

# Strategic Plan

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Sad Pumpkin Games



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## Introduction

Sad Pumpkin Games is an indie game development startup focused on the creation of games which are viably self-sustainable and have a built-in audience at launch. To achieve this, Sad Pumpkin Games relies heavily on a few different methodologies. A lean startup methodology and agile process improvements streamline the development process and reduce costs and overhead. A hyper-communicative development process ensures that the target audience for each game is intimately involved in the development process, building up a willing player base by day one. A harsh fast-fail belief system ensures that games which don't meet the expectations of the studio's strategy (either in quality, audience, or economic viability) are quickly shelved in order to save wasted development costs.

## History

There are hundreds of game development studios actively releasing products into the market and countless more studios which have folded, many before releasing a single product. The major players in the industry are all extremely-well funded corporations churning out regular releases and yearly sequels to every franchise. These corporations are wildly successful, but their offerings are often bemoaned by consumers as being too generic and lowest-common-denominator. On the complete other side of the industry are the small indie developers building passion projects they hope will be the next big thing. These companies fold before any release more often than not, and a passionate developer does not always mean a passionate audience.

Sad Pumpkin Games was envisioned as a middle road between these two extremes. From large corporate developers, borrowing the mindset of continuous deployment and pipeline optimization, methodologies which enable these large studios to churn out game after game which use similar frameworks. From indie developers, borrowing the mindset of intense audience interaction and

relatability. By avoiding the bad and poaching the good, Sad Pumpkin Games hopes to be able to make use of optimized, ever growing tools pipelines and constant customer interaction in order to develop games as cheaply as possible while tailoring features and content to a built-in audience.

## Vision

### *Building Games **with** Players*

The vision of Sad Pumpkin Games is of a studio with much more open development practices than any other studio. The vision of building games **with** players means both that the games being built have a reliable audience, tying into the studio's fail-fast culture, and that the players are participating in building the games, tying into the studio's fostering of audience feedback, player testing, and other open-door principles. Games with players further cements the studio's vision of avoiding spending time and resources on games and projects which are a gamble, and instead focusing primarily on games with targeted audiences.

## Mission

*Developing games for underserved communities and audiences with the features they want, for the platforms they use, and with the quality they deserve.*

The mission of Sad Pumpkin Games is to develop games with the help of player suggestion, feedback, and inclusion in the process. Instead of developing games with assumed audiences and a low chance of success, the studio will focus on gauging the interest of the target market constantly through polls, Q&A sessions, and other outreach in order to try and develop exactly what is desired by the target market. This mission statement holds true in the negative as well; Sad Pumpkin Games intends to not

add any features or build for any platforms which don't appeal to or aren't in use by the target market, or to develop games in hope of appealing to the mass market and attempting to unseat one of the industry giants.

The global gaming market is extremely diverse. The average age of gamers is 33 and there's a near 50/50 split of male and female gamers (Zuckerman, 2020). Despite this the game development industry is highly male dominated, the perception of gamers is male oriented, and the vast majority of mass-market games are targeted at the "typical male gamer." The mission of Sad Pumpkin Games is to overcome assumptions about who gamers are and what they want, and instead ask them directly and work with them to make that happen.

## Capability

The founder of Sad Pumpkin Games has a decade of games industry experience as a software engineer and game designer, working on games for most major platforms, in studios of varied sizes, and on games with myriad genres and audiences. This experience includes time in rapid-prototyping to develop playable MVPs of concepts and pitches. As the mission of Sad Pumpkin Games is to develop games sustainably and for varying audiences with varying tastes, this experience is essential.

At this stage, Sad Pumpkin Games has little capability overall. A lack of studio, team, and budget means that the development capability of the startup is limited to that of the founder alone. Operating as a bootstrapped startup also means that the time, attention, and budget of the founder is split between outside career, other responsibilities, and Sad Pumpkin Games. Without growing in scale and obtaining a level of budget, Sad Pumpkin Games has very little in the way of capability, at least on a viable scale.

## Concerns

Sad Pumpkin Games has neither funding nor a team and is in a market with near-infinite competition and constantly shifting user expectations. Games are incredibly costly to develop and any failure results in a total loss of investment, there is no inventory to liquidate in order to recoup value. Added to that, games don't even begin to draw any revenue until after completion, meaning the runway before potential profit is longer than products in nearly any other market.

The biggest concern of Sad Pumpkin Games is funding. The studio can stay in a bootstrapped lean startup mode indefinitely, but in order to create games and content in any reasonable timeframe the studio will need adequate funding in order to pay for skilled employees and/or contractors. Establishing a reliable funding source or releasing MVP content early in order to fund further development will be essential to maintaining the business. Game development studios are notoriously difficult to fund due to the lack of physical product that can be liquidated, making traditional investment too risky for most would-be investors. Most funded game development startups scrape by until they can recoup losses from crowdfunding and/or a game's release.

The second largest concern is the availability of employees. Having neither a large budget nor any amount of industry clout, it will be hard for Sad Pumpkin Games to attract employees with any degree of experience compared to larger and more established studios. This will force Sad Pumpkin Games to rely on temporary contractors and cash-on-delivery contracts in order to facilitate the majority of development. In order to widen the possible talent pool, as well as avoid overinflated salaries as much as possible, Sad Pumpkin Games will make use of remote workers whenever possible.

The games market is impossibly large and features companies of all sizes releasing dozens of games per day. In addition to that, the taste of the market can swing wildly from month to month depending on thousands of variables. This means the idea of Sad Pumpkin Games capturing a

meaningful portion of the market, as far as that can even be applied to the games industry, is a nonstarter. Sad Pumpkin Games hopes to avoid the pitfalls of this industry by focusing on very specific, isolated portions of the market in order to target niche requirements underserved by other companies.

## Communications Plan

Sad Pumpkin Games is a company that relies heavily on audience and player feedback, meaning that communication with those audiences is paramount to success. Without open channels of communication with each game's audience, then the mission and vision of Sad Pumpkin Games cannot be achieved, and the studio is operating as blindly as big budget studios.

The first aspect of the Sad Pumpkin Games communication plan is the finding and/or building of communities underserved by existing offerings. These communities will be identified and located primarily via social media marketing and the use of various online community boards. Once located, these audiences will be engaged through discussion boards, polls, and other content in order to gauge their interest in and reception of game design choices and content.

The second aspect of the Sad Pumpkin Games communication plan is much the same as any other product-based company, the marketing of product. Once a ship-worthy game is ready for release, the studio will make use of traditional marketing and advertising techniques in order to spread the word outside of the current active audience. This will include targeted advertisements based on the cohorts identified in the active audience, as well as more blanket marketing to reach potential customers.

## Marketing Plan

The marketing plan of Sad Pumpkin Games is heavily focused on the frequent and consistent communication with the target audiences for the studio's games. This not only factors into the mission and vision of the company, but also works to maximize the available budget for the studio. Frequent

communication, specifically meaningful two-way communication, keeps the studio in the audience members' minds without needing to rely on massive advertising pushes. Maintaining a positive position in the audience's mind also increases the likelihood of word-of-mouth (aka "free") marketing for the studio and its games.

## Goals

Goal #1 – Establish identity in the market.

Goal #2 – Foster audience communication pipeline.

Goal #2 – Release first game(s).

Goal #4 – Achieve self-sustainability.

## Strategies

**Goal #1 – Establish identity in the market.**

- Create online community (Reddit, Discord, etc.) for potential players.
- Create social media profiles for studio.
- Identify and engage with potential audiences.

**Goal #2 – Foster audience communication pipeline.**

- Setup website or other feedback tools for player suggestions.
- Conduct community polls and other events.
- Provide clear messaging on how/when/where audience-generated concepts and content will be used.

**Goal #3 – Release first game(s).**



- Focus on early and sustained audience feedback.
- Release MVP as early as possible to trickle in profit.
- Update, maintain, and support as long as audience has demand.

**Goal #4 – Achieve self-sustainability.**

- Maintain lean and bootstrap as long as possible.
- Release MVPs early in order to trickle in revenue.
- Routine kill/keep analysis to avoid spending excess money.

## Critical Issues

The same concerns identified for Sad Pumpkin Games serve as the critical issues for the company. Lack of funding, lack of skilled employees, and lack of a target audience could all result in the death or hibernation of the company.

Games are expensive and time consuming to create, and working on a razor-thin budget means Sad Pumpkin Games does not have ample funding to weather significant difficulties. If and when funding fails to be adequate, Sad Pumpkin Games will have to fall back into hyper-lean bootstrapping mode in order to continue development towards profitability.

Small companies with little funding are difficult to find employees for. Not only are talented contributors seeking high wages, but even lower-wage employees need an amount of stability. An inability to find adequate employees to fulfill the needs of the studio, much like a loss of funding, will result in the studio falling back into hyper-lean bootstrapping mode in order to continue development.

The last critical issue for Sad Pumpkin Games is a total lack of demand. If there are no audiences of players which feel underserved by the current offerings in the market, then the entire business plan for the studio falls apart. The studio could attempt to operate as any normal studio by releasing best-

guess games based on assumed market demand, but at that point the likelihood of success falls close to zero.

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