

# Rovio's 'Overnight' Success with Angry Birds Came After 51 Failed Attempts



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***Rovio's global entertainment empire is built on its Angry Birds game but getting there wasn't as easy as it seems.***



Rovio's Angry Birds store in its Helsinki headquarters.

With the simple flick of its finger, Angry Birds was the launchpad for the multi-billion pound mobile games industry we see today, but while many see it as an overnight success story for Finnish startup Rovio, the truth is somewhat different.

Speaking to **IBTimes UK** at Rovio's colourful headquarters in Espoo just outside Helsinki, the company's communications director Sara Antila revealed that prior to the 'overnight' success of Angry Birds, the company spent six years toiling to find the winning formula, producing 51 unsuccessful games before hitting the jackpot.

The company was founded by a group of students who just wanted to develop games in the time before smartphones, when Snake was the pinnacle of gaming on the go.

The evolution of the smartphone and the incredible success of Angry Birds has created a global phenomenon, with Rovio no longer seen as a mobile gaming company, but a true media entertainment company - Finland's Disney if you will.

### **From Star Wars to fishing lures**

To get a sense of what type of company Rovio is these days, all you have to do is walk into the Rovio shop at its headquarters in Espoo, just outside Helsinki.

Here you will find everything from the iconic Angry Birds plush toys and Angry Birds Star Wars characters, to the ridiculous Angry Birds shampoo, Angry Birds children's shoes and even Angry Birds fishing lures.



A tiny selection of the more than 30,000 products Angry Birds has on offer around the world.

The company currently has a catalogue of more than 30,000 Angry Bird-related products on sale in more than 500 locations around the world.

Reflecting this phenomenal branding effort, the company said that close to 50% of its revenue is now coming from non-game sales.

Along with all the merchandise, the company has a series of theme parks, a cartoon series (which has already had one billion views) and of course let's not forget those games.



Rovio's chief marketing officer, Peter Vesterbacka (aka Mighty Eagle), announces at Slush that Angry Birds had now been downloaded two billion times.

Peter Vesterbacka, the company's chief marketing officer who goes by the name Mighty Eagle and who is rarely seen without his red Angry Birds hoodie, announced on stage at the Slush startup conference this week that Angry Birds games had recently passed the two billion download mark.

### **Where to from here?**

The question for Rovio now is, where to from here?

It recently appointed Teemu Suila as its new chief operating officer. Suila, like many people in Finland at the moment, joined Rovio from Nokia, whose headquarters are just down the road. At Nokia, Suila ran the company's bridge programme which helped former Nokia employees to set up their own startups after leaving the company.

When I asked Suila what the company's plans were, he said the company was open to investigating many possibilities, and pointed out that the Hello Kitty market is worth \$9 billion annually, clearly indicating that Rovio sees non-game products as a mainstay of its future earnings potential.

## Angry Birds Go

But what of those cute gang of birds and piggies which we are all so used to?

Well there's no need to worry, the company has big plans for them, but it won't be what we're used to.



A real life slingshot/chair in Rovio's Helsinki headquarters

The first foray into new territory is coming on 11 December, when the company will launch Angry Birds Go, a Mario Kart-style racing game.

While the move away from the traditional physics-based slingshot games is a major creative departure, the more important change is the game's business model.

### Freemium

Rovio has previously dabbled with the freemium model, offering some in-app purchases in its games, but for the most part Angry Birds games have earned money from in-game ads or straight download costs.

Rovio will have been watching with great interest the growth of fellow Finnish games maker Supercell who has been raking in over \$2.4 million every single day from its freemium iOS hits Clash of Clans and Hay Day.



Angry Birds in Rovio's headquarters in Espoo, Helsinki

Angry Birds Go will be a big challenge for Rovio. Can it make freemium work in the way Supercell has, or will it alienate the billions of players who are happy without in-app purchases?

**It all started with Birds**

Rovio is seen by many as Finland's answer to Disney and it has been hugely successful in turning Angry Birds into a global entertainment empire.

Walt Disney once said: "I only hope that we don't lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a mouse."

In a few decades time, could we be hearing Vertesbacka saying: "I only hope that we don't lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a bird."

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