How To Start A Game Company: Step-by-Step Blueprint

The number one reason game feel a because a game developer made a game they wanted to make without finding out if the market wanted it to.

When you make a game you want to make, and there is no market for it, then no amount of marketing, PR, branding, acclaim, YouTube influence is going to help.

A better strategy is to deliberately make a game that "sells itself".

So, if you want your game studio to grow and make profits so it supports you financially, then here is a blueprint of "How To Start A Game Company: 7 Simple Steps"...

Step 1: Market Research

Summary:

- If you don't want your game to fail, you need to get some understanding what your market wants and needs
- And you need to know if your market is oversaturated and figure out the income potential
- To start, visit: https://games-stats.com/steam/tags/
- Looking at the Games Count and Revenue Medium to determine a genres potential... here's how...
- Low Games Count and high Revenue Medium = good
- High Games Count + low Revenue Medium = bad
- But not all is lost if your game idea has a high Games Count + low Revenue Medium...
- If your idea has a high Games Count + low Revenue Medium, see if you can incorporate another market/genre that does have a low Game Count + High Revenue Medium with your chosen genre (i.e. Bullet Hell + Roguelike Deckbuilder)

Your Action Plan:

- Find 5 games you'd like to make a game in
- Go through each genre and note down the Games Count and Revenue Medium for each of your 5 genres
- Pick two or three genres that have a low Games Count + high Revenue Medium
This will be your game idea that you'll now test, next...

Step 2: Talk To Players

Summary:

- Market research can only tell you so much... so, you now need to validate your findings
- The best way to validate your idea is to talk to potential players, and find out if players will be willing to play and buy your game
- Start here: get involved in subreddits in your genre
- Or find a website about your genre, and see if there is a forum you can get involved with
- Ask people what they hate and like about your chosen genre
- Ask them if they would play a game like you're thinking of making
- For example, I'd go /r/deckbuildingroguelike, and start building my karma by interacting with the community – I can NOT marketing, I'm trying to get a deep understanding of what players want and don't want
- Also, read reviews on Steam about games similar to yours
- And read YouTube comments on videos made about your genre or games similar to your game idea
- Again, you're trying to get a DEEP understanding what your players wants, needs, and are NOT getting
- Spend 10 minutes a day interacting in Reddit communities and online forums based on your genre
- While you're interacting in these communities, have a Google doc open, and write down any insights, ideas, words, phrases that stick out to you
- Spend 10 minutes a day reading Steam reviews on games similar to your game idea
- Again, write down any words or phrases that stick out to you
- Call this your "Player Insights" document
- Spend 10 minutes a day reading YouTube comments about videos made about your genre or games similar to yours (most comments will be crap, but you can still get some good insights)
- Again, write down any words or phrases that stick out to you
- So spend 30 minutes a day researching your player... that's it!
- Do this 5x a week, for 2 to 3 weeks. But the longer you do it, the deeper you'll understand the wants and needs of your player

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Step 3: Product Plan

Summary:

- By getting a deep understanding of your game, about what your players want and desire but are not getting from other games in your genre, you can now begin planning your game
- You want to organize all your ideas and insights into a simple, easy to digest Product Plan (or Game Design Document)
- To help you with the Design Doc, visit: https://www.gamedeveloper.com/business/how-to-write-a-game-design-document
- Be sure to be as concrete and tangible as you can when writing your Product Plan / Design Doc
- For example, don't say "unique risk reward system"... say, "player will have to decide if they have time to mine a little deeper and find rare relics or do they get back in time to defend their tower before the enemies get too much to fight off"
- To help you write a Product Plan that is clear and tangible, do the "Imagine Test"
- For example, I can't imagine "risk reward system", but I can imagine "dig deeper or head back!?"

Your Action Plan:

- Remember how I told you to write down all the words, phrases, insights, ideas, and discoveries you've found during your market research and talking to customers? I called it the "Player Insights" document. Well, open that document because it will help you next...
- Once you have your "Player Insights" document open, head over to: https://www.gamedeveloper.com/business/how-to-write-a-game-design-document ...and complete the how-to guide using the insights and ideas from your research
- As you complete this how-to guide, remember to be as clear, concrete, and tangible as you can

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Step 4: Prototype And Test

Summary:

- By doing all this pre-production work now, you are putting in the LOWEST investment in time, money, and energy but getting the HIGHEST value in return
- And what value is that? You can VALIDATING your idea BEFORE you spend months or years on a game project that may or may not work
- Once you've done your Market Research, Talked To Players, and created a Product Plan, you are now ready to create a Prototype
- Your prototype type is the CORE of your game, minus most of the art, music, sound
- Think color: you want something that tastes good and has nice texture... you don't care about fancy decorations, sprinkles, icing design, how many layers, etc...
- Same with your prototype: focus on the core game play loop and don't worry about extra details
- Now test your prototype in front of PLAYERS (not game devs)
- Since you've been interacting in communities in Step 2, and made some connections, you now can go back and show people your prototype without fear of getting banned or your post being removed
- Your prototype should be a self-contained, stand-alone complete product (i.e. the first level, first area; first chapter... but it does NOT have to be polished)
- Yes, your prototype is ugly, and rejection sucks... that's why most game devs wait for their game to be more "polished" before they show it to the public... but...
- By showing your prototype to a small group of players, you can easily make changes to your game and irritate faster
- A prototype is easier to change than a demo or an alpha build – that's why I'm asking you to test your prototype with potential players this early, in pre-production

Your Action Plan:

- Spend the next few weeks or months working on your prototype
- Then go back to those communities you have connections with (See Step 2) and ask them to check out your prototype to gain more insights, ideas, thoughts, and discoveries
- Use this script: "Hey, a few months ago I asked your opinion on my Bullet Hell with Roguelike Deckbuilding. I have a prototype done, and I'd like to hear your opinion. Here's the link to check it out..."
- Remember to take notes in your "Player Insights" document, noting any new insights, ideas, thoughts, discoveries you came up with when testing your prototype

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Step 5: Develop a "Tight 10-Minute Demo"

Summary:

- At every step you are validating your ideas so that you eventually make a game that "sells itself"
- But before you spend years on a polished game, you need something NOW that is highly valuable, that you can use to help build your community, and take to publishers
- And that is your, "Tight 10-Minute Demo"
- A demo is a polished, self-contained, stand-alone complete product (a polished first level, area, or chapter)
- It's a "marketing asset" that will help you find players, grow your studio, and attract publishers
- And players have a hard time connecting unfinished, loose, semi-complete ideas in alpha builds to what the actual version will look like
- But a polished, self-contained, stand-alone, complete demo will give that player an experience more valuable than just looking at screenshots or playing an alpha build
- Your demo should not "bury the lead", but get right to the best part of your game, the core game play loop
- This means no tutorial, no lore or story dump, just straight to the fun
- Remember, Demo = 10 minutes, polished, self-contained, stand-alone, complete product that let's a player experience your game's best features and core gameplay loop

Your Action Plan:

- Take your prototype and now polish it as if it's the final version of your game
- Add in all the extra details that were not important to your prototype
- Spend time on the arts, theme, atmosphere – this is what sets a lot of games
- Focus on depth rather then length (i.e. polish the first level and treat it as if it was the final version of your game)

Step 6: Build A Community Using Your Demo

Summary:

- Focus on building a community first because it will help things down the road a lot easier
- With a community, your game launch will have a higher chance at success
- With a community, you have a higher chance of finding a publisher (in fact, publishers might come to you)
- But you should start building a community as soon as you can (and not 3 months before launch)
- And because you spent a lot of time talking to people in Steps 2 and 4, you already have begun the "Community Building" process – you are already ahead of most game devs who only wait until they have something "polished" before they present anything to other people
- To help you build your community, screenshots, trailers, devlogs, updates will NOT do... these are not valuable
- What is valuable is your DEMO
- Use your demo as a way to attract new members
- All your marketing efforts should go toward getting as much attention toward your demo as possible
- What's the best place to have a community? The technology or platform doesn't matter... what matters is that you have a central place where your fans can hang out
- Email newsletter is good because you have more control over the message and how people get it
- Discord is good because players can interact
- TikTok, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube – these are fine, but you have less control over the delivery of your message and when they get it
- But again, the technology doesn't matter, it's the quality
- Do not give out your demo too freely (at least not early on)
- Leverage your demo as a reward for players to join your community
- For example, the only way they can play your demo is via grabbing it on Discord or through your email newsletter
- Why put up a wall like this? Because you want to pre-qualify your fans... you want to weed out the "tire kickers" who just want free stuff
- You want to find die-hard fans that will vouch for you and back you
- It's better to have 1,000 die-hard fans that are highly active and will spread word-of-mouth for you than to have 10,000 lukewarm active members who spend more time in other
- Discord channels and rarely talk about your game with other players

Your Action Plan:

- Decide where you will have your central "hang-out": Discord, email, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Patreon, etc... remember, the tech doesn't matter
- To get people to join your community, all your marketing efforts (i.e. screenshots, videos, posts, vlogs, Steam store page) should focus on your demo, let your demo do all the "talking" for you
- Setup a system where if players want to get the demo, all they have to do is join your email, or Discord, etc.
- Later on when your community grows big enough, then you no longer have to "hide" your demo, and can freely distribute it, any on steam

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Step 7: Approach Publishers With Your Demo And Community

Summary:

- Pitching your game to a publisher will have a higher success if you have a polished demo AND a passionate community that is vouching for you
- Publishers can't see "profits" by just looking at a game idea, or at just a demo
- Publishers want to see "social proof" that your game is a valuable not just to you but to a lot of people
- Also publishers want to see that your game idea is VALIDATED already... and the only way to do that is by having a community and a polished demo
- In fact, if you did your job right, if you did your research, found what players want and can't get, and are making a game that is based on player wants and needs, and you have a community, the publishers will COME to you

Your Action Plan:

- When pitching your game to publishers, start with your best arguments FIRST
- And your best arguments are... 1) You have a polished demo that has been highly tested and VALIDATED... so show them all your work and documentation and your entire process you did during your market research and talking to customers phase
- And argument number 2) You have a fanbasing of die-hard, passionate fans that are waiting in anticipation for you to finish your game... so show them the amount of activity your community is getting (i.e. share them your list of your community members, or show them all the emails you're getting and or all the comments you're getting in your subreddit)
- List all your hard work do the talking for you

Your Next Step...

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