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[Taken from Chapter 18: And Now the Hard Part]

Who's Paying

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When the game industry started out, developers programmed games in their garages. These young game creators soon formed companies like Atari, Activision, and Sierra, and eventually sold their games around the world. As gaming took off, many of these developers evolved into publishers, manufacturing their own games, gaming consoles and eventually hiring other development teams to create games for them.

Since the mid-80s, as consoles became the dominant system for playing video games, the publishers gained more control over what games were made. During this time, you could still create and distribute your game without a publisher ... but only if it was on a computer, not a console. While there were some digital distributors like Stardock, it was mainly publishers who controlled major releases, as they were the ones who could afford to invest the capital necessary to develop console games. When Internet-enabled consoles became the norm, publishers started to offer downloadable content as add-ons to their retail games. In 2002, Microsoft and the Valve Corporation started digitally distributing games through the Xbox Live and Steam platforms, changing the way players purchased games. Sony, Nintendo, Origin and other digital distributors soon followed suit.

While mobile gaming has been available since the early 2000s, the real game changer came in 2008 when Apple launched the App store. Developers leapt on board and after a few early successes, the new gaming gold rush was off and running. Since then things have cooled down, but the success of digital distribution has opened up many new markets for game developers:

- **App stores:** Apple's App Store. Google Play. Android Market. Amazon's Kindle store. All these publishers of downloadable games offer appealing alternatives to their console counterparts. Overall, it is cheaper for a game developer to submit a game to these app stores. They take a smaller cut of the profits and have less restrictive submission guidelines than their

console publisher counterparts. However you are competing with hundreds of thousands of titles in an already over-saturated market. How do you stand out from the crowd? Simply be awesome.

- **Digital distributors:** Digital distribution platforms such as Valve's Steam, Microsoft's Xbox Live, Sony's PlayStation Store, and Nintendo's Wii shop traditionally were the homes to PC versions of big-budget games. But since Valve started its Project Greenlight program and Xbox Live Indie Games, new developers have a shot of getting their games onto platforms that have an installed base of millions of users.
- **Crowd funding:** Launched in 2009, Kickstarter created a platform where game developers (and inventors and artists) could get their projects funded by the donations of individual contributors. Soon other crowd-funding sites like Indiegogo and GoFundMe cropped up, giving developers new ways to earn capital. While funding isn't guaranteed, successes like *Broken Age* (Double Fine, 2014), which earned \$3.45 million from over 87,000 backers within a month, and *Wasteland 2* (inXile, 2014), which earned \$2.93 million, make crowd funding an appealing option.
- **Web hosting:** Online sites like Kongregate, Newgrounds, Addicting Games, Adult Swim Games, and Pop Cap host free-to-play games created by all levels of developers, from amateurs to experienced game creators. These web-hosted sites are great for gaining an audience or launching your game onto another platform. Many popular games like *Bejeweled*, *Plants vs. Zombies*, *Robot Unicorn Attack*, and *Peggle* got their start as web games.
- **Social media:** The good news is that Facebook offers full developer support for game creators. The bad news is, your game will be competing against established developers like Zynga, King, and Pretty Simple as well as traditional publishers like Ubisoft and Disney Interactive.
- **Traditional publishers:** These are the EAs, the Sony Computer Entertainment, the Nintendos, the Activisions. Sure, you could walk in off the street with a great game demo, but unless you have an agent or manage to get a meeting with a business developer, chances of success are slim. Usually publishers like to work with established talent or their own development teams. However, if you do get a meeting, you will need a killer demo and/or pitch presentation.