# GO-GO-GADGET BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

*A Beginner's Guide to Business Development in the Video Game Industry*

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# Contents

If you run your own games industry business, your daily to-do list is probably overflowing with important tasks: completing projects, communicating with your customers, directing your development team, handling distribution issues, creating marketing assets, and in some cases even coding or creating art for your game—all of which are vital to running a successful business.

However, there's one task that doesn't always make the list, but is arguably one of the best things you can do to support your company's long-term stability and growth: business development!

This guide will introduce you to basic business development skills and useful programs and software, as well as tips for integrating business development into your daily routine.

*Topics include:*

- Why constant business development is important for your company
- The top eight skills that support a strong business development strategy
- Introduction to the most popular tools to use for daily business development
- Examples of how to conduct business development on a daily basis, as well as during a conference or industry event

## Ongoing Business Development Is Important

To ensure a healthy, thriving business, you must always be moving forward. This means reaching out to new clients, searching for businesses to partner with, or finding ways to improve your product or service so it's the best one available on the market.

If you neglect or completely ignore business development, you could face severe consequences sooner than you think. Once your business starts to stagnate — or worse, moves backward — you'll only make life easier for your competitors. Constant business development helps your business gain momentum, which leads to new customers, opportunities, and hopefully profit!

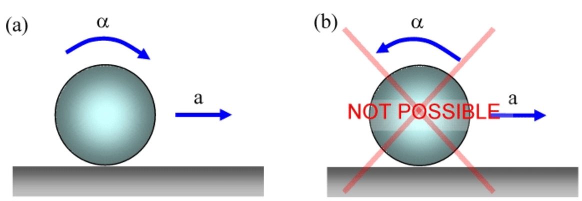


Fig. 1: Acceleration of rolling objects.

### What is Your Weakness?

Whether you do business development daily or you've never given any thought to it, chances are that you are probably naturally good at certain areas of business development, and unnaturally awful at others. While it's a great idea to play to your strengths, ignore the temptation to skip out on the "hard parts." Business development works best when you give equal attention to all areas.

Read through the following list of skills and consider which of these things you are best *and* worst at. Jot down which specific skill or skills are your weak points.

*Key Business Development Skills:*

**1. PR (Public Relations) and Messaging**
*Telling customers how your product or service will solve problems or improve quality of life*

**2. Prospecting**
*Finding potential clients or areas to expand your business*

**3. Follow-up**
*Pursuing interest in your product or service and gauging commitment*

**4. Proposals**
*Offering the right amount of work for the ideal price*

**5. Project Management**
*Planning and controlling resources*

**6. Team Management**
*Coordinating and tasking individuals*

**7. Getting Paid**
*Securing income to make your business model sustainable*

**8. Getting Endorsed**
*Asking clients to testify that your product or service is top-notch*

In the next part of this guide, I'll break down each skill into its key points. Pay special attention to the section that corresponds to your weakest skill(s) and keep in mind that, like most skills, it will take practice to improve.

Later in this guide, we'll also cover some websites and programs that can be integrated into your daily routine to help support these eight core skills.

## PR and Messaging

You live and breathe your business and understand better than anyone how it can improve people's lives or save them time and hassle. However, if a potential customer doesn't know about or understand your products or services, they'll just become a lost opportunity.

### *Craft your pitch*

A pitch could be a casual, written introduction you send via email, or an upbeat 10-second verbal presentation while waiting in line for coffee. No matter the method of delivery, your pitch should cover the following four points.

1. Sell yourself and your experience. "I've worked with global licenses for over 15 years."
2. State your business goal. "We want to put great IPs and brands in the hands of great teams."
3. Identify a pain point and back it up with data. "With 20,000 new apps launching each month, discoverability is a huge issue and licensing can be intimidating."
4. Explain how you will fix it. "We work with brands to find them great development partners, and help developers and publishers gain access to these licenses while building win-win co-marketing strategies. We show consumers that licensed games can be original and don't have to suck."

### *Tweak the pitch*

Once you've covered the above four points, customize the content for different situations and mediums (e.g., email, printed brochures, website, conversations). Prepare and practice a variety of pitches, as different potential clients have different needs. You may find yourself talking to a company in a different industry and need to be able to redefine what you do to make a connection.

### ›› General Tips for PR and Messaging

- Take a success and add your own twist.
- Never forget to K.I.S.S. (Keep it simple, stupid!)
- Don't get bogged down in detail at this point. Get a paying client first.

The following sample pitch describes a different service, but note how each sentence supports one of the four pitch points.

"I've spent the last eight years of my career hunting down and landing work-for-hire jobs around the world. We want to help you grow and stabilize by putting those opportunities in your hands. We know it is time consuming to find the right people and build the relationships needed to receive these RFPs. We can put over 60 years of experience, relationships, and guidance to work for you for less than the cost of a junior business development professional."

### *Establish yourself as an expert*

- Contribute articles to industry-related websites
- Maintain a blog and update it every 1-2 weeks
- Write whitepapers and submit them when conferences have "calls for entries"
- Pursue opportunities to speak about your skills or experience
- Participate in social media, such as creating and updating a Facebook page or Twitter account
- Send out monthly newsletters to customers or other interested parties to keep your business fresh in their minds.

## Prospecting

It's not enough to set up shop and expect customers to come find you. You need to go out of your way to find the right companies and people to engage with. Look for anyone who would benefit from the products or services you offer, and try to envision tangible ways their business would benefit from your help. Then, put these ideas together into a polite and cohesive email, send it, and keep your fingers crossed for a reply.

- Industry Guides: Lists of companies who are attending industry conventions are often available online, and some include brief profiles on the services each company offers.
- Virtual Assistants: VA's can be invaluable as the front line of your business development pipeline. A good virtual assistant can datamine new prospects and handle the initial outreach before handing a warm lead off to you or your sales team.
- Newsletters: Sign up at GamesIndustry.biz or [a]List Daily (alistdaily.com).
- Web News: Popular sites include Gamasutra and Develop.
- Mailing Lists: Consider joining mailing lists for companies you'd like to do business with in the future. You could also monitor mailing lists or blogs of fellow game industry professionals who can open doors for networking or provide opportunities to show you are an expert in your field.
- Grunt Work: If you've successfully sold your product or service to a particular type of company in the past, perform Google and other searches to identify similar businesses.

## Follow Up

Don't be "that guy" (or girl) who makes promises about commitment and then vanishes into thin air. A reputation for being flaky is hard to shake.

- Be timely. Don't let more than a few days go by without following up on any initial correspondence. Emails may be sent to spam or de-prioritized if the recipient does not know you or remember you.
- Show you are serious about working together. Follow up with a summary of the problem they are having, and use parts of your pitch to reinforce how you can help.
- Demonstrate you care and understand their pain point. Empathy and understanding are powerful tools. If you can show the prospect that you have faced the same issues and resolved them for yourself or your clients you will gain valuable credibility.
- Stay fresh in their mind. If they don't respond to your initial follow-up, try a different tactic. Send them an article they would find interesting, or schedule another time to check in with them in a few months.
- Answer questions before they are asked. Anticipate what kind of questions this person might have and address the most important ones early on. Don't include an overwhelming amount of details about insignificant issues in your initial call or email.
- Move the deal forward. If mutual interest has been established, schedule a call and discuss the client's specific needs or problems. Once you have all the details, craft a solution and move on to the "proposal" phase.
- Build the relationship. Find opportunities to keep in touch with potential clients (this ties into "staying fresh"). For example, ask if they'll be at a particular conference next month and offer to meet up. Keep in mind that even if paying work is not forthcoming from this person, there's always the chance they'll refer you to someone who needs your help and is able to pay you now.

## Proposals

A proposal describes the work you will be completing for your client and a breakdown of the costs involved with the project. The proposal should be detailed enough to justify your asking price, but not so detailed that you've lost significant time if the client decides not to follow through.

If your potential client has published an RFP (request for proposal) document then take the time to read *every single page*. RFPs often include important information about the specific problem the client is trying to solve, formatting guidelines (such as font size or page limit), and the submission deadline.

Your proposal should cover the following topics:

- Show you understand the problem. This ties back to identifying your client's pain point and backing it up with data and facts. Prove that you've done your research and are offering a customized solution that meets their specific needs. A "one size fits all" approach to your client's issues may not guarantee repeat business or referrals.
- How will you solve it? Explain your proposed solution with a sufficient amount of information, but not so much detail that your client could take your solution to a competitor and ask for a lower price. Avoid using industry jargon that your client may not be familiar with.
- What will you deliver? Specify what your client will have received by the end of the contract period, whether it's a final deliverable such as a game or marketing campaign, or an ongoing service you provide.
- What will you charge? To figure out how much you need to charge, make a list of all costs associated with the project, including salaries, travel, and materials. Don't forget overhead like rent or utilities for your office. The more entries in this list, the more accurate it will be. Then total up your entries, add your desired profit, and provide the final price in the proposal document. Make sure there's enough profit to provide some wiggle room, but not too much to price yourself out of the deal. Also, do not include a detailed breakdown of the costs, as this will provide the client with more opportunities to haggle price-points or even strike things from the list.
- Tell them why you are awesome. What makes your company stand out from the competition? Why should this client choose to do business with you? Review the "PR & Messaging" section of this guide for more tips on writing a solid pitch.

Once you are happy with your proposal document, save a copy and use it as a template for future proposals.

## Project Management

Finishing projects and getting paid is part of the formula for a successful company. However, if your development timelines are a convoluted nightmare and your client communication is tense or nonexistent, no one will be eager to work with you again!

- Have the right people on the right job. A 3D character artist may not enjoy working on environment art for a 2D game. A programmer who likes polishing projects might not be the best choice for fast, prototype work.
- Understand at a glance what is going on. Use task tracking and project management tools such as Asana or JIRA (described in the "Tools" section of this guide) to quickly see what everyone on your team is doing. You can identify who has bandwidth to take on new tasks and who is overburdened.
- Take preemptive action on possible problems. Use your past experiences to

anticipate future problems and resolve the issues before they can negatively affect the success of the product or service.

- Make sure nothing falls through the cracks. Use whatever organizational method works best for you to ensure you capture all project requirements. Remember to update the requirements throughout development if needed. Provide this list to your QA person at the end of the project cycle to double check that nothing was overlooked.
- Get the job done like you said you would. Finishing projects on-time and on-budget is challenging, but having a track record of seeing projects through to the end is monumentally important for both repeat business and new customers.

## Team Management

If your business has grown large enough, you hopefully have one or more employees reporting to you for direction. However, coordinating their tasks is only one part of the puzzle. It is just as important to manage the team's working relationships to ensure everyone is productive and proud of their work.

- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of each member. Ask team members to describe their professional skill set and what they like to do best, as well as what they don't enjoy doing at all. Then follow up by assigning projects that utilize their skill set, and avoid tasks that might make them dread coming to work.
- Understand what each team member *enjoys* doing, not just what they *can* do. For example, your team member might tell you they enjoy building websites, but in truth they live for perfecting CSS code and could care less about creating the site's graphics. Know when and how to split up projects so each team member is able to put their full effort and passion into their work.
- Make sure your team has the tools to succeed without excessive oversight. Encourage your team to use task tracking programs such as Asana and JIRA or report their weekly progress to you via email. If an employee works remotely from you, consider scheduling monthly phone calls to give you both a chance to casually discuss any thoughts or concerns about their tasks or professional growth.
- Explain how current tasks support the company's long-term goals. Many people work best when they have an idea of "the bigger picture." It helps them understand how their current tasks will directly or indirectly contribute to the lasting success of the company's products and services. If you, as the business owner, cannot articulate how a team member's work is important or necessary to your long-term goals, take a big step back and reevaluate why you assigned them the work in the first place.
- Assign tasks to not only get the job done, but to help your team members grow and learn. For less experienced workers, identify skills where they have demonstrated proficiency and assign them more challenging tasks that build on these skills. Conversely, experienced team members might appreciate opportunities to branch into areas they haven't worked with before. For example, your QA lead could enjoy helping design and test a new game feature. These workers also benefit from increasing levels of responsibility, such as mentoring other team members.

## Getting Paid

Without revenue, your business is nothing more than a glorified hobby. Make sure you set aside time to track your operating expenses and ensure clients are paying you the correct amount on time.

- Tie payments to milestones or specific dates. It's common to tie payments to game deliverables such as prototypes, alpha, beta, and gold. You could also request an initial 50% deposit, with the remainder to be paid upon project completion. Find an option your client is comfortable with but is also fair to you. Whatever payment schedule you choose, it is important to have a signed contract that proves both you and your client agreed on payment details.
- Give the client the info they need to pay you. This includes to whom to write the check, or a bank account routing number. Don't make it difficult for the client to obtain this information; otherwise, paying you sinks to the bottom of their to-do list.
- Forecast your revenue. If you know how much you'll be spending in the next three months, it's easier to negotiate a price that is reasonable to your client and enough to keep you in business.
- Understand your expenses. Clients don't like to have high operating expenses passed on to them through high project fees. Keep track of your expenses (save receipts if needed!) and study where your money goes. Don't forget hidden expenses such as office supplies or gas to travel to client meetings. You might even recognize ways to cut unnecessary expenses and net more profit for your business.
- Track your payment status. It pays to be organized — literally! Keep an organized file of when payments were due and if they've been deposited. If a client is overdue on a payment, kindly but sternly remind them of the agreed-upon amount and the date it was due. A telephone call may get a faster response than an email. Ensure that all deposited checks clear the bank before you spend the cash.
- Pay your contractors. Seriously, don't skimp out on this unless you enjoy having legal troubles. If they've done the work, cut them a check. If their work isn't up to par, discuss it before you hire them on for the next job.

## Getting Endorsed

It's okay to occasionally brag about your work. It's even better when you can get other people to do the bragging for you! If you're certain a recent client was pleased with your work, ask them to write a testimonial (also known as an endorsement) praising you and your business.

- Did you deliver what you promised? When considering whether or not to ask for an endorsement, make sure that the project ended on positive terms and you delivered all contractually agreed on items.
- Did the client see the value in what you did? Ask for concrete examples of how your clients benefited from your work. Nothing beats pure data. "We saw a 200% increase in the number of quality meetings at GDC this year because of your award-winning marketing campaign for our newest game."
- You may have to show your work. Be prepared to show a portfolio or have case studies and client references available.
- Ask yourself, "What's the worst that can happen?" Hint: they'll probably tell you "no" or not reply. If your ego can't handle this, don't ask.
- Get the endorsement out there. Display the testimonial on your website, or post an exceptionally glowing review on your Facebook page. If you are connected to your client on LinkedIn (and if you've been doing

business development properly, hopefully you already are), you can ask them to write a public endorsement that will appear on your profile page.

- Ask for referrals from existing clients. Tell your clients that you sincerely appreciate referrals to new customers. Word-of-mouth is an exceptional way to generate endorsements because it can happen anywhere, at any time, and it's free!

## Using the Right Tools for the Job

When used correctly, tools can save you enormous amounts of time and hassle. This section covers a variety of apps and software – both free-to-use and paid – that are must-haves for a busy, on-the-go business owner.

### Evernote

| | |
|---|---|
| *Link* | ›› *evernote.com* |
| *What is it?* | A sometimes intimidating suite of tools with a wide variety of uses. Its core function is to save stuff and share it with others. |
| *Practical uses* | Clip and save ideas for your messaging and PR;<br>Organize and prioritize prospect lists;<br>Share ideas and best practices<br>Create expense reports using Expensify and save to Evernote ›› *expensify.com;*<br>Conference management, such as scanning business cards;<br>Link notes into a visual brainstorming app, e.g., Mind Meister ›› *mindmeister.com;* |

### ›› Specialized Program Options

- **Asana**: Task-based project management ›› *asana.com*
- **Buffer**: Social media manager ›› *bufferapp.com*
- **Contactually**: Daily reminders and outreach programs ›› *contactually.com*
- **Convertii**: PDF to Word converter ›› *convertii.com*
- **FreshBooks & Quicken**: Bookkeeping for the rest of us ›› *freshbooks.com* ›› *quicken.intuit.com*
- **JIRA**: Task, bug and idea tracker ›› *atlassian.com/software/jira*
- **Hootsuite**: Schedule and monitor your social media ›› *hootsuite.com*
- **Lanyrd**: Discover new conferences and opportunities ›› *lanyrd.com*
- **Mail Chimp**: Email campaigns with tracking ›› *mailchimp.com*
- **Pocket**: Brain dump depository for web articles ›› *getpocket.com*
- **Toggl**: Time tracking tool ›› *toggl.com*
- **Tripit**: Organize your travel ›› *tripit.com*
- **Zapier**: Web app connector and automator ›› *zapier.com*

### Skype

| | |
|---|---|
| *Link* | ›› *skype.com* |
| *What is it?* | Communications application covering instant messages and various phone solutions. |
| *Practical uses* | Office phone is available wherever you are;<br>Use your headline to promote a service;<br>Quickly check in on clients and team members;<br>Build a better team through communication;<br>Maximize time and potential on conference calls; |

| Dropbox, Copy, & OneDrive | |
|---|---|
| *Links* | *›› dropbox.com*<br>*›› copy.com*<br>*›› onedrive.com* |
| *What is it?* | Cloud storage services that keep everything handy and make sure it is never lost. |
| *Practical uses* | Always have access to what you need;<br>Extend that access (or parts of it) to your team;<br>Back up important files as securely as possible;<br>Share presentations, sales material, and information with prospects and clients; |

| Google Apps | |
|---|---|
| *Link* | *›› googleapps.com* |
| *What is it?* | Suite of cloud-based tools for everything from email to documents to conferencing. |
| *Practical uses* | Easy, cheap solution for a small business;<br>Collaboration and version control;<br>Office phone;<br>Cloud storage; |

| LinkedIn | |
|---|---|
| *Link* | *›› linkedin.com* |
| *What is it?* | Social network for business leaders. |
| *Practical uses* | Job hunting;<br>Recruiting;<br>PR and messaging;<br>Research and qualification;<br>Endorsements; |

## ›› Customer Relationship Managers

Customer Relationship Managers (CRMs) are so important, I decided to give them some extra focus!

### *What is it?*

A CRM is a piece of software that is the lifeblood of your business development process.

### *Practical uses*

- ✓ Store contact information and organizational structure
- ✓ Organize your contact list
- ✓ Have the history of a customer relationship at a glance
- ✓ Schedule calls and meetings
- ✓ Organize sales plans and pipelines
- ✓ Track deals you won or lost and understand why
- ✓ Capture incoming leads

### *Which one is right for me?*

- Understand what you need and define a budget
- Research features and integration possibilities
- Don't pay for extra seats or features you will never use
- Ask your friends what program they use, and what they like most/least
- Don’t be afraid to experiment: A .csv file can be your best friend

### *Where do I start?*

Spreadsheets or CRM tools such as:

- ❖ Salesforce ›› *salesforce.com*
- ❖ Zoho ›› *zoho.com*
- ❖ Sugar ›› *sugarcrm.com*
- ❖ Nutshell ›› *nutshell.com*
- ❖ Contactually ›› *contactually.com*

# Business Development in Real Life

Now it's time to put all these tips together with real life examples and scenarios to help you drive your business forward!

In this section, I offer a glimpse into my daily routine and how I use many of the tools listed in the previous section to organize and support my business development efforts. I also provide guidelines and examples for how to maximize your time spent performing business development during industry conferences.

## Daily Business Development

Here's a summary of how I perform business development during a typical weekday. At first glance this might seem like a lot of work, but with practice and effective use of tools and programs, I can fly through these tasks. I also know that this work directly benefits my company's future.

*The Routine:*

First thing in the morning, I grab coffee and open Toggl to see how much time my team spent on projects the previous day.

Next, I open Pocket and review the collection of articles saved from the night before. I send the best ones to Buffer, which posts them to all of my social media accounts. I also flag any articles I saved because they mentioned companies or individuals I could do business with. I add these companies and their contact information, if available, to my CRM.

Then I check Asana to see which tasks I need to complete today, as well as what my team will be working on. Some days I'll execute a virtual company meeting via Skype or Google Hangouts, particularly if a large project has just started or reached an important milestone.

In the afternoon, I check Contactually, my CRM, to follow up on any pending deals with my customers, email new customers and touch base with contacts I haven't spoken to or heard from in a while.

I use Freshbooks to invoice clients based on deals or hours tracked in Toggl. Then I log in to LinkedIn to request endorsements from recent clients.

Finally, later that evening I go through the day's news using Feedly and save the best articles to Pocket for reference and use the next morning.

## At an Industry Conference

Conferences and conventions are an effective and exhilarating way to network with people who share your goals, or are willing to pay you to make their goals a reality!

*1. Set aside time to prepare for the conference.*

- Research the conference. Understand the size, layout, activities and who will be attending.
- Know where you are going and what you are doing. Establish these goals early and consider creating backup plans in case something goes awry (such as an event is cancelled, or a talk you wanted to see is full).
- Maximize each trip by seeking secondary opportunities. For example, use EventBrite to look for parties and events that could be good for networking.
- Research the companies and individuals you are meeting. Know their names and try to find a picture of what they look like, if possible (LinkedIn is a good resource). Get an idea of how their company makes money, then try to anticipate what their needs or pain

points will be. Brainstorm ideas for how you could solve their problems.

- Send confirmation emails for all meetings. Include the location, the time, pictures of the meeting spot if possible, and the best way to get in touch with you (typically a cell phone number). Specify if texting is okay because the convention floor can often be noisy and make voice calls difficult or awkward ("hold on, hold on, okay, I'm outside and can hear you now" is neither a fun nor a professional way to greet a potential customer).
- Include contact information on your calendar and print out a hard copy. It's always a great idea to have backup in case your digital devices fail or run out of battery.
- Test your cell phone reception. Go to the convention site beforehand to test voice calls and connectivity in the areas where you'll be spending the most time.
- Consider how much data you will be using on your smartphone**.** It's better to pay for extra bandwidth ahead of time rather than racking up a whole day's worth of overage fees.

### ›› General Conference Tips

- Have the right people in the meetings and don't book a meeting just for the sake of having one.
- Identify your top targets using the tools discussed previously. Reach out to them in that order for meetings.
- Print a physical copy of your schedule and write down objectives to keep yourself on track.
- Don't book meetings in general areas; include addresses.
- Select quieter, low-traffic areas to meet.
- Introduce people with facts about one another.
- Stay sober(ish).
- Use these opportunities to build relationships, not just make contacts!
- Tailor your strategy to the size and format of the conference.
- Respect your budget. If you don't need a pass, don't buy one. Use lobbies at the convention center, nearby hotels, coffee houses and other venues for meetings and networking.

*2. While at the conference, your main goal is to acquire information!*

- Network! Don't be afraid to say hello and introduce yourself. You never know when a casual conversation about that morning's keynote could turn into a business lead.
- Hand out your business cards. You're almost sure to get them in return.
- Pay attention to where the good parties are. Remember that good does not necessarily mean open bar. Consider what sort of crowd will offer you the most leads. A loud DJ could kill your opportunities for networking if no one can hear you.
- Pick up conference guides, magazines, and flyers. You can peruse them during down time at the end of the day, or on your flight home.
- Prioritize forming new contacts and relationships over education. Larger conferences often videotape talks and put them online for viewing after the conference has ended. However, the opportunity to make connections with business partners or new clients has to be done during the conference. The exception to this rule is the conference keynote. Make time to attend or at least find a summary of what was said. Since so many people attend these presentations, it's easy to strike up a conversation about it later while networking.

- **Reach out for meetings on the ground.** You could tweet a general blast that you're looking for certain types of opportunities, or text a personalized message to a high-priority business lead.
- **Maximize your time but know your limits.** You will make a sour impression during a meeting if you're stumbling over words and bleary eyed from lack of sleep, or constantly checking the time because you overbooked yourself and are already late for your next meeting.
- **Be agile.** Have a plan of action if someone cancels or doesn't show up to a meeting. Use your cloud calendar to move and arrange meetings on the fly.

### *3. After the conference, complete these seven steps to bring your business development strategy full circle.*

*Week One:*

1. Input all your business cards into LinkedIn and your CRM.
2. Extend invitations to all parties on LinkedIn.
3. Update your CRM with any new information, such as interests, upcoming RFPs, meeting notes, and information about client objectives and needs.
4. Immediately follow up on all hot prospects.

*Week Two:*

1. Follow up with all remaining contacts from the show.
2. Move forward on any action items from meetings.
3. Input all data or knowledge gleaned from the show into your CRM for future reference.

## Conclusion

Hopefully this guide has given you a better idea of how business development can benefit your company, as well as given you confidence to incorporate it into your daily workflow.

### *In summary:*

- Business development is essential to keep your business growing and moving forward.
- Actively work to identify and improve the weak spots in your business development skill set.
- Integrate the suggested tools into your workflow to make on-the-fly business development faster and easier.
- Practice business development on a daily basis, in addition to special industry events like conferences, for maximum benefit.

## About the Author

### *Who is this guy?*

Jay Powell began his career as an agent in 1998. He has been doing business development for 15 years and has negotiated and executed countless agreements for developers and publishers. He has lectured globally and is published in multiple industry business books.

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