Building scalable 3D applications

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Hybrid Graphics
What’s going to happen... (1/2)

• Mass market: 3D apps will become a huge success on low-end and mid-tier cell phones
  – Retro-gaming
  – New game genres taking into account special characteristics of cell phones
  – Navigation apps, screen savers, animations
  – Mass market is the place for revolutions
What’s going to happen... (2/2)

• Separate market for high-end game phones
  – Console ports
  – Still need to run popular “low-end” games
  – Place for evolution

• Some devices will form their own markets
  – Launch titles still subsidized by device manufacturers

• Much more variety than in PCs or consoles
What is a "mobile platform"?

• CPU speed and available memory varies
  – Current range ~30Mhz - 600MHz, no FPUs

• Portability issues
  – Different CPUs, OSes, Java VMs, C compilers, ...

• Different resolutions
  – QCIF (176x144) to VGA (640x480), antialiasing on higher-end devices
  – 4-8 bits per color channel (12-32 bpp)
Graphics capabilities

• General-purpose multimedia hardware
  – Pure software renderers (all CPU & integer ALU)
  – Software + DSP / WMMX / FPU / VFP
  – Multimedia accelerators

• Dedicated 3D hardware
  – Software T&L + HW tri setup / rasterization
  – Full HW

• Performance: 50K – 2M tris, 1M – 100M pixels
Dealing with diversity

- Problem: running the same game on 100+ different devices
  - Same gameplay but can scale video and audio
- Scalability must be built into game design
- Profile-based approach
3D content is easy to scale

- Separate low and high poly 3D models
- Different texture resolutions and compressed formats
- Scaling down special effects not critical to gameplay (particle systems, shadows)
  - Important to realize what is a "special effect"
- Rendering quality controls
  - Texture filtering, perspective correction, blend functions, multi-texturing, antialiasing
Building scalable 3D apps

• OpenGL ES standardizes the API and behavior
  – ES does not attempt to standardize performance
  – Two out of three ain’t bad

• Differences between SW/HW configurations
  – Trade-off between flexibility and performance
  – Synchronization issues
Building scalable 3D apps

• Scale upwards, not downwards
  – Bad experiences of retro-fitting HW titles to SW
  – Test during development on lowest-end platform

• Both programmers and artists need education
  – Artists can deal with almost anything as long as they know the rules...
  – And when they don’t, just force them (automatic checking in art pipeline)
Reducing state changes

• Don’t mix 2D and 3D calls!!!
  – Situation may become better in the future, though...

• Unnecessary state changes root of all evil
  – Avoid changes affecting the vertex pipeline
  – Avoid changes to the pixel pipeline
  – Avoid changing textures
"Shaders"

• Combine state changes into blocks ("shaders")
  – Minimize number of shaders per frame
  – Typical application needs only 3-10 "pixel shaders"
    • Different 3-10 shaders in every application
    • Enforce this in artists' tool chain

• Sort objects by shaders every frame
  – Split objects based on shaders
Complexity of shaders

• Software rendering: Important to keep shaders as simple as possible
  – Do even if introduces additional state changes
  – Example: turn off fog & depth buffering when rendering overlays

• Hardware rendering: Usually more important to keep number of changes small
Of models and stripping

• Use buffer objects of ES 1.1
  – Only models changed manually every frame need vertex pointers
  – Many LOD schemes can be done just by changing index buffers

• Keep data formats short and simple
  – Better cache coherence, less memory used
Triangle data (1/2)

- Minimize number of rendering calls
  - Trade-off between the number of render calls & culling efficiency
  - Combine strips using degenerate triangles
  - Understanding vertex caching
    - Automatically optimize vertex access order
    - Triangle lists better than their reputation
Triangle data (2/2)

- Optimize data in your art pipeline (exporters)
  - Welding vertices with same attributes (with tolerance)
    - Vertices/triangle ratio in good data 0.7-1.0
  - Give artists plenty of automatic feedback
Transformations and matrices

• Minimize matrix changes (demo)
  – Changing a matrix may involve many hidden costs
  – Combine simple objects with same transformation
  – Flatten and cache transformation hierarchies

• ES 1.1: Skinning using matrix palettes (demo)
  – CPU doesn’t have to touch vertex data
  – Characters, natural motion: grass, trees, waves
Point sprites

• ES 1.1: Point sprites (demo)
  – Smoke, fire, explosions, water flow, stars, weather effects
  – Scale controls through PointSizeArray, PointSizeAttenuation
  – Expensive to do in ES 1.0
  – Drawback: can’t rotate sprites or textures, fixed texture coordinates
Lighting and materials

- Fixed-function lighting pipelines are so 1990s
  - Drivers implemented badly even in desktop space
  - In practice only single directional light fast
  - OpenGL’s attenuation model difficult to use
  - Spot cutoff and specular model cause aliasing
  - No secondary specular color
Lighting: the fast way

While we're waiting for OpenGL ES 2.0...
  – Pre-computed vertex illumination good if slow T&L
  – Illumination using texturing
    • Light mapping
    • ES 1.1: dot3 bump mapping + texture combine
    • Less tessellation required

• Color material tracking for changing materials
• Flat shading is for flat models!
Illumination using multitexturing
Textures

• Mipmaps always a Good Thing™
  – Improved cache coherence and visual quality
  – ES 1.1 supports auto mipmap generation

• Different strategies for texture filtering

• SW: Perspective correction not always needed

• Avoid modifying texture data

• Keep textures ”right size”, use compressed textures
Textures

• Multitexturing
  – Needed for texture-based lighting
  – Always faster than doing multiple rendering passes
  – ES 1.1: support at least two texturing units
  – ES 1.1: TexEnvCombine neat toy

• Combine multiple textures into single larger one
  – Reduce texture state changes
    (for fonts, animations, light maps)
Textures and shots from Kesmai's Air Warrior 4 (never published)
The high-level pipeline

- High-level optimizations equally important
- Setup: organize objects hierarchically
  - Triangles organized into spatially coherent "objects"
  - Conservative bounding volumes (spheres, boxes) computed for each object
Four-step program for fast rendering

1. Render background and very distance objects
   - Sky cubes, impostors
     (use sky box to clear the background)

2. Cull objects not contributing to final image

3. Apply level of detail computations
   - Cull-away sub-pixel-size objects (contribution culling)

4. Sort remaining objects into optimal order
Culling

• Occlusion culling
  – Potentially Visible Sets and Portals are good low-cost solutions
  – ES 1.1 provides user clip planes to help with portals

• Hierarchical view frustum culling

• Back-face culling
  – Are we inside our outside the object? Terrains and indoors don’t cull well
Object ordering

- Sort objects into optimal rendering order
  - Minimize shader changes
  - Keep objects in front-to-back order
    - Improves Z-buffering efficiency
  - Satisfying both goals: bucketize objects by shader, sort buckets by Z
Thank you!

- Any questions?