Business of Games

Fall 2018
My Background

Marketer for range of games, studios and projects of different sizes

“Practical Guide to Indie Game Marketing” published by Focal Press
About You

Your class level, interests, background
How many capstone projects / students in class?
Why enrolled
What you’d like to get out of class
Future goals
Tell your friends!
Course Overview

You’re interested in creating games.

This course covers important topics for pursuing a livelihood in games after you graduate.

Different paths available:

- Large publisher
- Funding
- Independent
  - Published by other studio
  - Self published
- Marketing
- Additional business considerations

Lecture style, Q & A, periodic guests planned; may adjust schedule along the way
Class Format

• Varying topic focus per class (may vary some from syllabus outline)
• Periodic guest speakers from industry
• Written assignments, including final
• Quizzes
Course Outline

Week 1 - I wanna make games
Important business considerations

Week 2 - Marketing
Introduction to marketing

Week 3 – Marketing planning

Week 4 – Marketing examples
Course Outline

Week 5 – Business Planning
Revenue model for game/studio
Licensed vs original IP
Game tech

Week 6 – Industry Paths

Week 7 – Veteran’s Day – no class
Course Outline

Week 8 – Business Operations
QA, Team Management, Contracts/Legal, Financials

Week 9 – Platforms / Audiences; Case Studies

Week 10 – Course Conclusion, Final Project Briefing, Wrap Up
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1: Messaging</td>
<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write a game messaging brief – including target audience, positioning, top</td>
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<td>distinguishing characteristics of game, elevator pitch, tagline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 2: Marketing Samples Analysis</td>
<td>Oct 29</td>
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<td>Discuss ways that marketing materials you select are (or aren’t) effective and</td>
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<td>why</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 3: Industry Report</td>
<td>Nov 13</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Select a game industry entity that’s interesting to you and present relevant key</td>
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<td>information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 4: Game Industry Path</td>
<td>Nov 26</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write report about path you’d gravitate to in the industry and why – indie/self</td>
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<td>publishing, publisher, working for medium to larger studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 5: Final Project</td>
<td>Finals week</td>
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<td>Marketing/Business Plan</td>
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<td>Create plan – for your own game concept, or based on an existing released game</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Class participation / extra credit</td>
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Capstone Students

• I strongly encourage students involved with Capstone projects to coordinate first and final class assignments with their Capstone projects – treat this class as preparation for your game launch.

• Those who do this should vary assignment authors and make sure that all team members participate.

• For example, for the final project, have different team members responsible for different sections of the paper.
Grading

• Rubric

• Communications Effectiveness / Presentation

• 1/2 grade deduction per day for assignments turned in late
The Game and Paths to Market

Variety of Avenues

Funding

Bootstrap

External funding - crowdfunding, investors, publisher

Working with or for studio

Different size studios

Staff, contract, publishing agreement

Independent

Leaving publishing path to be determined
Bootstrap
Crowdfunding
Investors
Publisher
Working with or for studio
Independent
Funding

Bootstrap

Personal financing

Friends/family/angels

External funding

Crowdfunding

Investors

Publishers
Crowdfunding

Kickstarter

Indiegogo

Patreon

Fig
Recent Trends

Investors

Institutional investors

Incubators

Individuals / angels

Dev funds – e.g. emerging platforms, technologies

Other - e.g. competitions, non-traditional
Hi. We’re Panic. We make super nice apps for Macs, iPhones, and iPads:

Untitled Goose Game by House House

Something magical happened overnight. The IndieFund helped us get to the goal and we’re now 103% funded :D
FEELINGS: https://fig.co/campaigns/solo

Lost Children

Choice Chamber

twitch
Publishers

**Large Companies:**
EA, Activision, Ubisoft, etc

**Indie:**
Devolver, tinyBuild, Adult Swim, Good Shepherd, Ripstone, Double Fine presents, Team17, Surprise Attack, VersusEvil
Publisher vs Self-Publishing

PROS

CONS
## Publisher vs Self-Publishing

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Co-founder Pete Angstadt shipped indie game Cannon Brawl with different partner and had previously worked at Maxis and on Abzu. Co-founder Michael Peddicord had worked at different game studios.

- Moderate sales for Cannon Brawl (won Activision Independent Games competition, moderate sales)

Started Kingdoms & Castles game shortly after Abzu shipped.

- Game has generated over $212K in funding to date (initial $15K goal)
Game Path Snapshot

Justin Woodward

Staff artist

Kickstarter #1 - fell short ($15K goal)

Kickstarter #2 - exceeded goal by ~$1K

Game signed with Adult Swim publisher, underperformed

Additional projects, including MIX events

Next game exceeded $400K crowdfund goal

Jay & Silent Bob game on Fig (new funding platform, entertainment partner with sizable reach)
Game Path Snapshot

**Hyper Light Drifter**

Independent artist

$645 Kickstarter

(against $27K goal)

Over 365K units on Steam

also console
started as student projects
Working with or for Studio

Work for hire / project work

Can help with studio income while pursuing other projects
Independent

Creating your game

  Full time

  As side project

Determine publishing/distribution at later stage
Game Path Snapshot

Zeboyd Games

ESL instructor and artist/attorney meet on Penny Arcade forums
Side project games published through Xbox
Games establish team’s capabilities and start audience building
Then, new platform releases - most notably Steam
Penny Arcade connection → Rain-Slick Precipice Games
Kickstarted Cosmic Star Heroine project
Important Considerations

Target Audience

Age range / gender

Player type - heavy, regular, occasional

Niche?

Target financials → units/revenues
Important Considerations

Type of Game

Revenue model: Traditional, free to play/in-app-purchases, ad supported, DLC

Price range

Branding

Series considerations

Licensed vs original IP

Game tech
Other Possible Angles / Hooks
Important Considerations

**Game Concept / Gameplay Style**

Articulate core concept and determine possible unique characteristics - USP

Assess quantity of games in genre, recent releases and genre popularity, along with potential for multiple platforms

Seasonality
Get early access to our games...

Vote for which game we make next...

A Virus Named TOM
An infectious action-puzzler

Duskers
Tactical sci-fi roguelike survival crawler

Chess the Gathering
If Chess and Magic: the Gathering had a baby... in a dungeon

The Last Shadow
Simple Stealth Action

Early Access

Early Access

Early Access

Early Access

BUY NOW
Important Considerations

Platform(s) / Channels

Accessibility for publishing/distribution, visibility

Gameplay fit

Tech - multiplatform readiness

Release timing across platforms
Market Review

What games are performing best

Sales charts, player/editorial ratings

Additional research - online, articles, with colleagues
If you want to make games, pitching is important. If you’re not good at it, then get good at it! or identify person on your team who can perform well here.
Deconstructing the Pitch

Your Pitch
- Succinct
- What makes it unique, compelling

Audience / Context
- Different approach with different audiences
  [investors, publishers, press, consumers, show floor]
- Different factors in evaluation

Timing
Pitch Doc

Your game pitch, for presenting to possible partners - for funding, publishing, etc

Why it’s great and they should support it
Pitch Doc

Elevator pitch

- Brief summary statement
- USP - Unique Selling Proposition

Key project details

- Target audience

The team

- Gameplay
- Art / art style
- Planned platforms

Schedule

Budget

- How much money needed (if any) and what expected use of funds

Pitch doc details vary depending on audience
Pitch Structure

From Molly Heady-Caroll, Arcane Circus

• Introduce yourself
• Sum up the game in a few words (AKA: “The Hook”)
• Further elaborate what the game is and what the player will experience
• Which platforms the game is coming out on and when
• Take questions and thank them for their time

http://www.gamasutra.com/blogs/MollyHeadyCarroll/20160401/269268/Pitching_Games_What_Has_Worked_for_Us_So_Far_and_May_Help_YouToo.php
Your Audience / Their Triggers

- Investors
- Publishers
- Press
- Consumers
Delivery

- Enthusiasm
- Energy
- Polish

Practice, rehearse, test, tune, refine
Stage is Critical

From Keith Katz

Some publishers (very few) will invest at design doc level, slightly higher invest at prototype level, and many (especially in F2P mobile) require a Beta/soft launch.

Possibly vertical slice
How To Pitch Your Indie Game

How to pitch your game to a publisher or anyone

You’ve got your game in development, and decided you need a partner to help make it bigger. That’s a smart idea – you want to focus on the game itself and have an experienced partner help you get your creation out in front of as many eyeballs as possible.

This article is meant to help you effectively pitch your game to publishers, journalists, you tubers, streamers, or anyone you meet. (I don’t like to use the word “publisher”, but let’s just use it instead of a partner that helps you make your game more successful — it’s shorter!)

Elevator Pitch:

You’re in an elevator. I’m standing there in a stupid orange hat. We have 6 seconds before the floor is hit. I ask you about what game you’re working on. Practice that reply.

Being as cheesy as “Mario Kart: As a 2D Platformer” works. It gives me an idea of what the game is, and sparks conversation. “Does it work online?” I’d ask, and if you tell me it’s a competitive online platformer — we might just have a Speed Runner.

Think about what makes your game interesting. Sometimes being generic and referencing other games works. “Have you ever had loud neighbors? (everyone will nod or say yes). Did you ever want to stab them? That’s the game!” and you might have a Party Hard.

Notice how the pitch is very similar to what is in the final game pitch to the public and journalists. It needs to have context. “Fishing with Machine Gun” for “Ridiculous Fishing”. “A Math Puzzler About Slicing Sheep in Half for Divide By Sheep.”

Make sure to practice this in front of the mirror, say it loud and clear. Don’t go deep into explaining the mechanics, just get people interested. Be memorable. It helps if you’re memorable as well. It’s e-mail, just add something personal to it – a gift of you doing something, or even better a good gift of the game.

Description

Don’t get deep into the story behind the game, and especially don’t write a novel-sized text. Use short, easy to scan bullet points why you think your game is great. Do something to stand out there. Be clean, spot-on.

Notice how I’m writing this article? Short sentences. Nothing complex. It’s easy to read because I don’t use long sentences, where the structure gets complex, because I write very easy, and also in the beginning of the article I mention your pitch should be great and short, but this sentences is already getting too complicated and dumb and at this point the reader will just drop off. Stop doing what I just did here in this paragraph. Actually do this instead:

- Online multiplayer FPS
- Built in Unity
- Using Photon Engine
- Target platform PC, works well with controller
- Tricky Link
- Need help with marketing, financing
- Inspired by Tribes

Keep it simple. If I like what I’ve seen so far, including the gif and trailer, and the brief description that I’ll spend about 10 seconds scanning, we will get on the call to talk about what you actually need, your ideas on how to release it, etc.

If you need funding, explain why and what it’ll be used for.

If you released games before, that’s a huge encouragement — we know you can complete projects.

Getting a build? Great!

Make a build that has a vertical slice of gameplay. Something that shows off why your game can be fun. Think of it like this — if this build was at a convention, where thousands of people walk by, how can you make them interested in picking up the controller, to fully understand the mechanics, and to continue playing?

http://www.tinybuild.com/how-to-pitch-your-game
If you've just given your game pitch and it seems to have failed... wait a beat, then say "...but with Zombies."
Tim Schafer credits the concept of the Amnesia Fortnights to film director Wong Kar-Wai. During the long, three-year filming of Ashes of Time, Wong had taken some of his actors and film crew to Hong Kong to shoot footage for fun, ultimately resulting in the films Chungking Express and Fallen Angels. These were some of the director’s more famous films.
Examples of Game Pitches

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWUq8HHMLC0&index=3&list=PLlhLvue17Sd7riA8vb8h1kP3jCFS_qtTM
“After careful evaluation of current market place realities and underlying economic considerations, we've decided that this was not the appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC”
Students of Marketing / Business

- Favorite products assessment
  - What’s their approach to marketing? (messaging, advertising, key art, social media)
  - What’s resonated with you and why
- What’s an unexpected product that you’ve tried and why
  - How did you hear about it?
  - Word of mouth can be powerful – ways to pursue
  - Other channels
Reading Materials

“Practical Guide to Indie Game Marketing”, Focal Press - Amazon

Gamasutra

PixelProspector.com

TheIndieMarketer.com
Instructor / TA Info

Course website: https://courses.soe.ucsc.edu/courses/cmpm179/Fall18/01

Email address: jdreskin@ucsc.edu

Office Hours: E2-389, Mondays 3 pm to 4 pm

TA: Melanie Dickinson, mldickin@ucsc.edu

TA Office Hours: E2 393, Fridays 2 pm to 4 pm
For next class

Read chapters 1, 2 and 5