

I HAVE THIS IDEA FOR A GAME

A GUIDE ON HOW GET YOUR GAMES PUBLISHED

THE TABLETOP GAMES MARKET IN THE UK IS WORTH PERHAPS £400 MILLION, AND IS GROWING ALL THE TIME. THERE ARE AROUND 100,000 PUBLISHED GAMES IN EXISTENCE, WITH HUNDREDS MORE BEING RELEASED EACH YEAR. THIS IS VERY MUCH THE GOLDEN AGE OF TABLETOP GAMING.

Many gamers look at all these new games and think to themselves 'I have this idea for a game.' At this stage, many of these budding designers get no further. How do you move on from that lightbulb moment? Just how do you get a game published?

This article is a guide we hope will answer these questions.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Many individuals may think board games are restricted to Cluedo, Scrabble, Monopoly, and Trivial Pursuit. It is important to be aware of the wealth of games that already

exist, and that the competition is huge. So, you first must do your research.

ONLINE HELP

Visit gaming related websites, YouTube channels and blogs. **Board Game Geek** lists thousands of games. **The Dice Tower** runs top 10 lists. **On Tabletop** produces a vast number of review videos and game play throughs.

GET TO A CONVENTION

Conventions are where the games industry gathers and meets gamers. Games are demoed and sold, publishers get a chance to get

BY RICHARD DENNING

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREE SCHNEIDER

feedback and to show their new prototypes. These are some of the largest in the world:

Gencon Indy takes place in August in Indianapolis, USA. Around 90,000 visitor attend, and there is a huge organised play schedule.

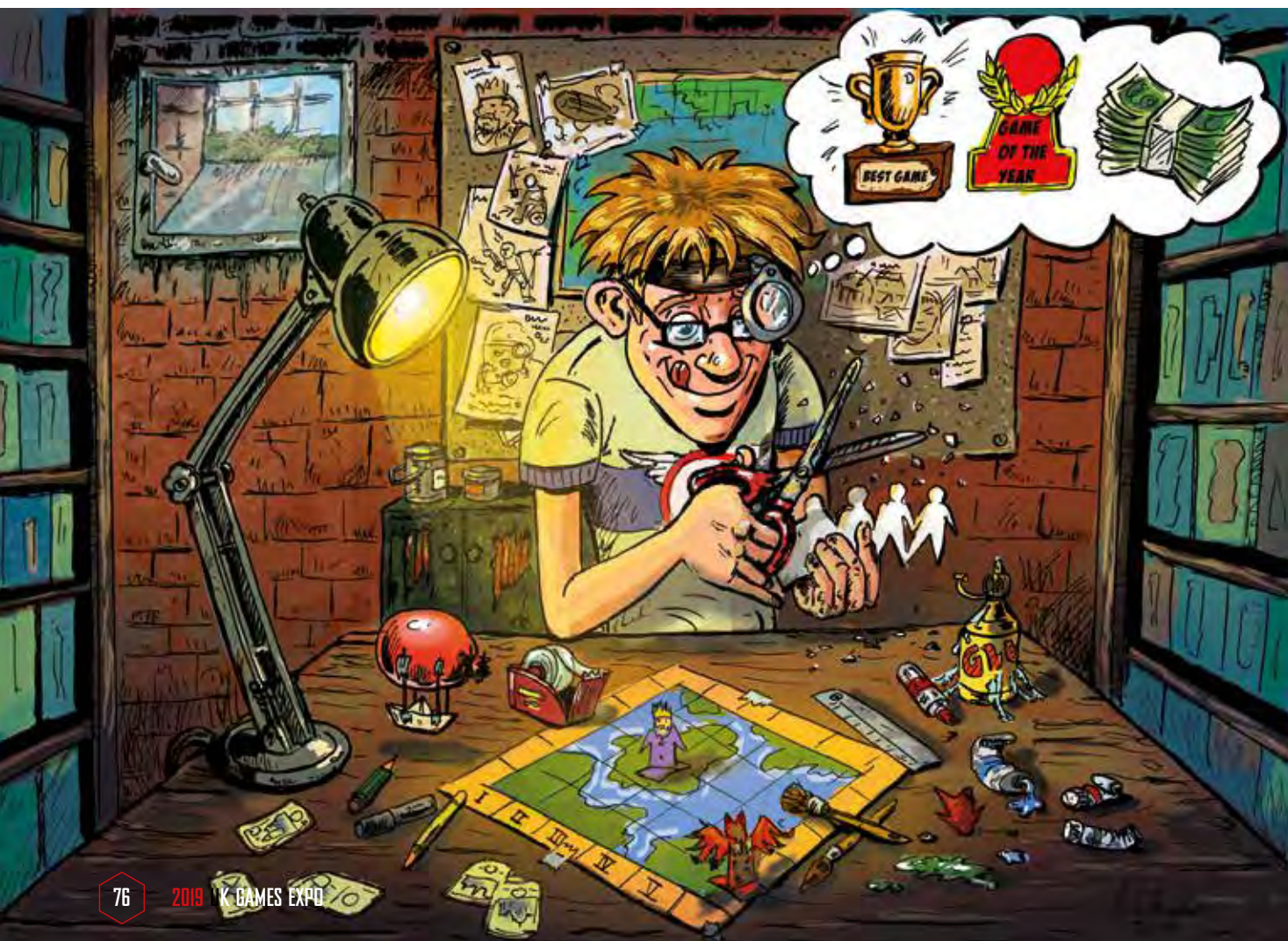
Essen Spiel happens each October in Essen, Germany. It has around 70,000 unique visitors, and is where most new releases of board games occur.

UK Games Expo is each May or June in the NEC, UK. It has around 22,000 unique visitors, and features an extensive Publisher-Designer Track (see page 46).

Worldwide, other events worth looking at are Origins, Pax Unplugged, Lucca Games, and Comics and Cannes.

In the UK other large conventions include Dragonmeet, Airecon, and Tabletop Scotland. There are dozens of other smaller conventions too, which are great testing grounds for

HOW DO YOU MOVE ON FROM THAT LIGHTBULB MOMENT?



your prototypes.

At these events you can play the games, meet the designers, and make some contacts. You will also become aware that gamers have many different tastes; some like games with luck and randomness, some hate that. Start to get a feel for the audience your game might appeal to.

PLAYTESTING AND PROTOTYPES

The process of publishing a board game is a little like writing and publishing a book. When you write books you first start with a basic concept, then write a first draft, and then revise and edit it. This is similar to what happens with game design.

Indeed, some companies call game designers the game author. You first produce an early version and begin play testing it. You need to see if the game works. This, means playing the game over and over. The game will go through various versions, akin to drafts of a book, and just as an author needs an editor to see what does not work in a book, a designer needs play testers to pick up on the flaws in a game concept.

It is a good idea to bring the game to a convention, as you can get feedback from new players. Be prepared for negative remarks and the need to go back to the drawing board.

Playtest UK run many playtest sessions around the country. See: playtest-london.blogspot.com You can visit them at UK Games Expo in stand 1-184 where you can help this year's playtesters with their playtesting and gain tips and ideas for another year.

HOW TO MAKE PROTOTYPES

There are various ways to make prototypes. The quick and easy way is a DIY approach using a home PC and cheap components – potentially only bits of card. Once you have a more developed game idea and are starting to take it to events, then a more professional appearance is needed. Some companies offer a full prototype service, such as cartamundi.com/en/make-my-game/

THE IMPORTANCE OF ART

In the current market games can often fall or succeed on the quality of the appearance. A great game that looks bad can struggle to make an impression. If you do not possess enough skills yourself, you need an illustrator and graphic designer. You may be able to find someone who offers both skillsets, but equally you may need two people. Several attend UKGE and have stands, so take the time to go and see them all because one of them might have the skills you need. Ralph Horsley designed our programme cover and is on



stand 2-674 whilst Andree Schneider created our merchandise art and is on stand 2-665).

YOU HAVE A WORKING GAME, NOW WHAT?

You now need to get a publisher. This is where taking the game around the conventions can be of value, because if a game has legs gamers will recommend it and a publisher might take notice. Alternatively, directly pitching the game idea to a publisher is an option. The key thing to remember at this stage, however, is not to approach a company until you have a game that is well developed and play tested.

Here are some routes to explore:

A) Indie publishing. Why not publish the game yourself? A number of games manufacturers attend UK Games Expo. Visit their stands and discuss your projects. It is best to get several quotes, sometimes one company may be cheaper for one type of game and a different one for a different game. Points to look out for are:

- What is the per unit cost depending on the quantity you order, eg. £13 per game for 1,000 units, £11 for 2,000 etc.
- What are the tooling costs? Most games require one-off templates or tools. If you have a punch board of counters of different sizes, that needs a unique tool to punch the tokens out. It can pay dividends to explore different layouts that allow you to use the same tool more than once.
- Look at their sample components and make sure you are both using the same terms.
- Don't forget possible testing charges. If you sell games in the EU your games must contain a CE mark to show they have passed certain tests.

- Additional language versions of games might add costs if there is a lot of language on the game components.

Further Costs come from:

- Your artists and designer's costs. Negotiating a good overall deal on artwork as well as costs for layout of the game and creation of digital files is important.
- Translation costs. Each language you have in the game means getting it translated. You may find asking other publishers who they use can give you useful introductions to affordable translators.
- B) Co-publishing.** You may be able to form a partnership with an existing publisher or distributor to help make the game. For example, let's say you intend to make the game in English and only want 1,000 games. Partnering with a German publisher to produce 1,000 in German means you are now making 2,000 games and that reduces the per unit costs for both of you. As the designer, you should be able to get a profit out of that arrangement and still allow the co-publisher to get a fair deal. For example, say a game costs £10 to make. You may be able to agree a deal that the co-publisher pays £12 a unit to the manufacturer who pays you the £2 as profit.
- C) Selling or Licensing the game to a Publisher**

It is possible that you may be able to sell your game design to a publisher who then produces the game. At UKGE we hear stories most years of designers who maybe had a game on a playtest table or a starter stand one year and were approached by a publishing house who eventually bought the game design from them.

In these scenarios, you may either agree a deal for a one-off payment for the rights to the game either for ever, or for a defined time period. It may be that a royalties deal is

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agreed giving you a percentage of profits. You need to look at whether you are granting the rights for just, say, English versions or for all languages, for sales in limited areas or worldwide.

Andrew Harman from YAY Games tells us about their experiences with licensing their games.

There's a big worry that getting a licensing deal is somehow the start of you losing control of your beloved game. It will be changed into something unrecognizable. Well, this is partly true. But it's really about adapting your game to their target audience. Sometimes it's a financial decision and a way to keep their staff and artists busy, sometimes it's to add something to fit their house style – whatever it is, it's an interesting journey.

We have two license deals for Ominoos and they really couldn't be more different. Albi in the Czech Republic were clear from the start that they wanted to redo the artwork but it didn't change fundamentally from our YAY Games edition. With Simply Fun in America it was a very different story. They wanted to retheme 'Ominoos' and chose a setting of rockpools instead of Ancient Egypt. We shared our development experience to make sure that symbols on the dice were clear and colourblind friendly and it was a great experience seeing what they came out with. 'Rolling Tides' looks great and won an award in the US proving they really knew what they were doing. So, the big lesson is to trust that your partner publisher knows their target audience.

The other thing is the dreaded contract. It can be quite daunting reading the legalese on these. Don't be afraid to ask for changes or clarification. A contract isn't fixed until it's signed and it's a chance to negotiate for things you want or don't want. Remember that they need you as much as you need them but be realistic. Think of it as a partnership not a rip off.

D) Crowd Funding and Pre-orders. Crowdfunding is a method frequently used in the games industry whereby the considerable cost of making a game is raised in advance by selling the concept to potential customers typically via the internet. Common platforms are Kickstarter and Go Fund me.

Peter Blenkharn of Inside the Box tells us about his experiences with Kickstarter.

Our first Kickstarter in 2015 was a real start-up dream, as new grads putting absurd hours in with basically no money, trying to get an idea off the ground. With only 50-60 quid to start the project, we ended up spending a straight 20 hours on the run up to the launch putting together the campaign. Our first game, Molecular, an educational chemistry game, funded and we got a taste for the buzz of crowdfunding



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR THE PUBLISHER DESIGNER TRACK, GO TO PAGE 46

success. There are maddening logistics in completing a project but also outright exhilaration of sending off hundreds of parcels around the world.

Our second Kickstarter initially failed as it isn't a catch-all method for success. It's merely a platform and succeeds on the merits of projects putting its powerful tools to good use. That's when the UK Games Expo came in, providing an affordable starting point to play our game with hundreds of people who then went to back the Kickstarter relaunch.

That second, successful campaign got us Statecraft printed, and just enough to launch Sub Terra - where ITB had its first taste of real, international success. But our Kickstarter journey didn't start with that one massive campaign in January 2017, it began two years earlier, when me and Matt were dossing around in our university rooms or Thirsty Meeples trying to cobble something together.

So we Kickstarted Sub Terra and that overwhelming funding success also kickstarted our company ITB. With subsequent distribution worldwide, we're poised to launch more than a dozen titles in 2019/2020, now with a professional studio team and some incredibly exciting things to come.

YOUR GAME IN PRINT!

Finally, if all goes well, the game gets released. Plan the launch to coincide with a large convention to get your game off to a good start.

Your job is not over yet

Once the game is released, you need to continue to market the

game. This involves demoing the game at conventions, getting interviews with bloggers and podcasters, and reviews online. UKGE offers marketing opportunities online and at the convention.

THE TAKE HOME MESSAGE

Sarah Kennington of One Free Elephant summarises the key points of this article here:

There are many ways to produce a game, but these are our Golden Rules:

1. Test!

Find a wide audience of playtesters: PlaytestUK, Conventions and local groups are your hunting grounds now.

2. Build Relationships!

Visit manufacturers at conventions. Join indie publisher facebook groups, go to meetups, publisher speed-dating, and volunteer on people's convention stands. Everyone you know makes you better.

3. Be Specific and Consistent!

Volumes, sizes, measurements, weights, samples, colour spaces, pantones, costs, thicknesses, cores – know them and make sure everyone you're working with does too.

4. Lock stuff down!

Before your Kickstarter launches, refresh your quotes with a 60 day option. Pay your deposit before that deadline. Only sign when you're ready - but sign when you are ready to get those prices fixed down.

5. Drive your goals!

Just because it's important to you, doesn't mean it's important to others. You need to be in the driving seat.

