casual connect

Pitching to a Publisher

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The Publisher

When dealing with a Publisher, there are aspects that you need to know how to handle. You are most likely reading this because you don't have an existing relationship with a Publisher and they have to deal with a lot of people saying they have the best game ever. Truth be told, some 90% of all pitches to Publishers don't move forward. By no means does this mean you shouldn't do it, of course you should, but you need to be ready for it.

The Publisher in general deals with a lot of developers that want to get their games published. Consider relating dealing with a Publisher to submitting your resume for a job. It is a step-by-step process that one must go into being prepared.

Focus your effort on one game at start to show that you are committed to this idea and you have the moxy to back it up. Besides being committed, the Publisher wants to see that you are working on this game instead of it just being an idea that you want funding for. If you have 20 people in a room, you have 20 ideas. It is up to you to represent the game in the best possible light and know the title inside and out. No questions thrown at you will catch you off guard. But if by chance you are asked something that you don't have an answer for, just state that you will talk with your team to find out the answer and get back to them. When talking about the best possible light, don't try and present your game as something that it is not. The Publisher has dealt with that enough in their time, that they will see right through it and you will lose face with them. Once you do that, it is almost impossible to build up trust again. Honesty is key here as, if the deal does go through, these are the building blocks that you are creating, and if it doesn't work out, when you reach out to them again you have that rapport. This industry is a lot about the relationships that you make, so when dealing with a Publisher make sure to be front-facing, make sure to always bring your 'A' game. If you are having a face-to-face meeting, make it something to remember about your game, but also you.

There is a considerable amount of time and effort that needs to be invested when dealing with a Publisher, for the majority of times it is not the first meeting that gets everything completed. It is a series of conversations and various levels of deliverables that you will be faced with. During that time you are talking with Publishers, keep working on your title. You will never know when a chance from a couple of months before turns into something more concrete.

The Pitch

Below are series of categories of rules you should follow with certain aspects when dealing with the Publisher. It is broken down in a way to answer questions, but hopefully to raise some more questions about what you have ready to show.

Be Professional

When giving your pitch over to the Publisher, make sure it is professional. Yes, the overall is to make a fun game, but this is a business. So when going into these meetings make sure you are professional, as the goal here is to be published. To come across as a developer who is serious about what they're making, you need to come off as being serious. You do not need to wear a suit in this industry but jeans and a torn t-shirt aren't appropriate either. When dealing with executives from a publishing company, treat it like a nice restaurant. Nice looking jeans are fine, but wear a collared shirt.

Know Who You Are Dealing With

As much as there are different genres, there are different types of Publishers. If you are talking to a casual Publisher, don't expect them to publish the next Destiny. If the Publisher has released certain titles, they are going to focus on those types of titles, as it is in their wheel house, but also it is how they have become who they are. Focus on Publishers that are based upon the genre that you game is of, and you will get responses that fit. Do you due diligence on a Publisher and understand the titles that they have published in the past.

  ∴   Check a Publisher's website for submission guidelines
  ∴   Make sure you know the Publisher's submission rules and clauses.

One Sentence To Rule Them All

Can you describe your game in one sentence? If you can't you need to figure out a way to be able to do that. When putting together a high concept for your pitch, this is the goal. The idea behind this is similar to why you might click on a link to learn more. We have become a society where if you can't get your idea out to me in one sentence, I am going to move onto something else. I liken it to an elevator ride: by the time that the elevator stops at the next floor you better have interested the

person you are telling your idea to want to hear more. If you don't…Well there is no reason to go on, you missed that opportunity. What this all means is that if you don't whet the appetite of the Publisher that you are talking to, then they aren't going to read your pitch or continue talking to you. Imagine you have a minute to tell someone totally about your game to make them interested in more, then stop imagining because this is exactly what happens and it is good to know what you are going to say in that minute.

Be Visual

Let images of the game speak to the Publisher instead of a wall of text for them to read. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, so use your images to speak volumes to the Publisher. Include mockups of your game in your pitch. It can be done in a number of formats, but make sure the visual representation of you game is easy to understand. It is obvious that the mockup does not constitute a final release of the title, which means it just needs to have elements that you are comfortable with, and be visually appealing. The mockup serves to demonstrate the viewer what can be expected but also lets them imagine what it will be when it is actually in the game. If you can include pre-production art, or art that is more final, it's even better.

Know Your Game

This should go without saying, but you will be amazed at how many people working on a game do not honestly know what the core concept of the title is. You should be able to recite the design of your game to everyone and anyone. It shouldn't be based upon 'I was thinking' or 'I am pretty sure', it should be based upon the game itself: the idea behind this is that you aren't pitching an idea, but you are pitching the game. So when you are thinking on this one, ask yourself - 'Why am I making this game?' This is the reason why you're doing it all. Know your game, know the audience, why your project is cool, who your team is, what makes it original or unique, what it can be compared to, what the project status is, and the approximate release date.

In The Long Run

When talking to Publishers, keep in mind that they aren't just focusing on the game, but also looking at the team behind the project. They are going to ask questions about you and what you have shipped. And when I am referring to you, I am referring to your whole team. When a Publisher is doing their investigation on you, they are looking at who makes up the team. If they feel this game

will be a success, then they aren't going to just go to bed with you once. They want a developer that they can work with in the long run.

The 'A' Team

If you are putting a certain team on the game, the Publisher is going to expect that team to stay on the project in the long run. Do not put team players in your pitch to just get the deal, because as soon as development starts the truth will come out. Trust me in this, as developers will always put the 'A' team in the pitch and then, when development starts, those people get spread out on other projects and the project that you promised the Publisher will suffer. This will affect the relationship in a drastic way, and not only change the direction of this project, but might also impact other relationships down the road. So don't do that!

Know Your Dates

With any development life cycle, there are dates when elements of that cycle are expected to be done. You need to know the dates of your major milestones even though you might have only an idea of when the game is coming out. What this means is that no matter what day/month/year you are talking to the Publisher, you need to have a clear timeline you expect the game to take, and that you can fit into the Publisher's timeline. You aren't the only one chasing a date, the Publisher needs to know when you expect the game to ship as they also have internal timelines that need to accomplish goals based upon your timeline. A good starting point is to know your Alpha/Beta/Release Candidate and Gold Candidate dates.

Know Your Competition

So what sets your game apart? It is vital that you know your competition from different points of view. How is your game different than X? If you game does compare to X, how did that game do on the market? What other titles are coming out in the same time windows as yours? Knowing the answers to these questions makes the Publisher believe that you understand the market. One thing to note though is that you also need to understand how and why a game that can be compared to yours has failed. As much as it is important to know why a game has succeeded, it is wise to be aware of why a game fails. There are titles that have been awarded over and over again, but this has never impacted the sales of the game. It is good to understand why.

What Platform?

Pick a game that you have played that is on multiple platforms and then think about how the game leveraged each of those markets. If you are making a game that is on PC, consoles and even on mobile, what makes the game different on each platform? How can you take that segment of the market and make the game shine on all those platforms? Also, as a design side note, think about how that game will work on all the different platforms.

Don't Bite Off Too Much

If your pitch includes info that your game will come out on every single platform from PC to handheld, make sure you haven't bitten too much off. A Publisher can see through all that information that it's about trying to do everything for everyone, and will likely end up being nothing for everyone. Understand your audience and the market you want to bring your game to. The Publisher will appreciate your insight on the market. This also associates with your audience, as you are creating a game for a certain demographic.

Don't Overpromise and Under-deliver

If there is something that has been drilled into me the first day I ever worked in this industry, it is that. Do not promise the world something in a timeline impossible to accomplish. This means that if you are being persuaded by a Publisher to change the scope of your title beyond what was intended or pitched, be confident about what you can do. Of course during the way there will be changes in the original vision for the game. But when you promise a certain game, make sure you are confident about completing what you set off to do. You will find out that if you promise more than can actually be done, it will come back to bite you, which leads to my next point.

On Time and Budget

Every time I think of this phrase, it brings a smile to my face. How could this phrase be misconstrued what-so-ever? This works hand in hand with the 'don't overpromise and under-deliver.' There is an expectation from the outset of development that the Publisher is going to have. If you make promises, you have to back them up. It is a simple concept to describe, but very different to actually follow through. When you are presenting a budget to a Publisher, you should

be a little greedy when giving it, as there will always be issues you didn't plan for. And when I am talking about budget, it's not just about money. Budget reflects the time, the manpower, and the expectations of the game as a whole.

Stay On Target

This phrase comes when Luke Skywalker is trying to make that one in a million shot at the Death Star, and you have just become him. Your team has a certain skillset based upon their past, and when you were creating this pitch, you knew what is possible within that team. This means that if you don't have a backend engineer to create a database for the million items the player can craft in your game, then don't target that design. Stay true to what your team can accomplish.

If You Build It, They Will Come

You have this great game on paper, as well as some great visual images. But shortly after seeing those, the Publisher will want to play something. This is when some sort of prototype or demo is great to have. But it's clear that this prototype does not have to be final in any way. It's more of letting the rubber meet the road and give the Publisher something that is tangible, that will allow them to get a better sense of your team. Also a prototype does not have to be on the engine or system that you are planning to use for the actual game. Think outside the box on some prototype ideas, as even something on paper that lets the Publisher go through the menus will work. This also depends upon the game that you are pitching.

> ∴ When submitting the prototype, make sure you include the rule set for the prototype
> ∴ List out what is possible and what is not in the prototype.

Changes

During the conversation there is bound to be a game feature that the Publisher will want to discuss and most likely to remove. You need to be open to ideas from the Publisher as you need to create a relationship with them and this does not mean that they are going to take over the design. What is important to hold onto is your core concept. Consider your core concept the foundation of a building that you are wanting to make. Putting floors onto a foundation that is weak will quickly result in issues that all will see, but having something that is strong to start with will allow for some changes along the way.

What To Create

The time will come when the Publisher asks for your submission package. You at this time have read how to submit, but do you have the contents that are ready to be submitted? Below are just some thoughts, but there are always alternatives and different ways to submit a package. Not all packages will be the same, it depends on the Publisher that you are dealing with. Think of your sales sheet, deck and demo as three stages of the process. You get a Publisher's attention with a sales sheet, you answer their key questions with the deck, and you sell them with the demo.

Sales Sheet

Your sales sheet will serve as a one-page synopsis of your game. This is to allow a Publisher to quickly see all of the high level information on your project. It should always fit legibly on one page and include:

∴ Game Title

∴ Platform(s)

∴ Monetization model (premium, free-to-play, subscription)

∴ Two to three screenshots

∴ Release date

∴ Feature list

∴ Short story overview or description.

Pitch Deck

∴ Slide 1: Game logo with company logo

∴ Slide 2: Game overview with:

    o Genre

    o Platform

    o Target audience

    o Monetization model

    o 3 to 6 features as bullet points.

∴ Slide 3: Unique Selling Points. These are what make your game UNIQUE. "Post-Apocalyptic Setting" is a feature, it is not unique to your game.

∴ Slide 4: Story or background overview

∴ Slides 5-6: Concept art, screenshots, or trailers

∴ Slide 7: Schedule and budget

∴ Slide 8: Company profile

∴ Slide 9: Experience of team leads

∴ Slide 10: Contact information.

Demo

∴ Clear directions on how to get your demo up and running

  o Step-by-step instructions. Make sure that this is professional looking.

∴ What is the rule set for the demo?

  o If you do 'A', 'B' will happen, then 'C' will unlock. Do not make them have to figure out what they are playing.

∴ Graphical Assets included along with the demo

  o The more the better, but make sure it matches up to what is in the demo. A suggestion would be to have pieces of art of what happens after the demo is complete.

∴ Your pitch sheet to be included again

  o They have already seen this document, but keep it always in front of their eyes.

∴ Design Document

  o You should have a Design Document that is always ready for eyes outside your development team, ready to read.

Conclusion

Getting a deal with a Publisher is a process that will take a considerable amount of time. Do not approach this situation as "I have a great game, now I expect the first meeting to be all I need". That is certainly not the case. Be prepared and step with your best foot forward. Go into treating this whole aspect as something to learn from each and every day. With the right information by your side and the willingness to let the world see what you have created, the right opportunity is out there.

OUR EXPERIENCE IS YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Contact to Contract and Beyond

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SKYLARK

The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have a promise to keep, and miles to go before I sleep -

Single Player Adventure Game for Mobile platforms

The uncontrollable urge to wander, has been part of your life since childhood. Hiking is your chosen menthod to placate your daily demons.

Accompanied by an array of eclectic characters. You set out of this once in a lifetime adventure to escape into the woods.

Features:

- Unique game setting in the middle of the Appalachain Trail

- Minimal GUI to allow the player to focus on the game and not the controls

- Engrossing story line that keeps the player wanting to see what happens next on the trail

- Beautiful handrawn and styled artwork that places you inside the world

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