for updates.

Where are we going? (After the E3 Invitational) 1 to 3 months

Beta Tests – We have finalized plans to add functionality that will allow easy access to future open beta tests. I'll let you know when we add this feature and give you instructions on how and when to use it.

Premier Events – Shortly after E3, we'll announce the start of the Premier Events (PE) beta test. Unlike our last beta test, the PE beta will take place on a separate server. I'll post details on how to sign up for the test after E3.

Free Trial Server – Finalizing specs for the free trial server. It's coming!

Fifth Dawn Release – On track for a July release.

Darksteel Release Events – Randy and I are looking into options for running these events with existing functionality. Execution sounds likely if we can work out some timing issues. Stay tuned for more information.

Help File Text – Over the next few weeks we will begin the process of identifying outdated program help file text and begin the process of updating the files

While this is far from a comprehensive list of intermediate goals, it does represent the 1st wave of priorities. As these issues are resolved, we will add the next set of priorities to the list and send an update.

The Future

Magic Online version 3.0 – We got our first peek at visual concepts for the tournament hall and card binder and we are looking forward to the 2nd round. While v3.0 is still 12-18+ months off, it is nice to see the plan coming together. For those of you that don't know this already, phase 1 of the v3.0 project involves replicating existing functionality while addressing the fundamental infrastructure issues we have been wrestling with (scalability). Phase 2 involves adding "nice to have" features all of you want to see.

From a business perspective, *Magic Online* has been very successful. Hasbro, WotC and the MTGO team are committed to supporting the MTGO product. Although there are some hurdles and we anticipate that there will be some setbacks along the way, we are confident that we can meet the challenges. We also want you to know that we are passionate and dedicated to *Magic Online* and that there are many talented people working behind the scenes to make the product better on a daily basis.

Good gaming. See you online.

Regards,

Justin Ziran



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