

Developing a Marketing Mix for Independent Game Developers

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<p>The independent game industry is a rapidly growing and evolving industry, with much to offer to both gamers and developers. What makes a critical difference whether a game will succeed or not is how much time and effort have been put into marketing. Independent game developers are known for their superb technical skills, but unfortunately they often do not know much about how and when to start their marketing efforts.</p> <p>This thesis will offer an international marketing mix, pointing out the most important elements that should be learned about and focused on. It is intended to serve as a guideline for independent game developers who are just starting their online marketing journey and who want to know what they should take into account when creating their marketing strategy, as they attempt market their PC game.</p> <p>The marketing mix will cover a number of important topics, including the desired qualities of an independent game, crowd funding, social media channels, community management, pricing strategies, online tools, and tips on how to contact the press.</p> <p>The empirical part of the thesis consists of a Facebook discussion in the Indie Game Developers Group, which took place on February 25th, and the IGDA (International Game Developers Association) monthly gathering, which took place on February 11th.</p>	
Keywords independent game industry, marketing mix, PC games, inbound marketing, social media channels	

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1 Introduction

In my thesis I will go through all the important elements an independent game developer should take into account when making their own marketing plan. This includes everything from creating a landing page and a development blog to building and managing a community of people interested in the independent game and its progress.

I chose this topic because the game industry is something I am very passionate about, and I find the independent game industry to be a very new and promising industry in the close future.

As I eventually found out, there are not many official and up-to-date publications on independent game marketing. So I searched for the most vital information that are scattered all over the internet, and brought the most relevant and recent tips and resources together in this thesis.

1.1 Independent game industry

David Houghton (2014) writes on his article about how independent games have become the new cool thing. A great number of digital distribution and crowd funding platforms are making independent games a huge part of both PC and console gaming.

An AAA game is a game title developed by a large studio with a massive budget to use on both game development and marketing. These games are usually produced on the major platforms (Xbox 360, PS4 and PC) and expected to sell at least one million titles (Schultz). When enormous amounts of money are spend on developing a game, the game will turn into a product with the sole purpose of appealing and satisfying as many people as possible (Hartup, 2013). I think this is one of the main reasons why so many of today's AAA games tend to be franchises of long-running series.

Only one out of the ten bestselling video games of 2013 is an original title (The Fiscal Times, 2013).

1. Grand Theft Auto V (26,75 million units sold worldwide)
2. Call of Duty: Ghosts (12,71 million units sold worldwide)
3. FIFA 2014 (8,11 million units sold worldwide)
4. Pokémon X&Y (7,64 million units sold worldwide)
5. Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag (4,11 million units sold worldwide)
- 6. The Last Of Us (original title with 3,69 million units sold worldwide)**
7. Animal Crossing: New Leaf (3,35 million units sold worldwide)
8. Tomb Raider (3,18 million units sold worldwide)
9. Monster Hunter IV (3,05 million units sold worldwide)
10. Bioshock Infinite (2,89 million units sold worldwide)

I believe that the amount of fans of these franchise series worldwide is already massive enough, that producing more of these kinds of games is just a smart and desirable thing to do. These games are most likely where the large studios get the majority of their profit from, so it is understandable that the main focus is on these already known major game titles, instead of unfamiliar and completely new games with a higher risk of failure.

And this is what makes independent games so different and needed. The developers of these games have free hands to do whatever they like. They are not afraid of trying and inventing completely new ways to play or tell a story. And just totally failing at it will not be the end of the world nor cost anyone millions (Kuchera, 2011).

Unlike developers working on AAA games, no one is telling independent game developers what to do and how to do it. What these developers offer through their games is something personal and unique that larger studios just simply cannot match, as well as a closer and more personal relationship with their online community (Kuchera, 2011).

It seems like the independent game industry is constantly growing bigger and better, and that large game companies will soon struggle to survive with only their AAA titles, and will someday be forced to try something new.

1.2 Objective and limitations

My thesis objective is to create a set of guidelines for independent game developers through a marketing mix brought together from tips and guides from various sources.

An international approach was taken when doing my research as the game industry is and always has been a very international one. My marketing mix will be mainly targeted for independent game developers and specifically for those who make PC games and want them to be known and successful.

1.3 Research methods and key resources

This is a practise-based thesis that can serve as a guideline for independent game developers who wish to have their game known among PC gamers and who need help with how to get started with marketing. In my thesis I used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to build up and analyse the key elements of a marketing mix for independent game developers. Quantitative research was be used to support my final conclusions through a Facebook group discussion and an interview question to one of my main source of references, Emmy Jonassen.

Throughout my thesis, I will be using the zipper model to explain relevant theories as they come along. Instead of theoretical parts forming an independent part on the thesis, they will be introduced right before explaining how they show in the research.

Because my thesis will have a high focus on online marketing, most of my resources will naturally come from the internet, as I came to the conclusion that it was the right place to look for the newest and most currently updated information. My resources will mainly include professional marketing blogs, articles, recorded presentations and

seminars, as there are currently very few books written specifically for independent game developers about marketing.

Another reason why I decided to focus on material found online is that pretty much everything online related is constantly and rapidly changing, and most of the information printed on online marketing books simply can't be used if they are over three years old.

I participated to the Finnish monthly IGDA (International Game Developers Association) Gathering that was held in Helsinki on February 2nd, in hope of hearing personal views on marketing from real game developers. This was a success, and I have used parts of the discussions as a support to my final conclusions.

I also follow an international independent developer group, called Indie Game Developers, on Facebook, where they often have marketing-related questions and conversations. I also follow the IGDA Finland group, where they inform their members about all game-related events and conferences held in Finland, as well as ask questions regarding marketing and game development.

Emmy Jonassen (LinkedIn, 2014a) is a marketing professional from Boston who has a blog called IndieGameGirl. In her blog she offers a wide amount of free marketing resources for independent game developers. In October 2013 Jonassen held a presentation on marketing indie games on a \$0 budget at Konsoll 2013 which was recorded and can be found on YouTube. She gives some really good advice in both her blog and the presentation, and because of her long experience with marketing and the independent game industry, I will be referring to her quite a bit.

2 Applying the 5P's of Marketing Mix

To explain the vital parts of the marketing mix for independent game developers, I am using the famous 4P's (product, place, price & promotion) created by E. J. McCarthy in 1960 (MindTools). In addition I will be adding a fifth P for Press, as it can and should play a huge role in the independent game marketing.

As stated by Chris Hecker, "Marketing is part of making the game. You have to be good at it and know how to talk about your game." (Hsu, 2012.)

2.1 Product: Independent game

Hundreds of new independent games are released daily, so to get noticed the developer should try to offer something new and exciting that no one has ever seen before. This is usually what gamers expect and look for when searching for independent games.

Erik Johnson (2013), a PR and marketing professional from Arcen Games, advises independent game developers to be creative with their games, and to capitalize the things that make them special. These things can be anything from the gameplay and design to the story and setting. The key is to be very unpredictable, the opposite of an AAA game.

Dan Hsu (2012) wants independent game developers to pay attention to details. Even if the game is amazing, the first thing people notice is the name of the game, and the logo. When there are a large number of games and their logos put together on the same page, people tend to click on the most interesting looking and sounding logos and names first. This is why it is so important to come up with a very catchy name for the game and to create an attractive logo for it (Hsu, 2012). They should both clearly stand out from the rest of the games, to induce customers to check it out. The logo and other small thumbnails of the logo should always be very clear and readable, especially if they make it to the Steam store (Hsu, 2012). This might sound very obvious, but it is surprising to see how many forget this little simple thing, and fail only because

their logo is unreadable and blurry and thus gives a very bad and unprofessional mental image of the game and its creator to others.

2.1.1 The advantages & challenges

Levinson and Gibson (2010, xiii) point out how smaller teams can use the size of their competitors, in this case the AAA companies, against them by being fluid, creative and genuine. Independent game developers should definitely take advantage of this.

Working alone or in small teams can be challenging and slow work, but not having a deadline gives the developers a chance to take their time to make improvements, try a variation of things until they are completely happy with their product. When working for themselves, the game becomes personal and the motivation to come up with a perfect game, after spending so many hours on creating it, is very high.

Not having a deadline might also have its downsides, though. It can be easier to give up on the game, or never have it published because the developer believes that the game is never good enough. The developer should have high self-discipline to survive the long journey of creating the game and constantly dealing with the marketing side as well.

Independent game developers do all or at least most of the work themselves. Just coding the game is time consuming, so the developer might find himself or herself struggling at first when trying to fit marketing into their already busy time schedule. Learning proper time management will help create routines that will then make it easier to keep up with the progress of both marketing and the developing of the game.

Marketing is extremely important for independent game developers, as it can make all the difference whether the developer will actually get paid something for all the hard work they've done, and whether or not they get as many people as possible to play their game.

2.1.2 Crowdfunding: Kickstarter and Collective

When an independent game developer believes that he or she has an excellent idea for a marvellous game, but needs funding to make it happen, there are a few possible platforms to go to. Kickstarter would be the most popular one.

Kickstarter is a crowdfunding platform that focuses on funding creative projects from movies, art and music, to games, design and technology (Kickstarter, 2014). Seven out of the ten largest successfully completed Kickstarter projects have been different types of games, so it is no surprise Kickstarter has always been held in high value among game developers (Wikipedia, 2014a).

Collective is a recently launched (January 27th) platform from Square Enix and Indiegogo where developers can post their game ideas, and the community will give them feedback and be the judge of whether the idea is worth funding. This is how Collective differs from Kickstarter. Developers are only trying to see if gamers would be interested in supporting them and their game idea, before starting to seriously produce anything. If the idea receives enough supporters, Square Enix will determine how much money is needed to produce it and whether the developer is capable of doing this him- or herself. After this, gamers will be given a chance to send money to the project through crowd funding site Indiegogo (Collective, 2014).

Jonassen (2012c) shares a Kickstarter Campaign Timeline on her blog to help and guide independent game developers who are looking to get their game funded. The timeline consists of four phases: Build, Tease, Launch and Update.

The Build phase begins at least 3 months before the actual Kickstarter launch. The objective is to promote the game and build a fanbase that can later help spread the word when it is finally time to launch the Kickstarter Campaign (Jonassen, 2012).

The Tease phase starts three to four weeks before the launch. This is when the indie developer should start announcing to his or her fanbase, media and other key influenc-

ers about the coming Kickstarter campaign. This will also give time for interested editors and bloggers to publish their story on time (Jonassen, 2012).

As soon as the page goes live on Kickstarter, the Launch phase begins. Kickstarter gives developers an option of doing a 30 days or 60 days campaigns. Jonassen recommends the 30 days campaign, as it has a 35% chance of success. This is much higher than for those lasting 60 days. The primary marketing objective in this phase is driving traffic to the Kickstarter page from social media channels, blogs, forums, e-mails etc. (Jonassen, 2012).

During the final Update phase, it is important to communicate with people who have given money through Kickstarter and appreciate them and keep them excited and updated throughout development (Jonassen, 2012).

2.2 Place: Landing page, development blog and distribution channels

The two most important sites for an Independent game developer to have for his or her game are a landing page and a development blog. The landing page simply works as a site that encourages gamers to buy the game right there and then (Jonassen, 2013d).

A development blog on the other hand is a channel to keep fans informed with the latest news on the progress or possible new game updates. It is also a place where fans can leave feedback and have instructive discussions with the developer (Johnson, 2013).

2.2.1 Landing page

Jonassen (2013d) explains that a landing page is the place where visitors are turned into happy customers. The only purpose of the page is to get visitors to click on the call-to-action (CTA) button to purchase or download the game. This is why a landing page should not have any navigation, as the most important content is already placed on the main page, and the whole idea is to make it as easy as possible for visitors to purchase

the game. The only exception is having a company logo on the top left, linking to the company's website.

According to Jonassen (2013d), a landing page should begin by illustrating what makes the game so good and fun to be worthy of being purchased. Showing a video of the gameplay is a must, and offering the potential customers a chance to try out the game before buying is also recommended.

Because the CTA button is the key element on the landing page, it is extremely important to make it stand out from the rest of the page. Jonassen (2013d) suggest using the right colours, size and shape, and the use of negative space around it, to make this happen.

The landing page should have an attention grabbing headline, which will further encourage visitors to click on the purchase button. There should also be social sharing icons to make it easy for the customers to share the page. This is also the easiest way to gain some free marketing from the visitors (Jonassen, 2013d).

A trailer video is a must have, as well as five or more high resolution screen shots of the game. The screen shots should also have short descriptions on each, to give them some context and make them more interesting (Jonassen, 2013d). Another helpful content suggested by Jonassen (2013d) is to have a list of benefits of all the main cool and unique things the game has to offer. This is another way of giving the visitors a reason to buy the game.

Jonassen (2013d) recommends adding any testimonials and reviews on the landing page as well, if only possible. The page needs to have contact and press kit buttons and development blog links, to make it easy for writers to contact the developer and have everything they need for writing a story easily available.

2.2.2 Development blog

A development blog serves as a place where the developer can share the progress of the game, opinions or just ask for feedback. Jonassen (2013d) also points out how games with a development blog have 55% more traffic than those without one.

A development blog only works if it is updated frequently, at least once a week. It should have plenty of images, to make it look more appealing to the visitors. There should also be social sharing buttons available as well as an RSS feed and email subscription, to make it easier for the visitors to follow the blog and come back whenever there is a new post or update (Jonassen, 2013d).

Erik Johnson encourages giving open development blogs a try. This gives the visitors a chance to get involved early on in development by giving feedback on alpha or beta versions of the game, and it gives them a reason to keep coming back and feeling needed and appreciated (Johnson, 2013).

2.2.3 The importance of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The Search Engine Optimization is the process which affects the visibility and ranking of a website in a search engine's search (Wikipedia, 2014d). To properly benefit from the search engine optimization, Jonassen (2012b) lists the three critical things to keep in mind at all times when writing to the blog:

- Write to the intended audience.
- Write original posts.
- Make no spelling and grammatical errors. (Google will rank the site lower in its ranking algorithms for bad grammar and spelling).

Choosing the right keywords is important. Jonassen (2012b) recommends using Google Keyword Tool to test and find out which are the keywords that have the best amount of monthly searches and are not too competitive. One primary keyword and two or three secondary related keywords should be selected to be spread on the blog.

The placement of the keywords plays a huge role in the SEO. Jonassen (2012b) lists the most important places to put them in her blog:

- **Blog Title:** The first three words in the blog's title are the most important to Web crawlers. It should be no more than 70 characters long.
- **Title Tag:** Used for the post's title. Website's name should not be included in the title tag.
- **URL:** The blog's title should also be the same as its URL.
- **Meta Description:** A short, 160 characters or less, summary of the post containing a primary keyword.
- **H Tags** (headlines and sub-headlines): The primary keyword should be used at least once.
- **First Paragraph:** The closer the primary keyword is to the beginning of the first paragraph, the better.
- **Blog's Body:** To make it into decent ranking, the blog needs to have at least 500 words, and within these words, the primary keyword has to appear at least three times, and secondary keywords at least twice.
- **Images:** Secondary keywords should be used in image file names, and each image needs a descriptive alt tag.
- **Links:** Instead of using anchor texts like "read more" and "watch video" for the links, the developer should use the opportunity to insert a keyword in them, e.g. "Read more about [keyword 1]".

Another clever advice from Jonassen (2012b) is to set up Author Rank. This is what Google uses to connect the content and the writer's Google+ profile. It helps Google determine the writers' Web authority and how he or she should be placed in Page Rank.

2.2.4 Measuring ROI to make improvements

Jonassen (2013c) encourages performing regular testing on the landing page, blog and other social media, to analyse the data that is available and improve based on outcome.

Everything can be tracked and measured on the internet, so it only makes sense to take advantage of it.

Google Analytics offers a standard account for free, and is one of the most popular tools online to measure the advertising ROI (Return On Investment) and provide digital analytics of the website's traffic and traffic sources (Google Analytics, 2014). There are also plenty of other free web analytics services available, that developers might want to check out as well.

It is important for the developer to know where most of their visitors come and don't come from, to know which social media channels, for example, need some changes. Or if there is a certain target group that the developer believes will most enjoy the game, he or she will want to know how well they've grabbed this group's interest and whether there is a need to expand their promotion area by searching for new forums and communities and the like.

2.2.5 Distribution channels

There are quite a few sites where indie game developers can make their game available for purchase or just have it there for people to play for free. The biggest PC game distribution site is Steam. It distributes games and other related media from small independent developers to larger AAA companies (Steam, 2014a).

If independent game developers want to have their game on Steam, they must submit it on Steam Greenlight, where the players will vote for the games they want to see getting published on Steam (Steam, 2014b). Having a functioning marketing plan and an amazing game is the key to success once again. Steam has over 3000 games, and over 75 million active users (Blue & Powers, 2014). It was estimated in October 2013, that 75% of all purchased games that were downloaded for the PC were through Steam (Cliff, 2013).

The next best thing is Desura, which is the home for all the failed greenlighted Steam games. It has a primary focus on independent games and it's not a bad second choice

after not making it on Steam. Desura has close to 2000 games and a community of over 10 000 members (Desura, 2014).

Other smaller distribution channels to take in considerations are:

- Game Jolt (www.gamejolt.com): Has over 6000 games that are free to play.
- Games for Gamers (www.g4g.it): Another distribution channel for free to play games, with more than 4000 games available.
- Buy Some Indie Games! (buysomeindiegames.com): A small digital distribution channel where many greenlighted games go after failing on Steam.
- Indie City (store.indiecity.com): A distribution channel to sell indie games. Currently has around 600 games in store.

Another great way for an independent game developer to get his or her game out there is by participating in various indie bundles. A bundle is a collection of six or so games that are sold together for a substantial discount. The ones worth checking out are:

- The Humble Bundle (www.humblebundle.com)
- The Indie Gala (www.indiegala.com)
- Indie Royale (www.indieroyale.com)
- Groupees (www.groupees.com)
- Big Bad Bundle (www.bundledragon.com/bundle/bigbadbundle/bigbad)
- Bundle Stars (www.bundlestars.com)
- Bundle In A Box (www-bundle-in-a-box.com)
- Indie Game Bundles (www.indiegamebundles.com)
- Flying Bundle (www.flyingbundle.com)
- Indie Game Stand (www.indiegamestand.com)
- Blink Bundle (www.blinkbundle.com)
- Pay What U Want (www.paywuw.com)

2.3 Promotion: Social media channels and building and managing the community

Levinson and Gibson (2010, 52) describe the perfect social media marketer as someone who will only use their influence online to positively build up people or create change. And they want marketers to remember to thank and recognize those who help or promote them without any expectation of a returned favor. Being humble and remembering to publicly acknowledge that the position the independent game developer was hoping for was earned through the help and support of those around him or her.

Because people absorb information differently, Levinson & Gibson (2010, 24) suggest sharing the business information and brand story in various formats, i.e. in

- customer testimonials
- customer Tweets in the form of a blog entry
- podcasts (downloadable MP3/audio files)
- product demonstrations in video format (trailers).
- live chat with fans, community
- forums and FB pages for customers to share info about you

“The best medium is the one your customer likes. Use multiple media.” (Shane Gibson Tweet, 229.)

Levinson and Gibson (2010, 9) emphasize on being transparent in social media. They say that the keys to social media marketing are empathy, truth and integrity, and that trust and loyalty can be only build through transparency. What is meant with “transparency” is by only posting true and accurate things online, being very open about business practices and policies, and just by being their true self. Making an emotional and personal connection with their customers and community is a huge advantage that bigger companies don’t get to make.

Levinson and Gibson (2010, 29) encourages making everything easy for people to share. They remind to add one-click social bookmarking function to the blog and to

keep in mind that embedded videos on websites are almost impossible to share with other people.

2.3.1 Social media channels

Guy Kawasaki (Levinson & Gibson 2010, x) mentions some of the main challenges that people face in social media, and they are:

- Choosing the right tools and knowing how to use them effectively.
- Finding the right target markets.
- Building community and “raving fans”.
- Measuring ROI.

This is when we run into inbound and guerrilla marketing, as they walk hand in hand with social media marketing.

A HubSpot article (HubSpot, 2013) describes inbound marketing as something that pulls people toward the product by creating quality content specifically designed to appeal the dream customers. It emphasises on sharing useful content and valuable information that will keep customers coming back for more. This requires having a blog and other social media channels, and putting a human face on the brand or product. They are also meant for interacting with your audience and answering their questions (HubSpot, 2013).

Another key factor on inbound marketing according to HubSpot’s article (HubSpot, 2014) is the element of delight. Surprising the customers with extra content and other unexpected material helps to further make the happy customer base into happy promoter.)

Seth Godin explained at Inbound 2013 how mass marketing is slowly dying, as it is aimed for average people. These days being average is not something most of us want to be, so that is when inbound marketing comes in. The internet, which unlike the tel-

evision, was never invented for mass marketing purposes, so now the new trend is targeting smaller audiences, and trying to please only the right target group. There is no “average” on the internet. The internet is full of choices and people will go and find the perfect group for him or her. Trying to please everyone is not going to work and is not even suggested anymore (Godin, 2013).

Jonassen (2013c) confirms in her blog that, especially for indie developers, inbound marketing is the most affordable on long-term way to go.

”Guerrilla marketing was and is about using unconventional means to achieve conventional goals. It’s about using creativity, innovation, community, and relationships instead of big budgets to achieve marketing objectives.” (Levinson & Gibson 2010, xii.) The guerrilla marketing is very similar to inbound marketing, but with a slightly larger focus on the creativity and innovation side of marketing.

Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter are a must have for anyone wants to build an online presence. LinkedIn and Google+ are also just as important to gain trust and credibility from the audience. All social media channels should be regularly updated, to give visitors a reason to keep coming back (Jonassen, 2013). This will be a bit time-consuming, but it is part of the inbound marketing, and will be worth it in the end.

What separates social media from traditional marketing is the possibility to openly have discussions with the community. All public and private comments and questions should be answered quickly if only possible (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 53).

A Google Plus profile and a Facebook page are engagement pages with pictures and videos and should also have the contact information available (Jonassen, 2013). The independent game developer should post updates and links to these pages, whenever something new is uploaded on their YouTube channel or if a new post is made on the development blog.

Levinson & Gibson (2010, 67) suggests creating a more private Facebook Group for the most eager fans. This is a way to even further deepen relationships with the community and making the true fans feel more appreciated. Same advice applies to Google Plus and its private Circles.

A Twitter has similar functions to the Facebook page but focuses more on short updates and sharing pictures and links to relevant sites. It is also a perfect channel for discussion.

Jonassen (2013) says that when there are no new daily updates to inform the community about, the developer should find something else to share on his or her social media channels that might interest the audience. This could be a personal opinion on something independent game related topic, an interesting article or a new indie bundle that should get everyone's attention. It can be pretty much anything from a silly picture to a serious news article, as long as it will be entertaining for that specific audience.

LinkedIn is to show people that the independent game developer is a real person and will give people more detailed information on his background and qualifications.

The independent game developer should definitely have a YouTube channel to upload video material of the game and its progress. Another growing trend seems to be vlogging, which gives a more personal touch to communicating with the audience. But the most important video material on the YouTube channel should be the final trailer of the game (Jonassen, 2013).

According to Jonassen's research (2013), most of the top 10 video game trailers are at the most one and a half minute long. This short trailer should focus only on the best material available and a lot of gameplay footage. Setting the mood with music and sound effects will help to keep the viewer's attention. Jonassen states that the very first seconds of the video game trailer are the most crucial, as they will determine whether the viewers will be hooked to watch the rest of the trailer, or whether they will skip the trailer to find something more interesting to watch. Jonassen explains (2013) how the

most attention grabbing game trailer intros start with a short story line that keeps the viewer interested until the end. And she reminds that the game trailer should always end with a call to action, where viewers are directed to where the game can be purchased or downloaded.

Adam Berke (2013) is an online advertising industry expert who points out in his article how so many of the trends in digital advertising have slowly crossed into the mainstream. This will keep happening as the digital advertising is still quite new and keeps evolving. Everyone should keep themselves updated on the current and possible future trends to be able to stand out and compete of the attention with the rest of the world.

2.3.2 Social and news submission newtworks

The amount of game reviews and news sites on the internet is enormous. The independent game developer can try to spread the word of his or her game by getting a review out on a game blog or a game news site, as well as through a game related YouTube channel. Jonassen (2012a) also strongly advises to upload all press releases to Games Press (www.gamespress.com) as the editors sometimes go there to search for new stories.

I've listed the top 4 most popular video game websites (eBizMBA, 2014) with an overwhelming amount of over 10 million monthly visitors. These numbers are from March 2014:

1. IGN: 17 500 000 monthly visitors
2. GameFAQs: 15 500 000 monthly visitors
3. GameSpot: 14 000 000 monthly visitors
4. Kotaku: 10 000 000 monthly visitors

IGN is an entertainment site that offers news on video games, music and movies (IGN, 2014). GameFAQ is mostly known for game FAQs and walkthroughs for video games, but also has a database for game reviews (Wikipedia, 2013). GameSpot is the largest gaming website focusing more on game news, reviews and previews

(GameSpot, 2013). Kotaku counts as a blog, but does the same as GameSpot, offering game news and reviews to its readers (Wikipedia, 2014b).

There are a great number of other game related news websites and I've made an updated list of all the active and relevant sites that an independent game developers should check out when searching for the right websites he or she would like their game review to appear on. The list can be found in the attachments.

Getting reviewed in one of the big game news sites will usually get the developers game reviewed on other big game news sites as well (Kuchera, 2011). This is why it is so important to do research on who the developer should e-mail about his or her game. Getting a review on one of these sites is a grand success, so this is why a good amount of time should be spent on the press release and e-mails to the editors.

There are also a huge amount of game blogs that the independent game developer should consider asking for a review from. It is most likely easier getting a review out on a "smaller" game blog than in the big gaming news sites, and the developer should try to spread the news about his or her game in as many places as possible.

I've listed some of the active game review blogs that might be of interest to the independent game developers:

- Digitally Downloaded (www.digitallydownloaded.net)
- Erratic Gamer (www.erraticgamer.com)
- Free Gamer (www.freegamer.blogspot.fi)
- Gaming Momentum (www.gamingmomentum.com)
- RGDC (www.rgcd.co.uk)
- Square Tetromino (www.tetromino.wordpress.com)
- Wraithkal's Indie Gaming Corner (www.wraithkal.info)
- Indie Retro News (www.indieretronews.com)
- Indie Game Enthusiast (indiegameenthusiast.blogspot.fi)

A newer form of marketing has risen with YouTube and its famous YouTubers with millions of subscribers. For example Felix Kjellberg (known as PewDiePie), is a video game commentator with currently over 25 million subscribers. He uploads entertaining YouTube videos of him playing different games, both independent and AAA on his channel.

If the independent game developers game is fun and interesting enough for Kjellberg to make a video about, it will most likely bring instant fame to the game. I believe most of his subscribers who watch him play, do get tempted to download or purchase the same games after seeing how much fun Kjellberg had playing the game.

In January 27, Kjellberg uploaded a funny gameplay video called “FLAPPY BIRD – DONT PLAY THIS GAME!” where he would play the game and get extremely frustrated and angry at the bird because the game was so hard to play. This video today (March 25th) has over 15 million views, and the sales of Flappy Bird skyrocketed in February where the Vietnamese independent game developer of the game, a 28-year-old Dong Nguyen, was earning an estimated \$50 thousand a day (Kushner, 2014). It is hard to believe this would just be a funny coincidence. In addition, the game was also much talked about on various social media channels, especially Twitter.

Another place where the independent game developer should be very active is on Independent game communities. These are great and useful places to start making connections and getting help and feedback on the game.

Indie Statik (www.indiestatik.com) is an independent game journalism community that wants to support independent game developers and help them with whatever they can. Indiegame Forum (www.forums.indiegamer.com) is also a large independent game community supporting independent game developers.

2.3.3 Community management

Buying attention doesn't work anymore. Godin (2013) encourages standing out and leading your communities by being genuine, unpredictable and by “being vulnerable

without shame”. When dealing and discussing with other people, the independent game developer should not be afraid to show their true personality, as being true to themselves is also being true to the community which will then only further deepen the relationship he or she might have with the followers.

In social media it is extremely important to not argue or overreact to criticism, but respond and have a creative discussion about it any public disagreements (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 53). If someone makes a rude comment i.e. “Your game sucks”, instead of getting angry, it’s better to thank them for their comment and ask why they think that is, so that improvements could be made to any missed deficiencies. In case this doesn’t work and an extreme troll seems to be the case, it is better to just ignore them (Jonassen, 2013a). Other members will also notice when someone is being rude online for their own amusement, and learn to ignore these kinds of people as well.

2.3.4 When to start promoting

There is no one and only answer to the question of when it would be the right time to start promoting the game. Some believe the promoting should start almost immediately or at most six months before the launch, to cause a lot of buzz. And then there are those who don’t believe in causing buzz, and recommends starting the promoting only a week before, or even on the day of the launch.

Jonassen (2014b) believes in early promoting and writes in her blog that independent game developers should start promoting as soon as possible. Even if there is nothing major to share of the game yet, developers can begin promoting their game by promoting themselves first. This will help with getting noticed, generating buzz and building an audience. Independent game developers are independent experts and their experiences and expertise is quite valuable to other developers and organizations targeting aspiring developers, like the press for example.

Jonassen (2014b) encourages independent game developers to openly share their opinions. She suggests writing an interesting argument on a relevant topic, and publishing it in their blog, and also sharing the link to it through forums, and social media.

Because independent game developers are experts, they could also gain more traffic by creating useful how-to tutorials on subjects they are very familiar with. Another good way of getting noticed, according to Jonassen (2014b), is giving away useable material for other developers. Jonassen (2014b) encourages independent game developers to create pieces of custom code, music, or art and offer them to the audience royalty free. Giving away cool and useful stuff will help with building an audience who will make sure to visit the developers' site regularly and tell about it to their friends.

Johnson (2012a) also agrees on starting the promotion early, and says it could start about three weeks into development by sharing media and the concept to get feedback on them early on.

Kuchera (2011) says that buzz is only a sound that bees make and that instead of creating any hype beforehand, he would much rather have the game already there available to purchase or download when reading about the game or watching the trailer. He believes developers should sell right there and then right when customers are excited about the game. If the developers ask customers to wait for a month for the release, they might not even remember the game anymore by then.

It really depends on the game and whether the independent game developer wants to start promoting early to get feedback, or if he or she believes on their concept so strongly they do not wish to get any feedback until much later in development.

Important details that the independent game developers should consider before starting the promotion or when choosing the date of the launch, is whether there any big name games launching around the same time (Johnson, 2013). Timing is important, so that AAA games don't steal the entire spotlight and leave the independent game in the shadows. The independent game developers should do research on what other big games are launching and when, and choose the right date for their launch when everyone's not distracted by any other huge games (Johnson, 2013).

2.4 Pricing strategies

Unfortunately, when looking at the Steam Store, it seems like there is an unwritten rule that independent games should be sold for under \$10. Hopefully this will change eventually to allow independent game developer to profit a lot more than they do today.

Deciding on the pricing of the game can be tricky, but Kuchera (2011) recommends trying different tactics and playing with pricing until the developer finds something that works for his or her game. There are a number of options game developers can try to sell and make a hit of their games.

2.4.1 Pay What You Want (Indie Bundles)

The Pay What You Want (PWYW) is a pricing strategy where the customers decide how much they are willing to pay for the product or service. Usually there is a minimum price set, and customers paying over a certain amount will receive some extra content (Wikipedia, 2014c).

Getting the game into one of the indie bundles I have mentioned before is one way to increase the value of the game. Customers will be encouraged to pay over the average PWYW price to get extra games with the bundle. And because part of the money goes to the developers and, in some cases, the other part to supporting charity, customers are more willing to pay for them.

Indie bundles will raise the audiences' awareness of the game, even if it wasn't the main reason why the bundle was bought. After spending money on the indie bundle, the customers will most likely try out all of the games, and not just the few favourites. And hopefully they will notice how unexpectedly great this new independent game is and share their discovery with their friends.

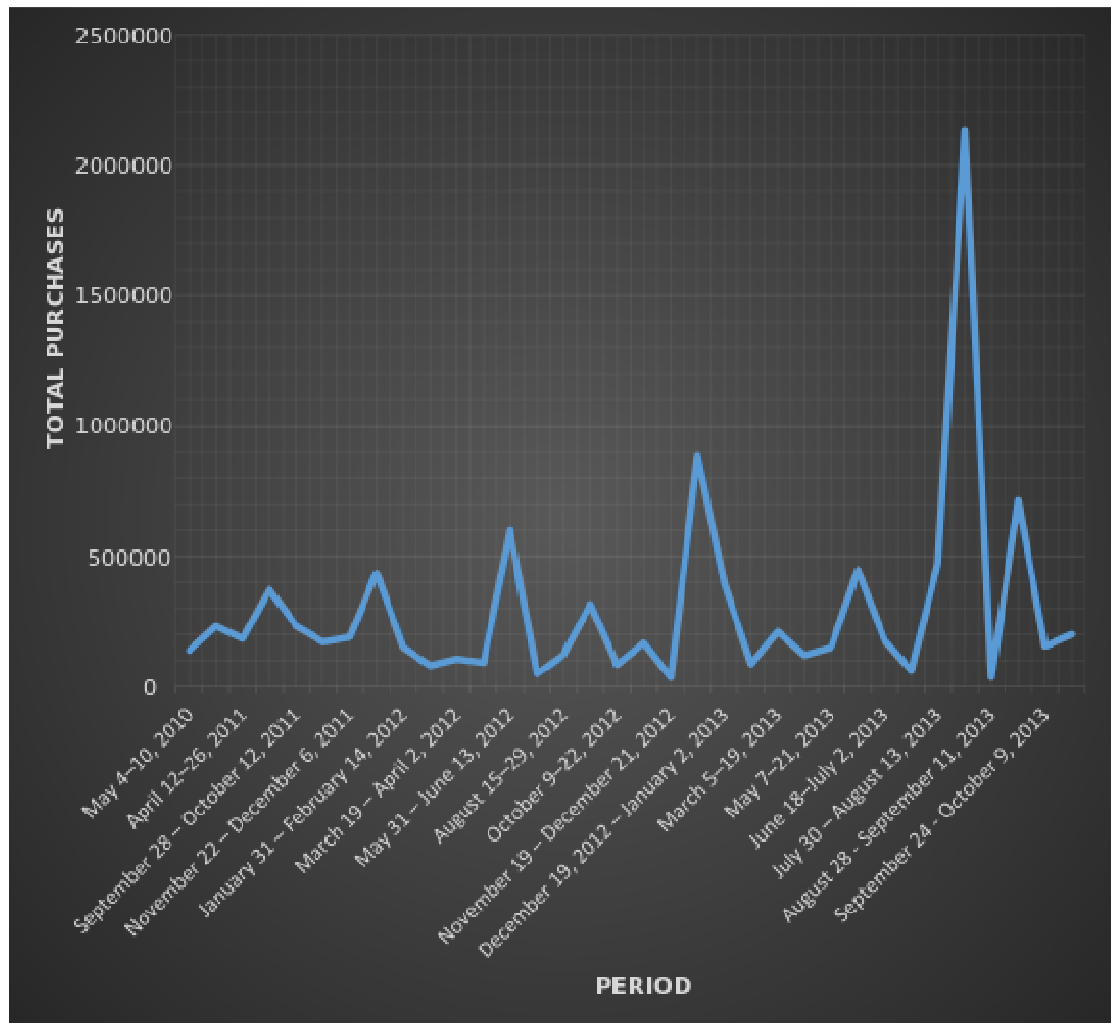


Figure 1. Total Humble Bundle purchases for each bundle between May 2010 and September 2013. (Wikipedia 2014f)

The graph above shows the amount of purchases each Humble Bundle has had since May 2010 until September 2013. The Humble Bundle which was available from August 14th to August 28th in 2013 was called the Humble Origin Bundle and it consisted of 6 different games: Dead Space, Burnout Paradise, Crysis 2, Mirror's Edge, Dead Space 3 and Medal of Honor (Wikipedia, 2014f). The buyer could receive all these games for any price they choose. But if the buyer would pay more than the average price, which was calculated to be \$4.93 at the time, he or she would receive four more games into their bundle. These games were Battlefield 3, The Sims 3 + Starter Pack, Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 – Uprising and Populous (Wikipedia, 2014f). The Humble Origin Bundle is the most successful bundle with over 2 million purchases. The total money raised was \$10,54 million which was then split between the developers, the Humble Bundle operators and one or more charities (Wikipedia, 2014f).

The PWYW strategy can be used outside indie bundles as well. The independent game developer could try offering the game for a PWYW price for the first hundred customers. There are really no specific rules for independent games, so the developer should just have fun trying out different strategies (Kuchera, 2011).

2.4.2 Steam sale

Ben Kuchera (2011) shares some very interesting information about Steam Sale and how the pricing psychology works there. When independent game developers get their game in Steam, they should not launch it with \$ 2 or people will think that it is probably not a good game. “Low price, low expectations”. But if the game is launched with \$10 and then 3 months later the game is part of the Steam sales season, where prices are dropped up to -75% and is now on sale for \$ 2, customers will feel like they have to buy the game immediately until the sales are over. Kuchera (2011) reveals that games participating in the -75% sales season will have their sales go up about 1500%.

2.4.3 Freemium

Freemium is a pricing strategy that allows customers to have the basic product or service for free, but requires them to purchase the premium version to get the complete product or service with all advanced features (Investopedia, 2014).

Offering the customers a chance to try out the game for free is much recommended by Jonassen (2013d). It helps build trust, and if the game is as good as it should be, there is no reason why customers would not gladly pay for the full premium version.

One example of a freemium game is Plants vs. Zombies 2: It's About Time. The game can be downloaded for free, but some of the plants that are used for playing this strategy game can only be purchased separately from the cash shop. There are also some game modes that can be unlocked only with cash. What makes this game a good example is that the player is not required to spend any money on the cash shop to be able to beat the game. The game is still very much enjoyable as it is. Money will only give them extra content if they wish to have them.



Picture 1. Screenshot of the cash shop on Plants vs. Zombies 2 (Plafke, 2013)

There are bad examples, too. An article on Venturebeat by Benjamin Sipe lists the biggest mistakes of freemium game design and business model. One is the pay-to-win model in player vs player (PvP) games, where the players who have spent the most money on cash items will always win (Sipe, 2013). In a better freemium game design, these cash items should be available for non-paying players as well by giving them a chance to receive these items through grinding or farming, for example (Sipe, 2013). Grinding is a video game term for repeatedly killing (sometimes the same) monsters to gain money and experience and is usually quite boring and very time-consuming (Wikipedia, 2014g). Farming is also a video game term which means the player spends hours, again, killing certain monsters in hope of a rare item that the monster might leave behind after it has been defeated. This can also get quite boring after a while and in some games it can even take days until the monster finally drops the item that was hoped for.

Another example of a freemium mistake, is forcing the player to pay to continue playing (Sipe 2013). For example Zookeeper Battle, a tile-matching puzzle game, gives the player five turns to play, each game lasting around 3 minutes or so. After playing those 5 games, the player must wait for those game turns to come active again, each taking

15 minutes to “reload”. This is called delay mechanism. Players who do not want to wait 15 minutes to play again, will have to purchase game turns from the cash shop.

2.4.4 No charge

If the independent game developers’ only goal is to get as many gamers as possible to play his or her game, the developer might just share it for free. This way, if the game is good and marketing is done correctly, the word of mouth will make sure that many gamers, who are specifically interested in the category the game falls into, have tried the game and will hopefully join the fan community. So later when the independent game developer starts creating a whole new game, there will already be a supporting community behind him or her. And if the game is at least as good as the previous one, the fans will hopefully be willing to pay something for the next one.

2.5 Press: How to deal with journalists and when

The press is an independent developer’s best friend if and when they really do have a good game to share. Ben Kuchera, an experienced video games journalist currently writing for a video game website Polygon, gave some really good tips in a RunJump-Dev game developers meetup in November 2011. His presentation can be found in YouTube, and I highly recommend all independent game developers to watch it before starting e-mailing the press.

Kuchera (2011) explains how there is a pressure for game journalists to cover big-name-games, and that it is easy to give these games attention due to huge marketing budgets. He also mentions that for journalists writing about AAA-games is a sure way to know that people will actually read their reviews. But what AAA-games lack is the element of surprise. These games are fun, but they don’t exactly have anything new or different to offer. And that, he says, is a huge opportunity for independent game developers. With a small team, and a small budget these developers can come up with ideas that bigger teams can’t or just simply won’t.

2.5.1 Story about the game and the developer

Kuchera (2011) encourages independent game developers to come up with an interesting game play experience or just something unique that none of the major game companies are doing. It should preferably be something really brave and something that no one has ever seen before.

The gamers will want to know everything about the gameplay, but what journalists want is an interesting story to write about, and the game itself is only one part of it. So when pitching the game to game journalists Hsu (2012) reminds independent game developers to market themselves as much as they do their game. If the developer has an unusual background, or if he or she is just a very personable and funny, or in any other way interesting, they journalists will like to write about that. Hsu recommends independent game developers to show their quotable and marketable side to journalists at the same time they're introducing their game to them.

Jonassen (2012a) on the other hand writes in her blog that the e-mails should be very short, and that independent game developers should not waste time introducing themselves, as the editors at this point are only interested in the game.

I suppose it depends very much on the game and the developer, whether to market both at the same time, or just focus on the game.

2.5.2 Searching for the right sites and journalists

Before sending anything to anyone, the independent game developer should do some research to find which sites or blogs are the most suitable for his or her game review. And even more important is to find the right game journalists to contact. The developer should pay close attention to what kind of games these journalists like to write about and which type of games have they most enjoyed playing (Kuchera, 2011).

Jonassen (2012a) advises independent game developers to make a list of all publications the developer would like to be featured in. Then he or she should start adding names, e-mail addresses and phone numbers on the list. And then when writing the

press release, the developer should create some very copy & paste-able material for the writers, to make it easier for them to build their own article around it. Adding high-resolution screen shots and a short teaser or a trailer video to go with it is a must.

In the list of publication contacts, Jonassen (2012a) suggests that developers should write down what was sent to who and when, especially if they are sending e-mails to hundreds of people. This will make it easier to know when to send check-up e-mails or to just know what was discussed with whom and when.

2.5.3 How to write the perfect e-mail

When writing an e-mail, it is important to remember that some of the bigger journalists could get up to a 100 e-mails a day (Kuchera, 2011) so it is extremely important to stand out.

Kuchera (2011) says that the e-mail should consist of a well written short intro. An independent game developer should be able to describe his or her game in three sentences. The e-mail should have an embedded video and screenshots to save time and to make it easier for journalists to give the game a chance to impress them.

Kuchera (2011) also says that there should be links to the developers' blog, landing page and press release. The key is to have everything the editor needs easily available. What should *not* be sent are any large and suspicious looking files.

Another thing the press is very interested in, according to a Pixel Prospector (2012) article, is the game info fact sheet where they can read your game description with bullet pointed key features. They want to know the release date, price and to which platforms the game is or will be available. And they will also want to find the independent game developers' contact information; name, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc.

If there is any previous press coverage about the game, the developer should mention it and add links to these reviews and interviews if possible (Pixel Prospector, 2012).

Hsu (2012) warns not to brag about the previous coverage though, as the journalists usually want to be the first to write the review.

Using good grammar to look professional might seem like an obvious fact, but unfortunately it is not as clear to everyone as it should be. Kuchera (2011) explains that when editors quickly go through hundreds of e-mails a day, poorly written e-mails are the first to get ignored. Using all caps in the headline is also seen as quite annoying. It is an important e-mail for independent game developers to be sending out, so they should spend a lot of time on it to make sure everything is perfect. Kuchera also reminds that when one of the big game websites writes a story of a game, the other big game websites will usually follow.

Having an e-mail signature will also make it look more professional. It should include the developers' full name, title, company name, Website, Blog, Phone number, Twitter ID, Facebook Profile and Pages and LinkedIn page. The developer should use hyperlinks here to make it easier for the journalists to visit any of the sites (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 123).

Rami Ismail, an independent game developer, released a free tool called the Presskit() (<http://dopresskit.com/>) to enable independent game developers to create a web page with all the vital information on their projects. Caoili (2012) writes in his article that this Presskit site consist of everything the press needs and want to know about before deciding whether they want to write a review about the game or not. It is a simple resource with easy-to-access information and assets.

An article on Pixel Prospector (2012) suggest including on the press kit high resolution screenshots and images, without any added watermarks, as they are not really favoured by journalists. Also logos and other artwork may be added if the independent game developer wants to offer something extra. They should all be in a gallery form where they can be seen and downloaded individually. In addition they should all be available to download in a zipped pack.

Because the huge amount of e-mails editors receive, it is possible that they will miss even the perfect e-mail about the incredible world-changing independent game. It is alright to send check-up e-mails, to ask whether the journalists has received and read the previous e-mail. But sending too many too frequently is not a good idea. Sending three to four e-mails with two weeks' time between each of them should be okay. If it is possible to call the journalists, then the developer should do just that, but he or she should remember to inform the journalists about the coming call beforehand in the e-mail (Jonassen, 2012a).

Another really important thing for independent game developers to take in account is *when* to send the e-mail. Sending it during busy season's means that it will most likely get ignored immediately, when there are "bigger things" the journalists are busy working with at the time. These include different game exhibitions and launching dates for greatly hyped AAA-games (Johnson, 2012). So the independent game developers should find out and write down these dates and weeks in their calendars so that their games don't get ignored only because there was simply no time for the journalists to even open their e-mails.

When someone does finally answer an e-mail and writes a story of the game, Jonassen (2012) recommends sending a thank you note and to keep in touch with the journalist in the future as well. After going through so much trouble finding the editors who actually gives attention to the game and the developer, it would be a pity to lose the connections, as you never know when there might be a need for them again (Jonassen, 2012).

2.6 Online Tools for Independent Game Developers

The internet is full of guides and tutorials for just about anything from creating and designing games to step-by-step marketing advice. YouTube, TED and Vimeo offer a large amount of presentations and other video resources for game developers, and are very much recommended to use.

If the independent game developer is not interested in paying a freelancer to make the sounds, or art, or edit video material for the game, he or she will have to learn doing all that on their own. And luckily we live in a century where all this can be easily learned online and for free.

I've listed some of the websites I believe can be very useful for developers. The links to the YouTube presentations that I've used as resources for this thesis can be found in the references.

- HubSpot Blog (<http://blog.hubspot.com/>): One of the biggest inbound marketing software platforms that offer marketing tips and news.
- Marketo Blog (<http://blog.marketo.com/>): Another automated marketing software that offers more of a B2B angle.
- Moz Blog (<http://moz.com/blog>): Posts daily SEO advice and video tutorials.
- GDC Vault (<http://www.gdcvault.com/>): A collection of presentations from various influencers of the game development industry. These presentations were all recorded during the Game Developers Conferences.
- PixelProspector (<http://www.pixelprospector.com/indie-resources/>): A wide collection of different resources on marketing, game design & development, website creations etc.
- Indie Game Girl (<http://www.indiegamegirl.com/>): A blog that offers free marketing tips and knowledge for independent game developers.
- Gamasutra (<http://www.gamasutra.com/>): A website that focuses on all aspects of video game development from programming and production, to design and marketing.
- Google Analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>): A handy tool that gives you detailed statistics about your website's traffic and traffic sources.
- Webmonkey (<http://www.webmonkey.com/>): A site that has free tutorials, tips and advice for designing and building websites.

- `presskit()` (<http://dopresskit.com/>): A simple website containing all the necessary information about your game. The site is already coded for the user, he or she just needs to add the information on it and start giving the link to interested editors.

3 How to spend £20 000 on marketing

On February 25th a member from the Indie Game Developers group on Facebook started an interesting topic with this question: “Someone gave you £20k to market your game. What would you spend it on?” It received 135 responses from the members, quite many of them being something like “beer” or “tequila”, but there were also a good amount of proper answers to analyse from. I picked all 29 relevant answers and made a little chart of their responses. Of course, because there were only 29 developers giving real answers to this discussion, the results are not as reliable as they could be, but it does give an approximate view on the minds of developers and how they would use the money for marketing.

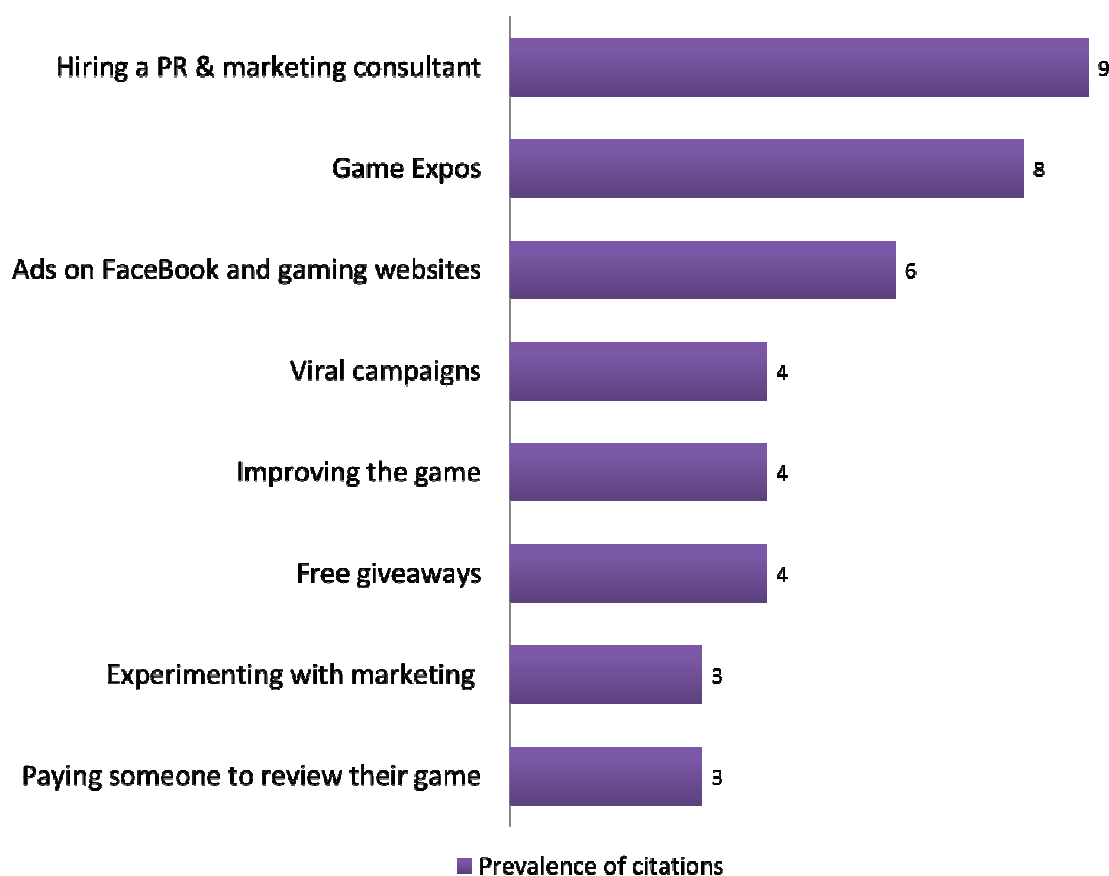


Figure 2. Indie Game Developers Facebook group members’ answers to the question “Someone gave you £20k to market your game. What would you spend it on?”

I was glad to see how many would invest at least part of the amount on hiring a PR or marketing expert. I believe that if an independent game developer has created something extremely unique and wonderful, and have a decent amount of money to spend;

it would be recommendable to hire someone professional to deal with marketing. This will allow the developer to focus on polishing the game.

The second most popular answer was participating in game exhibitions i.e. PAX, Indiecade, GEEK and local events. Some prefer meeting their target market face to face, and game exhibitions as a great way to do just that.

The third popular answer was to invest on ads that would then show up on Facebook, game sites and top rated applications.

The “viral campaigns” answer was not really defined by anyone who gave that answer. What is meant with a viral campaign though, is creating marketing material that can be easily shared online, and also make it so people *want* to share it to their friends. A good example for this is the Old Spice Guy-videos from a few years ago.

“Making the game better” is not using the money on advertising, and based on the responses, these are usually the type of developers who believe there is no need for advertising if the game is good enough. And this is the biggest mistake an independent game developer can make. Comments like “If the game is good it will sell itself” is unfortunately something too many independent game developers seem to believe in, at first. It doesn’t matter how extremely great and life-changing the game is, no one will play it if no one knows about it.

Free giveaways were also mentioned a few times. Especially free T-shirts. I think, if this was executed properly, in the right place and time, and the T-shirt would look good enough for people to actually wear in public, then why not. But unfortunately I don’t believe it would be a big hit, unless people already know or play the game. There would have to be something else to trigger their interest on the game itself, besides “free stuff”. Maybe the shirts could be handed out after they try out the game in public, or reach a certain score to win a free shirt. This would add a little more value to the shirt. And again, each game is different and the marketing tactic should be tailored according to the game.

Experimenting with marketing was another positive response. If the indie developer is not experienced with marketing, he or she should try different marketing techniques and not invest everything in just one marketing strategy. Sometimes it will also depend on the type of game that's been made, so it is recommended to run a number of marketing experiments to find what works best, and then concentrate on that.

A few members answered that they would pay game editors to write a review on their game. It is good that at least a part of all indie developers understand the importance of getting the press interested. The proper way of doing it though, should be by sending the reviewers a decent e-mail and offering them a really good and unique indie game to play and review. The writer should like or dislike the game enough to write about it for free, instead of writing a review on it only because he or she got paid to do so.

I sent the same question that was asked of this Facebook group to Emmy Jonassen (IndieGameGirl) because I was curious to hear what a marketing expert would answer. She was very kind to reply and said she would first spend some of the money on research even before starting her game to increase revenue potential, and then focus the money on doing these three things:

1. Making sure the game is excellent

Jonassen writes (17 Mar 2014a) that she would put some money into doing a closed beta where people could play, test and give feedback on the game. From all the feedback received, she would make final polishing to the game to ensure that it is perfect.

2. Making sure to have excellent promotional material

After perfecting the game, Jonassen (17 Mar 2014b) would invest money on promotional material (trailer etc. mentioned on KONSOLL video). And if she did not own the skill set to create these, or simply had no time, she would spend money hiring someone to make them for her.

3. Getting traffic

After having a great game and materials, Jonassen (17 Mar 2014c) would spend money on paid advertising and getting reviews in key publications etc. She would aim to get her name out there on sites where her dream customers and audience would be and had high volume traffic.

4 Discussion at the IGDA Gathering

IGDA (International Game Developers Association) is a community for game developers that offer updates on tools, skills and resources that a developer should be aware of, as well as help and support from other fellow game developers (IGDA, 2014).

At the IGDA Finland Gathering, I got to speak with game developers from Remedy and Ubisoft, to mention a few. Even though I do not consider them as “indies”, as they work for big companies, I learned that all game developers, indie or non-indie, do what they do for the passion towards creating games. They share the same technical skills, wide imagination, and unfortunately, the lack of marketing knowledge. Working for a big company might have its limitations, but at least someone else is taking care of marketing, so there is no need for developers to know or learn anything about it. Obviously, for independent game developers, this is different.

Marketing is critical and requires quite a lot of time. Independent game developers should almost spend as much time on marketing as they do on working on the game itself. Communicating with others and updating social media channels regularly can be very time consuming. And if the independent game developer is not much of a social person to begin with, it will be a huge challenge to even start any of it.

In the end it all really comes down to time management for independent game developers. Creating a marketing timetable for all social media channels might help, and making sure to keep posts short and simple, but at the same time relevant and interesting.

4.1 Analysing Discussion

The key findings through my research were

- the freedom and possibilities developing an independent game offer and the importance of taking advantage of them
- actively promoting the game and the developer on various social media channels while keeping the community of fans and other followers interested

- knowing how to effectively use search engine optimization and other available tools to get as many visitors as possible
- contacting and dealing with the press

As Kuchera (2011) mentioned, the independent game developers have the freedom to invent something completely new and brave that the big companies would not and could not even think of trying. Kuchera gives Minecraft as a good example. He explains how Minecraft was coded by a very small team and it is a game that looks bad, has low resolution texture, does not have much gameplay, but the players are capable of creating anything they want. Kuchera (2011) says that the developers of Minecraft knew that people like to create, so they made a game focusing on just that, and it ended up at a huge success. 14 million PC copies and over 35 million copies across all platforms were sold as of February 2014 (Wikipedia 2014e).

The independent game developers should find out what gamers really want and execute their ideas in a way that bigger game companies can't or won't.

To make customers aware of the games' existence, the developers should at least have an active development blog, and a landing page once the game is ready for sharing. They will have to make time to keep their blog and social media channels alive and updated. And they will have to make time for answering e-mails and other questions or feedback received from their fans, the press and everyone else. They will have to learn to deal with all kinds of people and comments, without losing the trust or respect of the community, and at the same time being true to themselves and their opinions.

The independent game developer should find time to properly use the search engine optimization in their websites, to increase the amount of visitors and have more people know about their game.

Getting a popular game news website to publish a review of their independent games can be a long and hard road to take on, but after succeeding it will make a huge difference and be all worth it in the end. Independent game developers have to be patient

and resilient, and very careful when dealing with the press. If the game is really good, the review on it will most likely spread to other game review sites as well, and this is probably the best way to get a large number of new customers and fans.

4.2 Conclusions

An independent game developer is usually someone who is brilliant and passionate about making games, but when it comes to marketing, they can be quite clueless. The most unfortunate will think they don't need any marketing as long as they make a really superb game. And those who know they need to market their game don't know how to do it, when to start, and how much time, and possibly money, should or should not be spent on it.

Independent game developers should try out different marketing strategies as well as pricing tactics until they have found something that suits their game and style the most.

Timing plays a big role in both managing the marketing plan and when choosing the time to contact the press or even when choosing the launch date. Developers do not want to compete of the attention with an AAA game or an annual game exhibition.

During my research I found that the internet is quite full of very helpful marketing guides and I believe that all independent game developers should spend some time reading them. Pixel Prospector (www.pixelprospector.com) has an Indie Resources section that is full of links to guides and articles on different topics from game development and graphics to business and marketing. Indie Game Girl (www.indiegamegirl.com) focuses on the marketing side of the independent game industry and offers really good advice on a number of marketing related topics.

I recommend independent game developers to go through my thesis to learn the basics of the most important elements that a successful marketing mix consists of. It will help them know which topics to take into consideration when creating a marketing plan and a timetable for it.

For further research I would suggest researching the different pricing strategies more deeply and try and make some comparison between them. I would also suggest finding out how much the visual content affects the gamers. What kinds of graphics and colours are most appealing? Do gamers prefer 3D over 2D or the other way around?

It would also be interesting to interview a number of independent game developers to ask which pricing strategy they used, how much time they spent on developing their game and how much time was spent on marketing and social media each day, and then compare their answers and the success of their games to see what it was that the most successful developer was doing that the least successful ones were not.

5 Self-Evaluation

I am very happy with the choice of my topic, as I found it quite interesting all the way through. Marketing and the game industry have always been interesting fields for me, and I'm glad I could mix them like this, to research and learn more about both.

I knew there probably wouldn't be many books to borrow on this topic, but I did not expect to not find anything at all. This is why online resources played the main role for my thesis, and why there are so many of them. And thinking about it afterwards, I feel it was better this way. The information is very current and comes from many different, but of high quality, sites and professionals.

After discussing my thesis with a number of people from the game industry, it seems there is a need for a proper "marketing manual for indies", and I am thinking about taking this thesis further by updating it and adding to it in the future, to create a better marketing guidebook for the independent game developers.

I wish I would have done a Facebook survey of my own to get more answers on the current marketing knowledge of the independent game developers. I suppose I thought it would have been silly to make a survey on a question that was already recently asked from the group. But now that I think about it, a Facebook poll on the topic would have summed up the answers more clearly and would have been a nice way to end the discussion.

I have enjoyed the time I spent researching my topic, and was very positively surprised when I received an answer to my e-mail from Emmy Jonassen, whose articles and presentations play a big role in my research and the content of my thesis.

I have learned a lot, and wish to learn even more in the future, and I hope that someday I will be able to try all this in practice for someone else or as an entrepreneur.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. A List of News and Reviews Sites

News & Reviews Sites Part 1

	10 Dollar Gaming <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indie game reviews, news and videos• www.10dollargaming.com
	1UP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video game news, reviews, previews, trailers, screenshots and podcasts (since 2010)• www.1up.com
	ADDatWorkProductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A YouTube channel with indie game reviews and previews• www.youtube.com/user/ADDatWorkProductions
	Armless Octopus <ul style="list-style-type: none">• News, reviews, previews, features, podcasts and contests• www.armlessoctopus.com
	BigSushi <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indie game reviews and podcasts (since 2012)• www.bigsushi.fm
	Casual Gameplay <ul style="list-style-type: none">• News and reviews on indie games• www.jayisgames.com
	Digg <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The most interesting and talked about stories, videos and pictures on the web• www.digg.com
	CheatCC <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offers previews, reviews, news and various articles on the gaming industry• www.cheatcc.com
	Extra Guy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• And indie game site with news, reviews and articles• www.extraguy.com
	GameFAQs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guides, walkthroughs and game reviews• www.gamefaqs.com
	GameFront <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Game news, reviews and downloads• www.gamefront.com
	GameInformer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video game news, reviews, previews, podcasts and gamer culture• www.gameinformer.com
	GamesBeat <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gaming news and reviews (Old "Bitmob", co-funded by Hsu and Demian Linn)• www.venturebeat.com/category/games

News & Reviews Sites Part 2



GameSpot

- Game news, reviews, previews and trailers
- www.gamespot.com



GameTrailers

- Video game trailers, reviews and previews
- www.gametrailers.com



Giant Bomb

- Video game news, reviews, podcasts, forums
- www.giantbomb.com



HookShot Inc

- Video games review
- www.hookshotinc.com



IGM (Indie Game Magazine)

- Indie game reviews, previews, news and downloads
- www.indiegamemag.com



IGN

- Video game news, reviews, previews and trailers
- www.ign.com



IGR (IndieGameReviewer)

- Video game news, reviews, interviews and how-to's by a true independent collective
- www.indiegamereviewer.com



Indie DB

- News, insight and media direct from the developers
- <http://www.indiedb.com/>



Indie Game HQ

- Informs about projects that deserve attention. News, interviews, media and reviews
- www.indiegamehq.com



IndieGames

- News, reviews, previews, features, podcasts and contests
- www.indiegames.com



Indie Retro News

- Daily updates of the latest indie games, retro remakes and kickstarter gaming news
- www.indieretronews.com



Indie Gamer Chick

- Video game reviews
- www.indiegamerchick.com



Indiegraph

- Indie games news and reviews
- www.indiegraph.org

News & Reviews Sites Part 3



Indie-Love

- Indie game reviews
- www.indie-love.com



JoyStiq

- A source for news and information on the video game industry
- www.joystiq.com



Metacritic

- Aggregates game reviews from the leading critics
- www.metacritic.com/game/pc



N4G

- Community-supported video game news site
- www.n4g.com



NeoSeeker

- PC game news and reviews
- www.neoseeker.com



PCGamer

- PC game reviews and news
- www.pcgamer.com



PCGamesN

- Indie game news and reviews
- www.pcgamesn.com



Penny Arcade

- A webcomic focused on video games and culture. Includes news and commentary.
- www.penny-arcade.com



PewDiePie

- A video game commentator on YouTube with over 24 million subscribers (and growing)
- www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie



Pixels for Breakfast

- Articles that explore the creative process of making games and playing them
- www.pixelsforbreakfast.net



Quarter to Three

- Video game reviews and podcasts
- www.quartertothree.com/fp



Rawket Lawncher

- Indie game reviews
- www.rawketlawncher.tumblr.com



Reddit

- A social news website where registered users submit content in the form of links or text posts
- www.reddit.com



Retro Remakes

- Game reviews
- www.retroremakes.com



Rock, Paper, Shotgun

- PC game reviews
- www.rockpapershotgun.com



ScreenshotSaturday

- Promoting weekly progress and community feedback on projects in the game development scene
- www.screenshotsaturday.com



StumbleUpon

- A giant collection of recommended websites
- www.stumbleupon.com



The Escapist

- Video game news, reviews, forums
- www.escapistmagazine.com



The Game Jar

- Indie game reviews, trailers and screenshots
- www.thegamejar.com



TIG Source

- Indie game news, reviews and interviews
- www.tigsource.com



True PC Gaming

- PC game news and reviews
- www.truepcgaming.com



Venus Patrol

- Video game news and reviews
- www.venuspatrol.com



VGNaut

- News about indie games, game development, crowd funding and other game related topics
- www.vgnaut.com



WIRED

- Video game reviews and podcasts
- www.wired.com/gamelife