

# How to start an indie game studio?

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# PROLOGUE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>2. Roadmap</b> .....	5
<b>3. Where to Start?</b> .....	6
3.1 Resources .....	7
3.2 Core skills and continuous learning .....	7
3.3 Plan .....	8
3.4 Budget (and costs) .....	9
<b>4. Team Building, Roles and responsibilities</b> .....	10
4.1 Team Building .....	10
4.2 Roles (and responsibilities) .....	11
4.3 Contracts and paperwork .....	11
<b>5. Market analysis and Marketing</b> .....	12
5.1 Market analysis .....	12
5.2 Marketing .....	12
5.3 Basics of Marketing .....	13

<b>6. Outsourcing</b> .....	14
6.1 Music and Sound .....	14
6.2 Outsourcing Marketing .....	14
6.3 What not to outsource? .....	15
6.4 Tips to successful outsourcing .....	15
<b>7. Financing</b> .....	16
<b>8. Business Model</b> .....	17
<b>9. Advice from Professionals &amp; links to useful sites</b> .....	18
9.1 The Advice .....	18
9.2 Useful stuff (mostly links to other stuff) .....	19
<b>10. Reasons to Start Your Own Game Studio (observations and opinions)</b> .....	20
10.1 “The Passion Industry” .....	21
10.2 “Crunch Culture” .....	21
10.3 “The vision” .....	21
<b>Sources</b> .....	22 - 23



# 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to encourage students to start their own business in game industry. The guide is mainly for those who are studying game industry related studies, such as programming, game design etc. The focus is on business, founding the company and what is possibly needed to be successful in the industry. Entrepreneurship is highly subjective topic and there are countless possible paths to success, therefore we are focusing on the general idea of founding a game studio. In other words, there isn't a readymade, step by step path to success.

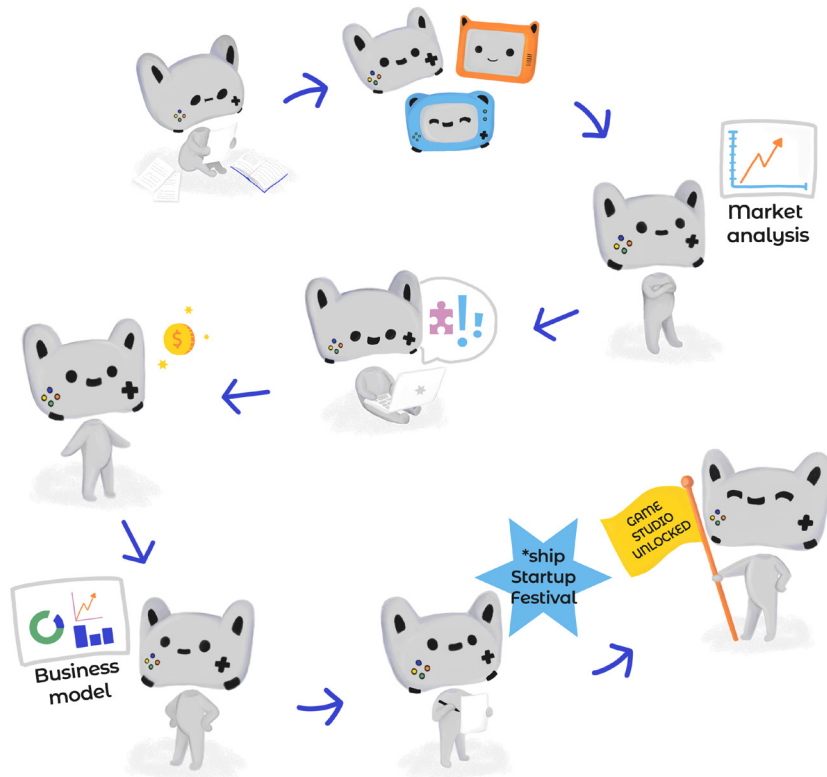
The closest thing to the above-mentioned "ready-made path" is a roadmap that tries to encapsulate all the required steps to a more easily digestible form. It introduces you to all the things you need to do and understand when founding a game studio. All the sections following will go more detailed into the subjects of the roadmap.

To build the guide that would be useful to start a gaming company, the core is in the information. When the subject is highly subjective, the best information is experience. That is why all the gathered knowledge in this guide is from industry professionals.

I was also very lucky to be able to interview many experienced entrepreneurs from game industry. From these interviews I was able to fill the blanks and ask specific questions about the industry and how the business works. Thank you all who participated and shared their experiences and knowledge to build this guide.

## 2. ROADMAP

This roadmap is illustrating the possible steps from the start to finishing the product (game) in a chronological order. It is just an example of the core steps and where they are positioned in the timeline and should give you some idea in what order you should do the steps. As mentioned before, the video game business is very creative, and you can execute the steps in different order if you feel it serves you better.



Still, there is some barriers you can't surpass without the specific requirement fulfilled. F. ex: if you don't know how to start a business, you shouldn't start one (business advisor). If you don't have money, you can't hire anyone (financing). If you want to get financier, you need something concrete to show (business plan and possibly a demo or convincing concept art).

1. Acquiring the core skills
2. Nest egg (acquired)
3. Preliminary planning
4. Local Business advisor
5. Paperwork
6. Business planning
7. Starting the business
8. From this point on taking care of the business and developing the game
9. Financing (if needed/ when something to show)
10. Marketing
11. New project planning etc. (back to step 2.)
12. Releasing the game
13. Post launch activity

It doesn't need to go exactly like this, and many steps are overlapping. Following chapters go more deeply to the processes (steps), contain links to useful information such as videos and websites you might want to use to learn the necessary information on how to run a business in game industry.

### 3. WHERE TO START?

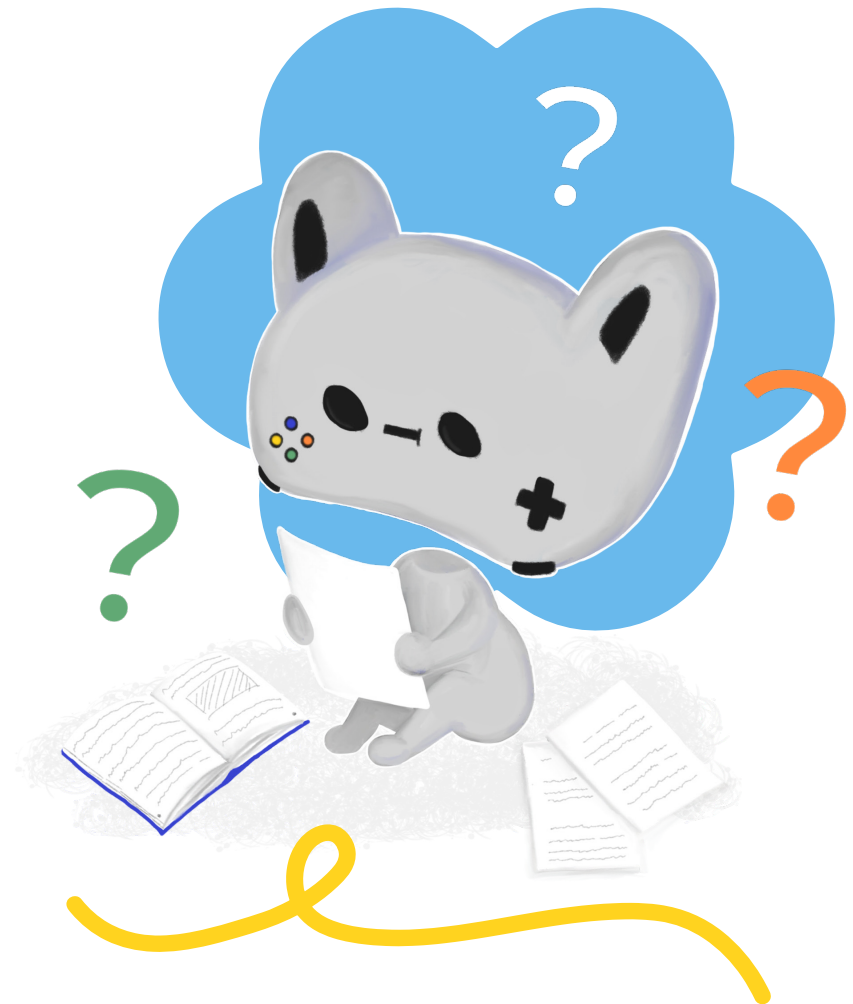
After you have accumulated expertise on those subjects you think that are vital and the nest egg, it's a great time to start planning your business. You should get organized as a business in the early stages (or even before starting) development. When you have the core team and initial plan figured out, you are ready to start your business.

Good place to start is the local business advisor services. They are helping you with everything from the legal documents to contracts and how they work. You should utilize this service because it is free of charge and you will gain useful knowledge of running a business. In Kotka-Hamina area the local business advisor is Cursor. You can find them behind this link: <https://www.cursor.fi/>

One of the most encouraging thought I read when researching material to this guide was from Reddit user @LordNed. You can be the most experienced and skilled making video games but you still don't know everything. You can read guides, watch videos and learn the skills (which are still useful btw) but you can never learn it until you try it by yourself. There's no correct path to success. You need to figure it out on your own. If you ask me, the best advice you can get is, just start and try. There won't be a point when you know "enough" or have "enough" money. When you have a core skill and an idea and some money to be able to survive through the development, you are ready to start.

*"No matter how much research you do in advance, how much preparation you have - you will learn something new every day. This means that no one can tell you everything you need to know to become an indie dev or how to complete a video game. You have to discover it on your own by doing. Doing." - @LordNed (getting\_started - "None of Us Know Everything")*

In the end the point of this guide is to encourage starting the business and give directions where to search info relevant to you. There is no right path, and you need to learn the skills and quirks of the craft along the way.



## 3.1 Resources

There are three key resources to spend when making a game: **Time**, **Money** and **creativity**. Everything you do is taking at least two of these, and you need to base your plans and decisions to these resources. You will never have more than enough of any of these, and you will run out very easily. Game development isn't free and you will need all resources mentioned to get the game released.

**Time:** This is quite self-explanatory and the easiest to understand. The problem is that inexperienced game developers very often can't estimate the time it takes to develop a game. Other common stumbling block is how well people value their time. "Time is money" is the old saying and it is very much just that. When you don't have money, you need to use other resources and most of the time, its time. Whether you plan or make something, you need it. And when comes the time everything goes sideways, its nice to have spare time because you will need it.

**Money:** Again, very self-explanatory resource. You need money to buy and rent things. Everything costs something and if you don't want to use your own (or other team-members') time, you need to pay. To start a business has it's launch costs. Yours and the teams living is costing. Equipment, licenses and outsourcing work costs money. Marketing the final products does as well. This is why budgeting is so important, to be able to manage the money you have for the project. Without money, there's no business.

**Creativity:** This is maybe the most abstract of the resources since you can't quantify it. It is still very important when making games. With creativity, you can "cut corners" and save time and money. Creativity is problem solving and out of the box thinking. It is as much tied to the success as any other of the resources you have available. The best (or worst depending on how you look at it) is that indie developers don't usually have money, they need to use their time and especially creativity to compensate.

## 3.2 Core skills and continuous learning

Most of the professionals in gaming industry have some sort of education in programming, game design or some other computer sciences. Many older industry professionals are selflearned, so the education is not required. It is still recommended that everyone in the team have some understanding in either game design or programming (preferably in both). Other important core competence is the business side of things. Somebody need to understand it and be on track of everything business related, so it would be preferable to have at least one in the team who have the responsibility. More on the team's responsibilities, core competences and roles in the next section.

Video game industry is evolving fast. Technology, equipment, game engines and trends etc. are changing all the time. This is the reason you need to be able to adapt and learn new skills. This is required from everyone in the team no matter the role. Follow developing and declining trends. Widen your skillset by learning new skills. The learned skills will become useful eventually.



## 3.3 Plan

The first thing when planning to develop a game is to ask these questions and have answers to them. 1: How much will it cost to make the game? 2: How much money will it make? 3: When are you going to finish it? If you don't have answers to these, you probably don't know what you are doing. (Kennedy, A. 2018). The answers shouldn't be too exact (approx.), but relevant nevertheless since those are determine the budget needed, revenue expectations and the schedule. If you can answer to these, you are already quite far into the planning process. You probably need to know these if you want to get financing other than the nest egg.

Another thing to keep in mind when on planning stage is to understand the reality that the competition is rough and you don't have as much experience as the veterans of the industry. Keep that in mind when planning to keep the expectations in manageable levels. It's not wrong to think big but without previous experience there's a big chance you won't succeed on the first try (and it's ok).

When starting the plan, be more general and open minded with it. There will be many variables that will force you to adapt and change the plans so don't go too much into details. Regular checks and updates to the plan is a good way to track the progress, add details and update it often enough to have a plan that is useful to you.

The business plan is important if you need financing to your game. It is more "formal" than the plan you are assembling to your teams use. It shares same elements with that but, in general, it is more of a justification/reasoning to the financier to "give"/loan you money for the project. More of the financing in the money and financing section.

Here are two great links (first in Finnish and second in English) which both explain what kind of information the business plan needs to contain and explains the crucial terms. I recommend reading them both before you start to construct the plan.

**Finnish link:**

<https://uusyrityskeskus.fi/yrityksen-suunnittelu/liiketoimintasuunnitelma/>

**English link:**

<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/plan-your-business/write-your-business-plan>

## 3.4 Budget (and costs)

The budget is highly dependent on what kind of game (scale) are you going to develop and how. The bare minimum is that you are going to make it alone. If we assume that you have all the equipment needed, you use free game engine and there's no other costs, the only thing you need to pay is your living. That's the bare minimum. Then depending on your estimation how long it'll take to make the game, you can estimate how much money you need until the possible paycheck. Remember that it might take a while to get your first earnings from the game itself even when it is already released.

### What if bare minimum is not an option? (some examples)

**Workforce:** The biggest operating expenses come from salaries you need to pay if you have salaried workers. The more experienced and skilled they are, the more you need to pay. This is not necessarily the case if you f. ex. have very flat organisational structure, and the other workers are co-owners.

**Business:** This includes accounting expenses and other.

**Software, hardware and licenses:** All the hardware cost if you don't already have them or you need to replace broken ones. These can be quite expensive investments. It is possible to sell them when you don't need them or rent if it's something you can rent. Software licenses can also cost something (like a monthly subscription) but those are quite minor expenses.

**Office:** This is something you might want to avoid at the start, especially if you don't have a lot of money to start with. Renting an office can add a lot to your running costs.

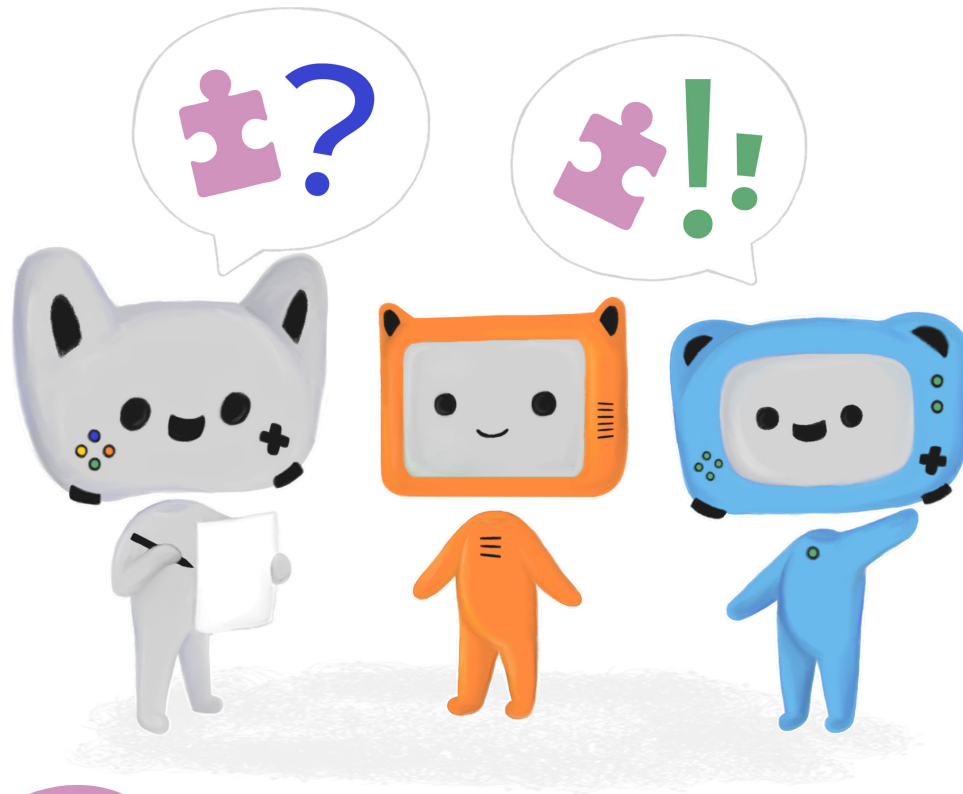
**Outsourcing:** Depending on the deal of course but outsourcing will cost something. Most likely it is quite expensive (labour is unfortunately). It is still very competitive option because you don't need to "hire" anyone and you can target the outsourcing to a specific task you or the team doesn't have the skillset to complete otherwise.

**Game Assets & Plugins:** One way to fasten the progress of your game development is to buy ready-made assets such as 2D or 3D objects, characters, music, sound, UI elements, fonts etc. There is many free once available depending on the game engine you are using but the problem is that many others are using them as well (duh! they are free after all). There is a lot available with reasonable prices. The problem is that those aren't custom made just for you to use. Nevertheless it's still great way to "cut corners" and save a lot of time.

**Scale:** In the end the biggest cost is the scale of the game. The more there is complexity and systems, the more it will take time and effort and the more it will cost. This is the reality and the reasoning why indie games are not as complex as AAA-games.

There are many things, even those you might not think right now, that will cost money. When making the budget keep that in mind that you will probably need a lot more money than your first calculations indicate. Remember that the longer the development takes, the more budget is needed. If you take these to account, you should manage just fine.

## 4. TEAM BUILDING, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



Everything affects to team building and the roles of the members. What kind of game you are going to develop, the scale of the game, how big budget you have, who are available etc. It might sound complex process and it can be just that, but there are few rules that might help a lot.

One way to make the process easier is to know skilled people who want to be part of your indie game studio beforehand, f. ex. your classmates. To start the studio with few reliable people would make the choosing process a lot simpler since you already have people in the project. To know their work morale, skills and attitudes is huge advantage.

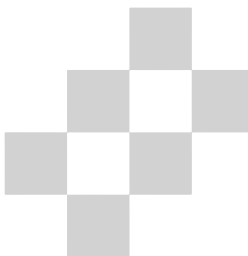
### 4.1 Team Building

When searching potential candidates to the team, you should think these aspects:

- The candidate should bring something to the table.
- Choose those who have the right skillset to get the game forward.
- Choose those who want to learn new things and take responsibilities.
- Who have the right chemistry (don't pick those who can't get along with others).
- Preferably some previous experience.

There are many possible methods to find the good fit to your need.

- People who you know already, know their abilities, work morale and attitude. (friends, classmates etc.)
- Game jams and other events for industry people
- Job advertisements
- Trainees (f. ex. through school)





## 4.2 Roles (and responsibilities)

**Programmer:** The code is the core of the game. All the interviewed professionals agreed that it would be the best to keep the programming in house. This is why the programmer is possibly the most important role. Game programming is very labour-intensive work and the more complexity the game has, the more work-force (or time) you need to complete the game. You can outsource some of the programming, but there is risk to run into many problems if you don't understand all of the code.

**Game designer:** Responsible for leading structure of the game (Systems, game mechanics and gameplay). The one in the middle who needs to communicate with other team members. Designing the game elements like characters, storylines, interactions, levels etc. This role can overlap as the “game designer” is more of an umbrella term than just one “role”. It is still a role every game studio should have. If you have a studio of just one person (you) then you are the designer. Very often in small indie studio the game design responsibilities are either shared with all the other core members or there is one lead designer.

**Graphics/art & Animation:** All games have graphics and depending on the game, a different kind of graphical skills are needed on the team. Graphic artists are responsible for all the visuals on the screen.

**Business/Producer:** It is important to have someone who takes care of the business side. You can outsource some of it (like accounting) but it's still important to have someone who keeps track on how the business is running. Producer is responsible for the budget and economic assessment. Producer also is responsible for the business negotiations f. ex. with publisher.

**Marketing (PR & Community):** Responsible for the marketing side, public relations and community management. The contact between the potential customer and the studio. More of this role in the marketing section.

**Quality Assurance (QA):** Game testing (from alpha to beta to going gold). Makes sure that the game works as intended and communicates the flaws and bugs to the developers.

**“The final word”:** Someone who sees the big picture, keeps track on everything and has the final word. This can be anyone but preferably the CEO, Lead designer or anyone who has a lot of responsibility and eye to understand and keep track of the big plan and its progress. It is important to have that someone who assures everything is on schedule and progress is made.

Here is a great presentation from Don Daglow who has led many different companies (also in video game industry) and have coached CEOs for a long time. In this presentation he talks about the new indie game studio leaders' critical failures and how they could avoid them.

GDC:A Crash Course in Business and Leadership for Indie Game CEO's and GM's by Don Daglow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHbZJeeZ1aw>

## 4.3 Contracts and paperwork

Contracts and paperwork are unfortunately needed when doing business. Legal documents are there to assure shared responsibilities, ownerships (f. ex. intellectual properties) and other legally binding agreements. It might be hard to prove contract breaches and other disputes without proper paperwork. Make sure you have all the paperwork done properly. You should have legal documents of everything. Local business advisor can help you with this.

## 5. MARKET ANALYSIS AND MARKETING

Market analysis and marketing has a lot to do with the sales figures of the product. This is true in the video game market as well. Many of the most selling games of all time had insanely large marketing budgets and extensive campaigns including TV ads and such. The unfortunate truth is that the big publishers have a lot of money, skill and data to build successful marketing campaigns and conduct market analysis. It is pretty much impossible to compete against the industry giants with their strategy. This means you need to use creative strategies, target the marketing, and find inexpensive ways to advertise your game.

### 5.1 Market analysis



Market analysis is very important to conduct to be able to understand what kind of games are selling, what genre is dying and what is trending. Comprehensive market research data can give you valuable information which you can use in planning, marketing and adding features to the game. One of the good examples of market analysis' importance is Erik Johnson's (Infinite Monkey Entertainment) analysis, why his game's sales didn't hit the expectations. The correlating factors have probably changed a bit since the actual analysis was done in 2017 but the overall point is still relevant. Without careful market analysis it is hard to estimate how successful the end-product will be.

GDC: Know Your Market by Erik Johnson (Infinite Monkeys Entertainment): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uy0Dfr-mnUY>

The video is also a great example how you can learn a lot from analyzing the shortcomings.

### 5.2 Marketing

When market analysis is the factual data gathered from (preferably) reliable sources to help you understand the market and where your company and product (game) will position itself, the marketing is the practice where you use that data to do just that. It is pretty much impossible to be successful without marketing. In the end, it is the way to acquaint potential buyers about the product you are launching. If the potential customer doesn't know the product exists, how could it be bought. "It is the practice where the success is made" (Villanen, A. 2021).

It would be recommended to have a marketing expert on the team to handle the marketing since it will be a lot of work. If it is not possible, there is plenty of knowledge about the marketing available on the internet. There are also many courses (also online) you can take if you, or someone in the team wants to learn about it. It is also possible to outsource it by f. ex. getting a publisher to handle all the heavy lifting, but more on the outsourcing possibilities in the next section.

Whether you like it or not, marketing is a big part of the business side of game developing. At first it might not come to mind that it's not necessarily the quality of the game that sells the game. The advertising and communication with potential customer and the process to convince them to buy it is what sells the game.

## 5.3 Basics of Marketing

Basics of marketing are quite easy to understand when broken down to the basic “components”. It is important for anyone working in business to understand how marketing works. There are eight different components or “principles” as they are more commonly called.

**1. Product:** In this case the game you will develop. The overall quality of the product or how “good” it is, is one part of the equation but also how well can you communicate that quality to potential buyer.

**2. Price:** The price composes from the estimate what the potential customers are willing to pay, what other similar games are costing and how much are you able to make profit out of it (the revenue goal/estimate you set).

**3. Place:** In this case meaning the marketplace you are selling your product and how it is displayed there. In video game business this is very important section. You need to be able to stand out from the crows somehow.

**4. Promotion:** This is probably the one people think of when they hear the term marketing. It is the advertising, public relations (PR), sales promotions and all the other types of communications with potential customers.

**5. People:** In the video game business these are the personalities behind the games. Many companies use themselves to market the games. When the devs are communicating with the potential customers it creates trust. Trust is a great way to sell a game that isn't launched yet. This part is also the customer service so patching the bugs and informing the players with possible delays/problems etc.

**6. Packaging:** Isn't probably as important these days as it was 15 years ago. You can think packaging to be more of the visual appearance of the store image/page. Digital stores are the future (and present) in video game business, so the physical packaging is losing its importance. in indie game market they're almost nonexistent since it's just cheaper and more effective to sell games digital form only.

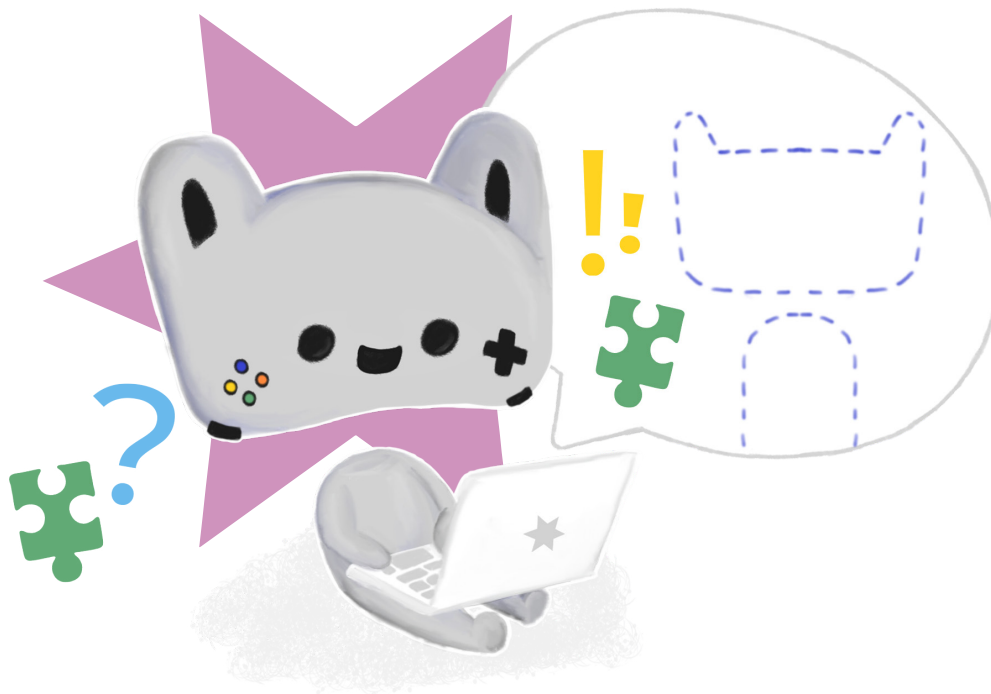
**7. Physical Evidence:** All the communication the customer does with the company. It includes the positive reviews (f. ex. Steam reviews) and those kind of interactions between the customer and the company.

**8. Process:** I think this is one of the most important principles in video game marketing. It's the products development from start to finish and beyond the launch. This is not necessary selling your current game, but it is important in the future projects. If the customers were satisfied with your previous game, they are much more likely to buy the next one.

With these principles you should be able to construct a marketing plan to your game. It won't be easy and there are options for you if you don't want to do it by yourself (f. ex. outsourcing or hiring a marketing person).

## 6. OUTSOURCING

Outsourcing is one of the things that has become more and more relevant to small businesses. It has potential to harness the resources and skills of a workforce you do not have in your company. All the professionals I interview thought that outsourcing is almost always necessary. Otherwise, you would need to either hire someone with the right skillset to do the job or learn it by yourself. The other costs money and takes time to find the right candidate and other takes a lot of your time, which you probably don't have to spare.



The work you want to outsource is highly dependent on the skillset you already have in the team. You could outsource everything that are not part of core competence of the team (Brandt, H. 2021).

### 6.1 Music and Sound

The most common answer from the professionals was music and sound. It is very common to outsource sound and music in game industry since there is many companies and individuals focusing on video game sound and they are probably much more skilled in this era of video game development. It might be very expensive (resource wise) to try to do this on your own if you don't have the equipment, skill or knowhow.

### 6.2 Outsourcing Marketing

Another very common answer from the professionals, was the marketing. There wouldn't be a successful indie game without marketing, and this is the other common skillset that is lacking in starting game studio roster. It is quite resource heavy work so many studios decide to just outsource it. One of the good ways is to find a publisher that would do the heavy lifting in marketing and possibly community managing (Brandt, H. 2021.). Many publishers have focus on marketing and they probably are more experienced to publish and advertise commercial games on the chosen platform than the starting indie devs. Deals can vary a lot and starting indie studios with small portfolios usually need to settle for deals that are "not so great" but without money or skill the marketing and launch can be hard. So this is definitely something to consider.

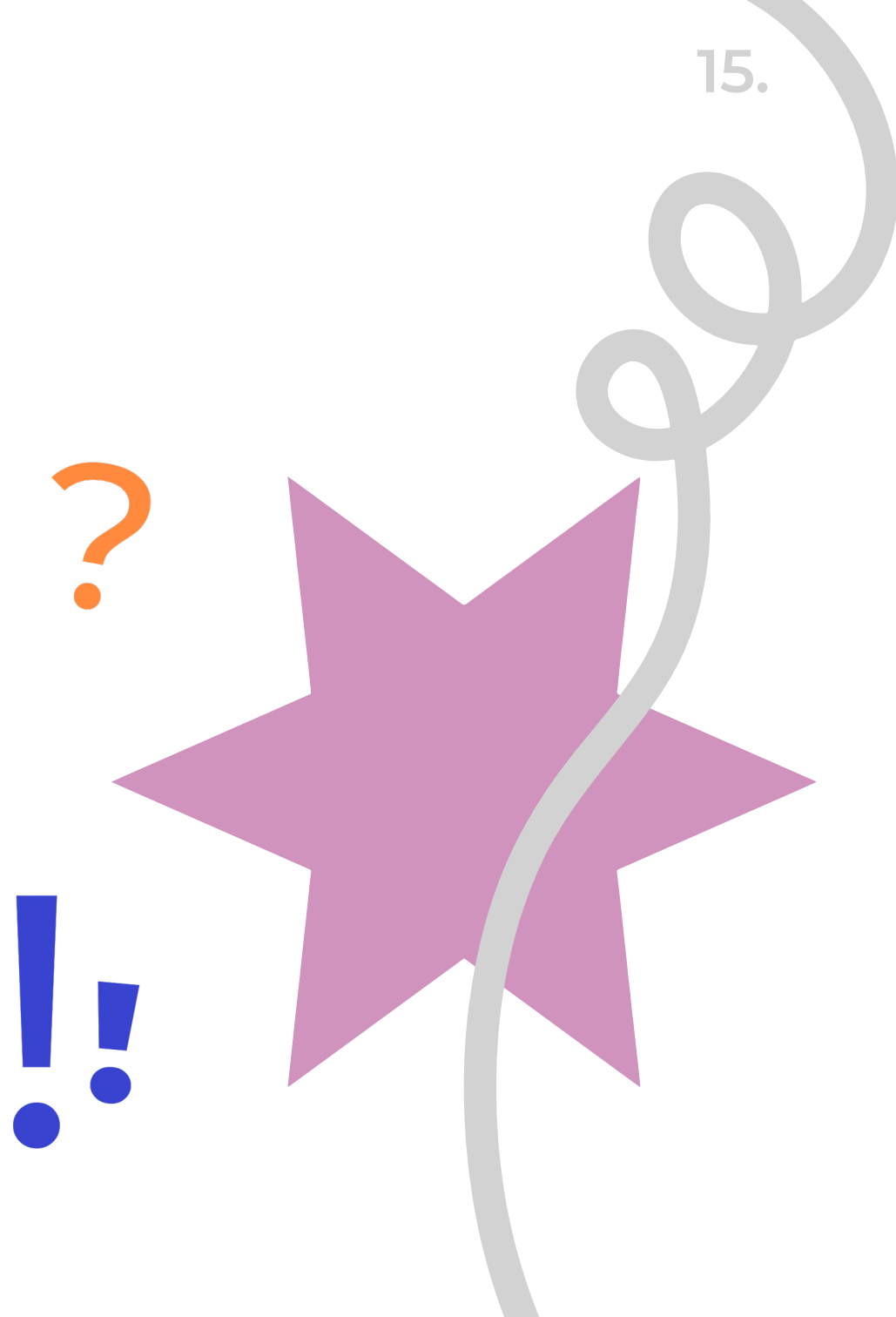
## 6.3 What not to outsource?

Even though you can outsource everything it doesn't mean you should. Previous mentioned core competence is good to keep inhouse but there are also few things that you might not want to outsource because of the risks involved. The first I picked up, was the business side of things. If you don't have business knowhow, you should learn it. It is almost impossible to be successful as a business if you don't know "how to business" (Villanen, A. 2021.) Another big one is the code. You should not outsource the code because it most likely brings many problems with it. It is the core of the game and if you don't know what the code is, there will be many problems to follow which then causes delays.

## 6.4 Tips to successful outsourcing

Even though it might be a good idea to outsource some of the work due the lack of skillset or time, you should still monitor that the work will be done. You will easily run to many problems if you blindly trust in the other party. Have a meeting with them often enough to track where they are going with the project.

One other thing mentioned, was that it is smart to try to negotiate good terms to your side beforehand. For example, to pay after the work is done. There is a risk that the subcontractor doesn't do the job well or in the worst case will just vanish without completing the job. That is why the contracts and "paperwork" are important. (Loikkanen, S. 2021).



## 7. FINANCING

Businesses need money to be able to develop products and services. Rarely young starting business' nest egg alone covers the costs for bigger and longer projects. Then they need to turn into financing.

**Family and friends:** Commonly small start ups get the first financial aid from family and friends. it has low threshold to start from here since you don't necessarily need well planned pitch or collateral securities. They might even get interested and bring something more to the table than just the monetary investment.

**Bank loan:** To get a business loan from bank, you need to fill the business loan application. At this point you need an existing business. Additionally (because it's a bank loan) you need some sort of collateral security. Most of the time it's a person who can "guarantee" your loan if you can't pay it.

**Investors (equity):** Investors are like family and friends but most likely their incentive to invest into your business is selfish. In return to their investment, you most likely need to give a part of your company (and part of the control) to them. To get an investor to be invested in your company, you need to actively seek and pitch your game idea to people. At this point, you need a real business plan and something "concrete" to show f. ex. portfolio or concept art.

**Angel investors (or Business Angels):** are the money source you want to start looking if you don't have family and friends who are willing to invest to your business. There is a small chance that they simply want to help you start your business (f. ex. silent partnership). Even though in this case you would need to relinquish part of your company to the investor, it can give you valuable business knowledge and experience.



**Publisher:** Publishers are investors as any others. They want something in return of their investments. With publisher, you have opportunities to outsource marketing and publishing of the game, which is the thing you want from the publisher. In return, depending on the deal, they might want part of your company, buy your company or part of the revenue.

**Business Stimulus/ Business aid:** You can apply to get a business aid. There are many organizations which give these "grants", local and domestic. Business Finland's aid is one of the domestic ones you can apply. In the local grants the sum you will get (if you get one) is usually small but significant since it's "free money".

**Subcontracting:** Great way to get your game financed is to do subcontracting work. There's possibilities to learn more about the game development along the way. The negative trade off is that it will take a lot of your time. This is still great alternative because you are not giving any revenue shares, company share or control away.

**Competitions:** Probably fairly small amounts of money but competitions are a great way to promote the game. In this stage you probably need to have something real to show (gameplay, trailer etc.)

## 8. BUSINESS MODEL

One of the biggest puzzles for you to solve is to decide what kind of business model you want to use. There are many options to choose from, and you can (and should) be innovative and creative with it. In this video, Charles-Antoine Richard from Ubisoft dismantles the key components of games' business models and how to use that knowledge to decide how you should implement it to your game.

MM20 – Ubisoft - The Right Business Model for Your Game (Charles-Antoine Richard): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPkWjw67FPA>

To put it simple, the only right way to do it is to make money, and wrong way to do it is to lose money. You just need to think, and preferably calculate with estimations, what way is creating enough value for the customers, so they are willing to pay for it, and in the end for you to make money.

Another big component in this is how you communicate and justify that business model to the customer. One good example, which also brings up in the video, is how Grinding Gear Games (GGG) justified the business model of Path of Exile to the customers. The game itself uses the basic free to play model with the monetization being in the microtransactions (MTX). To be able to make seasonal content, they need to sell skins and quality of life improvements to the players to make enough money. If they make enough from the previous game season, they can afford to support the game in the next one. Even though microtransactions are quite controversial, GGG has done great job communicating with the players.



## 9. ADVICE FROM PROFESSIONALS & LINKS TO USEFUL SITES

In this section I wanted to collect advice from professional game developers and entrepreneurs. The advice won't necessarily link straight into the other sections but are nevertheless, still very useful tips from professionals who are already experienced in game developing and business. There is also the "links" section that contains links to useful sites and videos you should look up.

### 9.1 The Advice

#### Marko Haaja (Kuura):

- "You should apply to all grants and such when those are available."
- "Don't rely solely on the money from the game you are developing, because it'll take long time to get anything from it." Subcontracting is great way to make money on the side or even be the main source of revenue, and you might actually learn something valuable."

#### Henri Brandt (Dark Amber):

- "Be sure that the paperwork is done properly"
- "Ask yourself if you are (double)sure what you are doing with the game and the company."
- "Is the IP truly as strong as you think?"
- "You need to have someone in the team who sees the big picture and keeps track on everything at all times."

#### Antti Villanen (Nitro Games):

- "Always have relentless attitude."
- "Don't give up from the first (or 100th) failure."
- "Keep learning new skills."
- "The quicker it is organized as a business, the better."
- "You should clarify all the responsibilities and who has them. It would also be good to have some documentation about them."

#### Jyri Kilpeläinen (Kiemura):

- "Make sure that financial aspect (Initial capital and funding) has been taken care of. You don't want to go bankrupt after half a year of development."
- "Some kind of backup plan is good to have."
- "Be realistic but still ambitious with the plan."
- "Previous experience of releasing/launching a game is valuable beforehand. To understand what kind of a job it is to release a game."
- "Contact network is very important to have before founding a company."

#### Kim Soares (Kukouri):

- "Everything takes more time than you originally anticipated so take care that you have at least double the time and money you think it will take."
- "There's just simply too many games on the market so you need to set the game apart from the others. One way is marketing."
- "You could do a hobby project and preferably you already have, but then it is not business."

#### Salli Loikkanen (Lizard Hazard):

- "Scheduling is a huge challenge, especially with first game so reserve more time than you think you need."
- "Ask help when you don't know what to do. E.g. business support services can help with business related things."

## 9.2 Useful stuff (mostly links to other stuff)

From this link you can find and download a guide to founding a business (yrittajat.fi). Unfortunately, the guide is only in Finnish. The English version of the site still have some articles about entrepreneurship you might find interesting and useful.

Yrityksen perustamisopas by Federation of Finnish Enterprises: [https://www.yrittajat.fi/uutiset/perustamisopas-auttaa-alkuun-ja-listaa-mokat-joita-valttaa-tieda-nama-kuusi-velvollisuutta/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwvr6EBhDOARIsAPpqUPH4UJoE\\_sS-fMdEuq8C7g0csnyPel8FsMtHLpxYl0L4xEBVke9xfFMoaArtCEALw\\_wcB](https://www.yrittajat.fi/uutiset/perustamisopas-auttaa-alkuun-ja-listaa-mokat-joita-valttaa-tieda-nama-kuusi-velvollisuutta/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwvr6EBhDOARIsAPpqUPH4UJoE_sS-fMdEuq8C7g0csnyPel8FsMtHLpxYl0L4xEBVke9xfFMoaArtCEALw_wcB)

Link to English version of Yrittajat.fi: <https://www.yrittajat.fi/en>

Here is a similar yet a bit longer and more detailed guide to start a business from Uusyrytyskeskus. Unfortunately, it is also only in Finnish.

Selko-opas yrittäjyyteen by Uusyrytyskeskus: [https://uusyrytyskeskus.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SUK\\_OPAS2019\\_selkokieli\\_VERKKOON.pdf](https://uusyrytyskeskus.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SUK_OPAS2019_selkokieli_VERKKOON.pdf)

If you have questions about the company forms, behind this link is great information of different possible options available in Finland and what are they for. The site is unfortunately only in Finnish.

Yritä.fi, Yritysmuodot: <https://xn--yrit-ooa.fi/yritysmuodot>

This link is to a video I found quite interesting as a topic. Two leaders/CEOs of two different indie game studios compare their success and different business strategies. I think there is a lot of valuable insight for starting game studio head to gain from this video.

GDC: \$0 to \$1 Million: The Raw Numbers Behind Indie Success (Tanya X. Short [Kitfox Games] & Richard Atlas [Clever Endeavour]): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A4ILaN-WaL4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A4ILaN-WaL4)

This video is a great to get some advice on how to grow your indie studio by Alexis Kennedy who has experience of starting two indie game studios. He is very experienced developer and understands which are the core elements of success and what you need to do to get there. One of the themes of this talk is how to learn from other people's mistakes, not just from your own.

Game Developers Conference (GDC) has great videos from various game dev topics. All the speakers in these videos are professionals and provide great insight of game development process and innovation.

GDC Channel: [www.youtube.com/channel/UC0JB7TSe49lg56u6qH8y\\_MQ](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0JB7TSe49lg56u6qH8y_MQ)



## 10. REASONS TO START YOUR OWN GAME STUDIO (OBSERVATIONS AND OPINIONS)

One of the reasons I wanted to make this guide, was to encourage students to become entrepreneurs. It is such an underrated way to get employment. For many who become a game developer the craft of making games is a passion. The common way to become a game developer is that they started by playing games when they were younger and had ideas how to make them better or different. These “high passion industries”, like the video game industry, often has some byproducts which might not be pleasant ones. I will mention some of them below and the big point of this is that if you have your own company, you have the power to avoid these byproducts if you choose to.





## 10.1 “The Passion Industry”

Unfortunately, big portion of the workforce in the game industry is underpaid, have no stable workplace and need to, very often, work longer days than normal “9 to 5” workers. At least at the time this guide is originally written (2021). This is because many people want to make games and are very passionate about it. Some companies are using this to their advantage so they can “force” the workers to work longer days when needed.

One of the reasons for these is the competition. Game industry is very competitive in many levels. To get a job is very competitive space. To get a “good” job is much more competitive and the higher paid ones are even more so. The companies are competing against each other for the sales figures and the workforce (especially the experienced, skilled ones). It is natural to these “high passion industries” and it is not all negative but for the average worker it can be very stressful environment.



## 10.2 “Crunch Culture”

So, what is crunch? In game industry the estimation of time needed to get the product finished is very often poor. There is simply never enough time. The crunch is the longer period of overtime work or work without days off for a long period of time. It’s used to get the product finished (somewhat) on time to hit the launch window.

This video, and the article following the video link, tells what “crunch” is and how it’s a big topic of early 2020’s in video game industry. The video is quite lighthearted and has a lot of jokes but the message in it is important. The article tells the bullet points of crunch, why it’s used and how it might affect to the employees.

Noodle: The Crunch Culture Conundrum: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS3-iSEwNhs>

Peter Willington (Auroch Digital): Video game crunch: What is it and is it a problem?: <https://www.aurochdigital.com/blog/2020/7/20/what-is-crunch-in-the-video-games-industry>

## 10.3 “The vision”

Most of the game developers drift to this industry from playing games. They play games, and think how they could make one by themselves, maybe even better ones. It needs a certain type of person to be motivated enough to learn all the necessary skills to make finished game. One of the big motivators is strong vision. I personally think that it’s the single most important factors what makes someone successful. There wouldn’t be masterpieces like Half-Life (Gabe Newell & Marc Laidlaw) or Minecraft (Markus “Notch” Persson) if the developers didn’t have a strong vision of what they wanted their games to be. Keep dreaming and thinking big. In the end, dreams of success are the ones that keep us motivated and drive us to overcome the obstacles.

## SOURCES

Here are all the sources listed that was used when researching material to this guide. Some are clearly marked to the text since there is a clear link between them. Some are not, since there is just bits and pieces taken which then formed the overall picture to me. I still want to list every source here because they helped forming the bigger picture.

More material about starting own game company you can find by following Xamk Game Studios.



Ask Gamedev. 2019. The 6 Roles That You Need to Build a Great Indie Dev Team. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EJP-I30iWY>

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GDC. 2017. A Crash Course in Business and Leadership for Indie Game CEO's and GM's. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHbZJeeZ1aw>

GDC. 2018. Intensely Practical Tips for Growing an Indie Game Studio. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDYh2mnDCIM>

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### Interviews:

Interviews were conducted between March 17th and April 15th, 2021. All the interviews were conducted with open ended questions since all the interviewed professionals had different area of expertise and different personal experiences as entrepreneurs in video game development. All the interviewed professionals were contributing their share of valuable insight from their own experiences as industry veterans.

**Thank you all who wanted to share their thoughts and knowledge.**

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