VIDEOGAMES & THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY

How the animation industry can enrich their IP with an interactive experience.

HAPPY
VOLCANO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PROBLEM

Video games have never been more popular. In recent years, the total revenue of the games industry has eclipsed the combined income of the film and music industry. Despite the financial growth and diversification of the medium, culturally video games remain the odd one out. The process of video game creation is largely unknown and few people outside of the industry really understand what video games are all about. Even to the animation industry, where similar technology is used on a daily basis, the games industry is a perfect stranger.

THE SOLUTION

This whitepaper aims to shed light in the darkness. Starting out with a brief look at the history of licensed video games, we point out the costs and benefits of enriching your animated property with a video game. We highlight the differences between the two industries, as well as the similarities and argue that the world of animation and video game creation exist closer to each other than you might think.

To gain a further understanding of how the games industry operates and what's needed to create a successful video game, the paper offers a brief and comprehensive overview of what video games are and how they are produced, funded, distributed and marketed. You'll find information on different game genres, platforms and input devices. You'll also learn about different business models, get introduced to the many stages of the game development process and be warned that marketing a game properly is just as important as creating it.

While all of these elements will be highlighted separately, they are all part of the all-encompassing process of game creation. Every aspect ties into each other and selecting the right mix of variables can make the difference between success and failure. Working with an experienced games studio will help you minimise the risk of making the wrong decisions, and gives you the best chance at creating a (commercially) successful video game.

THE CONCLUSION

Having grasped the basic elements of video game development, you will realise that the animation industry and the games industry aren't that different from one another, and that both industries can benefit from a closer co-operation. We think this crash course in game development will pique your interest in enriching your animation property with a high-quality video game. In that case we also hope the offered insights have convinced you to reach out to a professional games studio to deliver the quality your IP deserves.

INTRODUCTION

a brief history of the licensed video game

The idea of using a video game as a brand extension isn't exactly new. Back in the early nineties, when animated features were but a future dream and the majority of animation was hand-drawn, popular cartoon franchises like Disney's DuckTales were transformed into excellent platform games for the early Nintendo consoles.

By the start of the new millennium, video games had become the ultimate product to launch alongside big cinematic releases. Those games were often hamstrung by a tight production schedule and limited budget. The end result was more often than not an uninspired experience whose only goal was to maximise visibility of the cinematic release. Players grew wary of those types of games, quickly limiting the appeal of licensed titles.

Both the early Nintendo games and the cinematic sidekicks separated the game development process from the source material. The game developers bought a license to use the setting, characters and (sometimes) main story arc and then splashed a very basic game template on it. There was no attention for the creation of long-term value for the brand, nor was it important that the game and the animated content spoke the same visual language.

*This is not the way you produce a succesful licensed video game anymore.*

If recent cartoon video game successes, like the South Park role-playing games by Ubisoft, show something, it's the importance of the creator's involvement. Show runners Trey Parker and Matt Stone were consulted every step of the way to make sure the games would look and feel like a feature length episode of the show. When the first game released, it was praised by both critics and players for being very true to the series.

Another great example is FOX's Animation Throwdown: The Quest for Cards. It's a mobile game that fuses five FOX animation universes (Family Guy, Bob's Burgers, Futurama, American Dad, and King of the Hill) into one collectible card game adventure. Combining different animated properties is a serious challenge, but also offers opportunities. Futurama fans might not be familiar with American Dad so the game has the potential to introduce players to new shows.

Bottom line: to extend the reach of your IP with a video game, you have to make sure that the video game is selling the same IP. As we've illustrated, in the digital age this is only possible through a creative partnership that mixes the strengths of both parties.

"...in the digital age this is only possible through a creative partnership that mixes the strengths of both parties. "

If you're planning to create a wonderful interactive experience that's on par with the quality of your animation property, it's important to understand what to expect. In this whitepaper we will take you on a brief and comprehensive trip to the world of game development. We hope you learn something along the way.
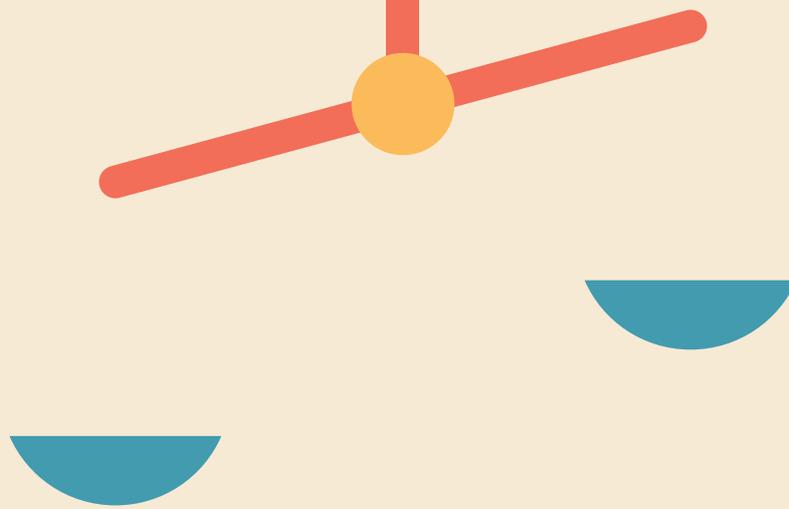
COSTS & BENEFITS

Okay, you get all that. But hold on a second. Why does my animated property need a video game in the first place? An excellent question that has a short and sweet answer: because you'll get a lot of bang for your buck.

Enriching your animated property with a high quality video game will give you a lot of benefits.

1

For starters, the video game can be used as a promotional tool. This can be as easy as creating visibility in (digital) environments where you'd never be seen otherwise. You can also use the game as a cross-promotion communications channel, where you can announce the airing of a new season of the show or the release date of a sequel to the original feature.

2

You can use the video game as a great way to bridge gaps between seasons or sequels and keep the property top of mind with the fans of the show. You can encourage players to go back to the game by launching new content shortly after the season finale or use the game in the marketing build-up for a new feature release. The cool thing about video games is they're very flexible so you can try out different strategies to see what works best for your property.

3

Branching out to an interactive medium also gives you the possibility to set up a new revenue stream and attract a different audience. If your game gets picked up because of the game mechanics instead of the IP, you might have a good chance at converting that player into a fan of your property. Or you can try to combine different animation properties in one video game in order to introduce fans of a certain show to something similar or new they might also like.

4

Having a video game can give you an extra sales argument when negotiating with potential partners. When given the choice between two new cartoon shows with similar potential, broadcasters might be charmed with a package deal where you can throw a browser game in the mix that can be played on the broadcaster's website. Having a more varied content portfolio than the competition might just swing the odds in your favour.

5

The most important benefit of all: a video game is different from animated content, but it's also the same. As far as digital entertainment goes, they are next of kin, sharing the same goal: make sure the audience/players have a good time. They both know how to captivate and surprise. A video game is an excellent way to let players interact in a new and meaningful way with familiar content. Let's see a lunch box or a backpack do that.

The costs of producing a video game depend on a lot of different factors. As we'll highlight many more times in this document, developing video games is an iterative process that doesn't follow a linear path. Calculating the exact cost of a video game is difficult, but overall it's relatively low compared to the budget of an animated series or feature. Sure, it will cost you more than a weekend at Disneyland, but at least it won't run you as much as making Despicable Me.

Video games and animation are brought to life with similar technology, which makes it possible to recycle production assets. The more things that can be reused in the game (sound effects, music, voice-overs, background sets, character designs, animation...) the cheaper the production will become.

SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES
between animation and video games

Possibly, the following question may have popped up in your head: "if we know how to use the technology, why can't we create a game ourselves?" Well, because there's much more to game development than mere technology. We're not saying it can't be done, but without prior experience in game development, you'd better gear up for a tough adventure with plenty of pitfalls.

While both animated content and video games exist in a digital realm and are used to create new worlds and tell stories, there are still a lot of differences. We may use similar computer programs and tools, but game development - like animated content production - still requires a specific skill set.
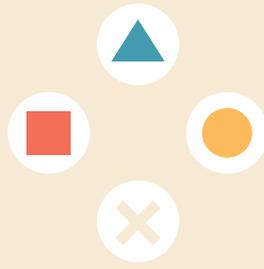
While animated series or features aim to elicit certain emotional reactions from viewers, they don't need direct input from them to work. In Toy Story, viewers don't need to tell Woody he has to save Buzz from a fiery explosion in the sky, he knows. He knows because it's in the script. He knows because an animator made him do exactly that. He has no choice but to save Buzz, and the passive spectators have no choice but to accept it. As a creator, you will always be in complete control.

Add interactivity to the mix and complete control is reduced to an illusion. You can direct players using level design and game rules, but you can't predict how each individual player is going to behave. This means you'll have to playtest a lot, which can be both time consuming and costly.

Game projects are iterative and will progress more dynamically than animated content, so it's not as easy to have an exact view of the production costs upfront. Producers will have to manage their costs much more closely and have a very good understanding of the development process.

Interactivity also means you have to take certain things into account you never have to worry about when producing animated content. Not only do players get control over a character, they also get to play around with the camera or can choose to stop the action altogether. What about multiplayer? Will you let players compete against each other (maybe online?) or will they have to work together?

And there's more to releasing a game besides the actual game design. If distributed digitally, you'll have to get the game certified with the platform holders, which is a whole other dimension of pain a game studio is able to help with. Players also appreciate it when you keep supporting the game after it has released. You can use software updates to resolve bugs that weren't caught earlier or to release extra content for the game. There's a lot of game-specific stuff to think about and it won't be easy to tackle it all on your own.

Maybe the previous pages have put you off video games for life, but here's hoping we convinced you to reach out to a professional game studio. Whatever the case may be, next we'll dive into the nitty-gritty of what video games are and how they are produced, funded and marketed.

WHAT IS A VIDEO GAME

You'd expect this question to have a straightforward answer, but it doesn't. Video games as a medium are still very much in development, so the ultimate definition of what a video game is, hasn't been coined yet.

What's for certain though is that the cultural importance of video games is still growing every day. Where the majority of early video games used to be approached as interactive toys, focused on scoring points and having fun, nowadays there's a lot of games that put theme, story and world building first. They still are interactive to a degree but high scores have taken a backseat to presenting players with interesting choices, telling meaningful stories or offering unique experiences.

It's also the part of video games that hasn't been widely discovered yet. The majority of non-gamers still treat the medium as culture of the lowest kind, merrily ignoring strides that have been made to move away from what they automatically identify video games with.

So what are video games? It's film before Citizen Kane, rock 'n roll before The Beatles or animation before Walt Disney – the best is yet to come.

If that's too lackadaisical for your taste, here's a more clinical and sterile definition, courtesy of game design lecturers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman

"A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome."

Of course, that's a definition as easily applied to a Sudoku puzzle than the next Super Mario game. To really figure out what a video game can be, we need to dive deeper and take a closer look at the different genres, platforms and input devices.

The most common game genres are action, adventure, role playing (RPG), simulation, strategy and sports games. Genres can encompass a wide variety of games, leading to even more specific classifications called subgenres.

Action games

Action games focus on hand-eye coordination and quick reflexes. The genre contains a lot of subgenres that offer very different gameplay. A platformer (e.g. Super Mario) has the player navigate through a challenging environment by running and jumping on platforms while fighting enemies. A shooter (e.g. Call of Duty) hands the player a myriad of weapons to battle against enemies, while a fighting game (e.g. Street Fighter) simulates melee combat.

Adventure games

Adventure games rely less on action and more on storytelling and solving puzzles. Classic point-and-click adventure games (e.g. Monkey Island) require players to solve problems by interacting with the environment and characters in the game. In modern adventure games (e.g. The Walking Dead), elements like player choice, character development and branching storylines are favoured over traditional puzzle gameplay.

Action-adventure games (e.g. Tomb Raider) are a subgenre that combine adventure elements such as exploration and puzzles with action elements like platforming and shooting.

Role-playing games

Initially evolved out of table-top games like Dungeons & Dragons, role-playing games (e.g. Final Fantasy) have players control one or more characters that are sent on story-driven quests. There's a myriad of different subgenres, but common elements include getting stronger by completing quests. Role-playing games are usually very large in scale, offer players a lot of options and freedom and can take up to 100 hours to complete.

A subgenre worth mentioning is the **MMORPG** or Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (e.g. World of Warcraft). These games have huge persistent online worlds where players battle alongside or against each other. MMORPG's have a huge social component that keeps players coming back. To even stand a chance against the toughest opponents, players will have to form groups of up to 25 people.

Simulation games

Simulation games attempt to create a real or fictional experience. The genre comprises a couple of very different subgenres. They can be very realistic, in-depth simulations that make you feel like you're in the cockpit of a Formula 1 car (e.g. F1 series). Another type of simulation game puts you in charge of managing a theme park, hospital or even puts the fate of an entire civilisation in your hands.

Sports games

Sports games aim to simulate a sport, but contrary to simulation games they sacrifice realism in favour of fun and playability. Sports games try to replicate the experience of a sports event, while at the same time offering a lot of accessibility. Ball physics and player control are simplified and coaching your team or transferring players is as simple as flicking through a couple of menus. The most popular sports to be turned into video games are soccer, basketball, football, tennis, racing and pro wrestling.

Strategy games

Strategy games challenge the player's strategical or tactical thinking and requires careful planning in order to achieve victory. They can play out in real time, where you'll need to think and act quickly, or have a turn based system where you can collect your thoughts and think about your next strategic move. Strategy games frequently simulate large battles where different factions compete for world domination (e.g. Total War) or feature tactical combat on a smaller scale, where you have to outsmart the opposition with a couple of units that each have a different skill set (e.g. Commandos).

This is but one of many arbitrary ways to categorise video games. Like all creative works, most games aren't easily lumped in one category or another. Developers inspire each other and fuse elements of different genres to create new subgenres or come up with fresh gameplay ideas no-one's ever tried before.

PLATFORMS

Video games are playable on a range of different platforms. Each platform has specific features and a slightly different target audience. Some genres of games are better suited to certain platforms as well.

Mobile games

A mobile game is a video game played on smartphones and tablets. They are controlled by touch gestures and/or motion sensors. Some creators use the varied feature set of smartphones to enhance the experience, so there's a broad range of (experimental) game types such as location based, augmented reality or even sound based games. Games are downloaded from a digital app store. The most common mobile platforms are Android (Google) and iOS (Apple).

Console games

Console games come in many forms, but they have one constant: you play them on a game console that's hooked up to a screen. Currently, the console kingdom is ruled by three companies: Microsoft (Xbox One, Nintendo (Nintendo Switch) and Sony (PlayStation 4).

There's also a difference between physical and digital distribution. Xbox One and PlayStation 4 use Blu-Ray discs, Nintendo Switch has cartridges. All platforms have their own digital storefront where you can buy and download games. Microsoft uses the Xbox Games Store, Sony has the PlayStation Store and Nintendo owns the Nintendo eShop. Games that have a physical edition can also be bought digitally, but there are a lot of games that are download only.

PC games

Pc games are played on a desktop or laptop computer. The pc is the oldest and most versatile gaming platform and there's a wide variety of pc games out there. The openness of the pc platform lends itself well to experiments or games with shorter development cycles (read: less financial risk). It's a lot easier to self-publish your game on the pc, so a lot of smaller teams will first create a pc version of their game, and port it to other platforms afterwards.

Where physical editions are common in console land, the pc market is all about digital distribution. The most popular digital venues to purchase games are Steam, Good Old Games and Humble. Steam uses a strict DRM policy. This means you'll have to play games through a Steam client and never get access to the actual game files. Good Old Games and Humble provide DRM-free solutions, where game files can be freely downloaded as soon as you've purchased the game. Some players value this freedom, others don't care. As they have a different user base, it's not a bad idea to make your game available through different digital distribution channels.

Browser games

Technically pc games, browser games are played in a computer's internet browser (no, really!) and require no software download. Due to browser limitations, they aren't as technically advanced as classic pc or console games. Most of them are fun, little time wasters that focus on a single game mechanic. They are usually free to play and are able to reach a big and broad audience. As there are millions of browser games on the internet, most people find them through big browser game portals like Kongregate or Bigpoint. These games can also be hosted on your own website or a broadcaster's website.

TIP

The choice of platform depends on the target audience and the marketing goal you set. It is also inherently connected with the business model. Select the platform that will give you the broadest audience for the best price.

Video games can be controlled in a variety of ways. The type of input device has a major impact on how players will experience your game, but also largely depends on the platform being used. Here are some of the most common control setups.

Mouse and keyboard

Keyboard and mouse are the standard on pc platforms. They can be used separately or in combination with each other. Certain types of games such as shooting or strategy games, genres that first saw the light of day on the pc, benefit from this control setup.

Gamepad/Joystick

Often referred to as a controller, these devices present the player with a navigational joystick and several (shoulder) buttons. Gamepads are the primary input device of consoles (with each console having a specific controller), but most recent models are compatible with pc platforms.

Touch screen

The player interacts with the game by tapping and swiping the screen. This is used in mobile devices like phones and tablets, but also on certain pc displays and laptops. Touch controls need to be very intuitive. When done right you can give players the sense they transform the game world using nothing but their fingers.

Motion sensor

Mobile devices and certain gamepads can read player's physical movements by sensing the tilting and turning of the device. Camera based motion sensors like Microsoft's Kinect can even detect full body movement. VR goggles also have head tracking to detect what direction the player is looking in.

TIP

The choice for a certain input controller is linked to the platform your game will be on. The age of your players will demand an easy or more complex control scheme. Also take into account the penetration rate of the device within your target audience.

Virtual reality

Not a true platform, nor a real input device, virtual reality is a completely new way to experience game content, immersing players directly in a 3D environment and making their head and body movements part of the action. The best VR experiences make use of a head-mounted display that connects to a powerful pc, but you can get VR running on your smartphone or tablet as well. By letting the player become one with the game world, virtual reality enables a new level of immersion that's impossible to achieve with other technologies.

That being said, virtual reality is still very much a new frontier. The technology is being refined every day, and the limitations of the current hardware are being addressed by technology powerhouses like Facebook (Oculus Rift), Valve, (HTC Vive) Microsoft (HoloLens) and Sony (PS VR). Right now though, it's still a testing ground for new and exciting gameplay ideas, and due to costly hardware the install base is a lot lower than that of traditional gaming platforms. As production costs dwindle, this is expected to change in the years to come.

BUSINESS MODELS

Now you have a broad understanding of what video games are, let's take a look at the pricing strategies that are common in the games industry.

Depending on your primary marketing goal, you can either ask a set price, opt for a freemium business model or even give away your game for free.

Premium

The classic way to distribute your game and by far the most common method on console and pc platforms. Less popular on mobile, yet there are plenty of great mobile games that did very well at a premium price. As long as your price point is in line with similar titles, you have a good shot at selling your game this way.

It's worth mentioning that these games can also offer extra downloadable content, such as more levels, game modes or story expansions. These future updates can either be given away for free or sold at a premium price.

Some games are sold as separate episodes. Players still have to pay upfront for an episode, but they don't have to buy the whole season to check if they like the game. If players liked what they played, they can buy the complete season, gaining access to new episodes the moment they're released. This distribution method only works with genres that fit the format, such as story driven adventure games.

Freemium or Free to Play (F2P)

Freemium games are free to download and play, but will try to make money from in-app purchases. They have no entry barrier so the potential player base (read: clients) is huge. Not all of them will be dropping money on your game, but we'd might rather have 1 million players that may spend some money than having ten thousand units sold at a premium price.

A lot of these games involve repeated actions where the in-app purchases can help the player achieve his goals faster. For example, by spending money on booster packs in a collectible card game, players have a higher chance to get rare, powerful cards than players who don't. They are also able to win these cards by playing the game, but it will take them much longer. It's important to keep the gameplay balanced between paying and non-paying players. The last thing you want is to be branded a pay to win game, where spending money is seen as necessary to have any chance at winning the game.

A safer bet then is to only offer in-app purchases that do not impact gameplay at all. This might not sound as alluring, but you'd be surprised how many people are willing to buy a fancy hat for their player character.

Ad supported

In these games the advertisements are used to generate money. This can be in the form of banner or interstitial ads at natural breaking points. Another way is to reward the player with in game lives, goods or currency in exchange for watching an ad. If a player gets tired of advertisements, they have the option to buy the premium version of the game.

Free

Who says you need to make money of your game? A free game is a great marketing tool to lure a new audience to your animated property or to offer broadcasters when they pick up your show or feature.
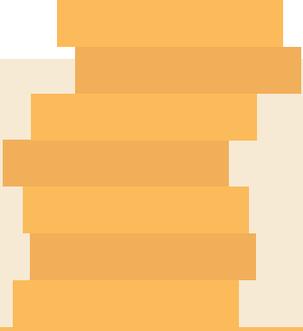
TIP

There are a lot of different pricing strategies, knowing what model is best for you depends on your game, platform and marketing goal.

Hybrid
Most games use a combination of the models above for instance a freemium game with a reward based ad or a premium game that offers paid downloadable content.

FUNDING YOUR GAME

Development costs of a videogame are not as expensive as making an animated feature or series, but they still can have a significant impact on your overall budget. Finding the right mix of funding options is key.

Work for hire
The property owner hires the game developer to create the game. This is an out of pocket cost and should be budgeted in the total budget of the animation property.

Co-production
Broadcasters, networks, or even the game developer can, for a revenue share or marketing value step into the project and take on a part or all of the funding.

Publisher
Publishers are the distributors of the games industry. They often finance the development of video games and can also be responsible for distribution, localization, marketing, market research, advertising and PR. In return a publisher wants considerable input in the design and content of the game.

Platform holders
When the property is interesting enough platform holders like Microsoft, Sony or Nintendo have been known to either act as a publisher or (partly) fund the development of the game. Similar to a regular publisher deal, they can also be responsible distribution, marketing and PR, and will weigh on game design and project planning. On top of that platform holders will demand (timed) platform exclusivity.

Subsidies and grants
A lot of regions have specialized programs to stimulate the growth of their video game industry. This can take form in recoupable or non-recoupable grants and subsidies. The application process for these grants is quite complicated so game developers can lend a helping hand. It's important to involve them early in the process as these applications are generally on a yearly or six-month schedule.

There are national and international grants that support game development.

The VAF/Game Fund co-finances the development of video games by games companies in Flanders and Brussels. This is the primary source of subsidies for game development in Belgium. The VAF/Game Fund is able to spend € 750,000 per year. Most countries have a similar fund, but the budget and application process will vary.

The Creative Europe Media Fund finances game projects for a maximum of € 2,500,000 a year. The admission requirements are however a lot more stern. To be eligible for a European grant, you need to have published a successful title two years prior to your current application. Another fairly strict condition is that your game needs to have an international appeal and have a unique European character. The most popular game that's ever made use of this grant is The Witcher, a role-playing game based on a series of Polish fantasy novels.

TIP

A healthy mix of funding is a time-consuming effort. Start early.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Crafting a high-quality game is a very diverse and complex process. Programming code that merges visuals, audio and interactive gameplay into a working, balanced and fun package is no walk in the park. Even experienced game designers describe the game creation process as finding your way in an enchanted labyrinth while wearing a blindfold. There are a lot of elements that need to slot into place before you finally get where you want.

There's no silver bullet solution to developing games, but the different stages of the development process act as guidelines to help you find your way.

CONCEPT

The concept phase is the proverbial blank page. There's plenty of ways to decide what type of game you want to make. The concept phase is filled with brainstorms, often followed by quick gameplay prototypes of the best ideas. Using a prototype is helpful to check whether a great idea on paper is also working in an interactive environment. Prototype feedback can then be used to further develop the idea, or abandon it and start over with a new one. Needless to say, this process takes time.

Before you can start fleshing out the chosen game concept, you'll need to decide who your target audience is going to be, what the business model is going to be like and what platforms you want to release on. Most of these decisions will be inherently tied to your game concept, but this doesn't have to be the case.

Once these variables are locked down, you can start to make an educated guess towards the budget (roughly: (development time * staff costs) + fixed costs) needed. As soon as you know how much money you need, you can start looking for funding.

PREPRODUCTION

The final goal of the preproduction phase is the creation of your Game Design Document (GDD). The GDD describes all aspects of your game in detail. It mentions for instance what makes the game unique, what gameplay elements will be used, how the story will develop and the role players have, what the graphics will look like, what music and sound effects will be used and so on.

Everyone that reads the GDD should have a clear understanding of the different aspects of the game. It's the master plan that everyone who's working on the game can fall back on to know exactly what's expected of them. It's also a living document that will change based on feedback from playtests or publishers. Having a solid GDD is the first big step in securing government funding for the production of the game or finding a publisher.

PRODUCTION

In the production phase, development shifts into high gear. Everyone knows what needs to be done and the team, possibly strengthened by freelance contributors – is working at full capacity. Production is helmed by a creative director, who supervises the creative process and is responsible for the overall quality of the game, and a producer, who tries to keep the game on time and within budget. In smaller studios these roles are often taken on by the same person.

To keep track of progress, there are several development milestones.

Pre-alpha: The first playable version of the game with functional gameplay and graphical assets in place. There are no more graphical placeholders, but not all features or assets have been implemented.
Alpha: As soon as all major features have been implemented, the project advances to alpha. There's still time to make changes or even add new smaller features.
Vertical slice: A vertical slice is a highly polished part of the game where most assets and features have been implemented to give players and publishers an idea of what the final game will play like.
Code freeze: If the source code of the game doesn't need any major additions, you've reached the stage of code freeze. As your game is now content complete, most time will be poured into polish, iteration and optimisation. You should only tweak your source code to solve problems that prevent you from playing or finishing the game.
Beta: When those game-breaking bugs have been solved, you've entered the beta stage. Bug solving and polishing the experience is the order of the day. During beta, games are often made available to the public to test the game on a wide range of system configurations and help the developers root out more bugs.
Gold: When the release deadline looms large on the horizon, you better make sure most bugs are taken care of. Once the game has gone gold, it's sent to the platform holders for certification. If the game passes, you will get assigned a release slot. If not, you'll have to address the issues and re-apply for certification. Depending on the platform, certification can b epending for several weeks.

RELEASE

Congratulations! Your game is out there for the players to enjoy. But if you think the work is done, you've got another thing coming.

Next to market the hell out of your game (see below), your team will have to do some maintenance work. A harsh truth about software development: you won't catch every bug before release. This means that players may discover issues you never encountered. Most platforms have analytic software to identify these problems, so you can repair the damage.

But things don't even have to be broken to be a problem. Players perceive games differently than developers, so they might experience things you hadn't. A frustrating difficulty spike that makes them lose interest, a waypoint that's too easily overlooked. You name it. If you receive similar feedback over and over again, it might be well worth checking out.

Depending on the success of your game, you can be quite busy in the weeks following release with developing software patches that address these issues. Of course, you can't update your game until the end of time and not all feedback will be useful, but players will be grateful when you listen to them.

POST RELEASE CONTENT

Fans will spread the positive word about the game and will be waiting anxiously for more content. Some people just don't want to stop playing after the credits roll. Replaying the game isn't always as fun, so when your game has done considerably well, you can consider to create more content. Depending on the chosen business model and type of game you can add extra levels, game modes, costumes, characters or even a new chunk of story. You can make some of the extra content available for free, but bigger story expansions usually come at a price. Releasing new interesting content is also a great way to revive interest in the original game.

MARKETING

Making a high-quality game is one thing, but you'll need to heavily market it if you'd like to turn your efforts into a (commercial) success. The only thing more important than creating a great game, is telling people how great your game is. Modesty will get you nowhere.

Gamers get flooded with new video game releases on a weekly basis. Not only are you competing for a players' cramped wallets, you are competing for their limited amount of time.

It's not easy to get noticed in the crowd, so you need to make sure you reach your target audience well before you hit that launch button.

One more thing before we take a closer look at some marketing tools: gamers appreciate honesty. Don't take your audience for a fool and try to sell them something you can't offer. You can shout all you want, but in the end you'll have to back up your claims with a solid game.

As with so many aspects of game development, there's no definitive way to market your game. A lot depends on the marketing goal you want to achieve, as well as the chosen platform and distribution method. However, there's some common marketing tools that can be of use in almost any marketing strategy.

In some ways you can see marketing as just another aspect of the game's development, equally as important as coding or designing. While your marketing efforts will climax around release, **the earlier you start the better**.

WEBSITE

As soon as you know what you're going to cook up and who you're going to serve it to, you can get to work. Set up a user-friendly website (or add a new page for the game to your existing one) and make sure clients, publishers or press can find all the relevant information they need. Try to put yourself in the mind of your player and use keywords to describe your game that they would search on. After all, the best place to hide a body is on the second page of Google's search results.

SOCIAL MEDIA

It has never been easier to directly communicate with your audience. Put your social media accounts into overdrive to easily spread the word about your game. Twitter is the preferred social medium of the games industry, but having a presence on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube can be valuable as well. Different social media have different users, so mix and match or identify the social medium your target audience frequents most. Post regularly about your game and it'll always be top of mind with your audience.

TRAILERS

Deciding when to unveil your game is tricky. You never get a second chance at a first impression, so you need to feel confident about what you're going to show. You can't postpone it too long either because you need enough time before release to stir up the desire to buy and play the game. Showing off your game for the first time during pre-alpha production is widely considered best practice. You can follow that up with new trailers during production, wrapping up with the release trailer on launch day.

EVENTS

Presenting your game at industry events is ever so important. For digitally distributed games, it's sometimes the only way of getting physically noticed. Events are also the ideal moment to have your games play tested by a live audience or have press check out your game before release.

PRESS COVERAGE

Talking about press: not only gamers get flooded by new video games, journalists do too. Getting your game covered by the press isn't as simple as sending a press release or review code anymore. Just like players, journalists have limited time and have to spend that as efficiently as possible. Since you have a direct line with your audience through social media, getting covered isn't vital anymore, but a stellar review can give you a nice visibility or sales boost.

INFLUENCERS

In a world of fake news, people sometimes prefer the word of mouth of someone they trust over the opinion of the press. Having influencers feature your game on their YouTube channels will give you a big visibility boost with a certain, mostly younger audience.

CROSS-PROMOTION

One of the best marketing tools is your animated property in itself. You can create a cross-promotion property trailer or give the game a nice cameo in your series or feature. If you already have a game, you can use it to promote a newer one. Cross-promotion is a great way to inform your existing fans of your game.

GETTING FEATURED

Digital stores use algorithms to show individual user recommendations that suit their taste. However, there's still a minor form of manual curation in the form of features. Great games get cherry picked by the platform holders and receive a nice place on the front page. As discoverability is everything, this will result in extra sales.

DISCOUNTS

There are of course many more intricacies to game marketing, but this should give you a general understanding of what you need to think about. The above clearly shows you can't underestimate the time you need to spend on your marketing strategy. It might cost you blood, sweat and tears, but if you minimise its importance, you might as well pack it up right now.

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IN CON–CLUSION

The goal of this whitepaper is to help the animation industry better understand video games. As we've come to the end of the journey, we hope you learned something about what makes the games industry tick.

Platform, genre, distribution, business models and marketing strategy. We've all approached them separately but developing a video game is one all-encompassing process. Every aspect ties into each other and making the right combination of decisions can be the difference between success and failure.

We offered you nothing more than a bird's eye view but still we feel confident you've seen that our worlds aren't that far apart and that we need to get to know each other better.

As the cultural relevance and financial force of the games industry keeps growing rapidly, we envision a future where we can co-operate more closely, providing rich IP with meaningful interactive experiences that result in even more long-term value.

Thank you for reading.

About Happy Volcano

Hi, we're Happy Volcano, a game development studio based in Belgium. We make digital entertainment products to create valuable and interactive experiences that are worthy of a player's time. In doing so, we firmly believe that video games are an excellent way of engaging with an audience on a long-term basis.

Happy Volcano has experience in designing games for all platforms, ranging from online to mobile and desktop to console. Whatever game plan suits your marketing strategy, we're up to the task.

We've had outside IP in our care before so we know how valuable it is to you and understand the importance of treating it right. Some of our previous work was done for VRT/Ketnet, Studio 100 and Thuristar. Our current own IP project The Almost Gone, is written by an award-winning Belgian author, so we know how to work with strong minded creatives and can make their inspired ideas work in a game environment.

We hope you've taken away something from this whitepaper. If you're warmed up to the idea of game development and you need a professional game studio to help you with transforming your IP into a high quality video game, we're but an email away.

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HAPPY VOLCANO