

Marketing Strategy

[Sad Pumpkin Games](#)



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Introduction

This document will discuss the overall marketing strategy for indie game development startup Sad Pumpkin Games in detail. This will include a description of the company and its mission, intended marketing channels to promote the company, detailed budgeting strategies, potential logos and slogans, an analysis of competition and threats that might arise, and a hopeful consumer position for the company. Throughout this document we hope to coalesce all the marketing planning that has been done thus far for Sad Pumpkin Games in order to make a cohesive document outlining the entire strategy.

Sad Pumpkin Games

Sad Pumpkin Games (SPG) is an indie game development studio founded by two industry veterans. The goal of SPG is to produce small, niche games which target specific underserved communities of players. These games will be catered to their target audience, deeply involving them into the core development cycle with frequent playtests, community polls, and a transparent development process.

The founders of Sad Pumpkin Games both have years of experience in the games industry and across a wide range of genres, platforms, and scales of development. This experience across the gamut of the game industry has given the founders a level of insight into common pitfalls that studios large and small face and should help to prevent Sad Pumpkin Games from falling into traps the founders have seen before.

Due to the niche markets of Sad Pumpkin Games's titles, their individual budgets are kept intentionally small, and the development process is kept lean in order to maximize what budget is available and reduce the likelihood of a single game crippling the budget of the studio as a whole. With

this small budget and lean development process, the effectiveness of any potential marketing strategy is paramount to the studio's overall success. SPG aims to account for this lack of marketing budget, and the target audiences of each title being small, by focusing on transparent, personal marketing instead of large advertising campaigns.

Growth Cycle Plan

Sad Pumpkin Games plans to grow, and sometimes shrink, in stages based on the active development of titles. In stage one the studio operates with a lean startup architecture, heavily minimizing outgoing funds by diversifying the types of work employees and founders are responsible for, reducing marketing budgets, and potentially reducing overall size. This stage of development is intended to give the studio maximum flexibility with the budget in order to scout underserved audiences, generate and gather concepts and ideas, and prototype potential titles for the target audience. In stage two the studio operates with a small business startup architecture, hiring full-time employees as necessary and focusing development resources in order to make the best product possible. This stage of development still has a tightly controlled budget, but the prerequisites of entering this stage include the successful funding of a new title so there is more flexibility in how the studio operates.

Marketing Channels

The marketing plan of Sad Pumpkin Games includes three distinct channels as the primary elements of advertising, each with different levels of investment and expected returns. The first channel is through websites and search engine optimization. The second channel is through content marketing via developer-led content. The third channel is through targeted advertising via Google Ads.

Websites and search engine optimization (SEO) are a simple way to diffuse information to an audience that is already engaged and to generate word-of-mouth style marketing buzz originating from engaged customers. Sad Pumpkin Games plans to use websites for this exact purpose. While not expecting to generate any new customers through website traffic, Sad Pumpkin Games expects to keep users engaged with the company and titles through well-built and content-rich websites. There will be a root SPG website which contains information about the studio, its mission, its culture, and other relevant details including job openings, calls for idea submissions, community polls, and other elements to engage the existing audience. In addition, each title that SPG begins work on will receive its own website that contains information about the concept, key art and mockups, playtest schedules, polls for features, and developer diaries relating to the progress on the project.

Content marketing is a great way to generate a marketing return with little or no investment by creating or reusing content. Sad Pumpkin Games will make heavy use of content marketing in order to maximize the total marketing budget for the studio and for each title. Weekly developer diaries, blog-style entries posted onto each in-progress title's website, will update the audience to progress on the title, any delays that have come up, and any features that are currently being developed. These developer diaries will be cross-posted and/or linked on the Sad Pumpkin Games social media channels and will hopefully humanize the developers and build a rapport with the audience. Behind-the-scenes videos, sneak peaks at in-development features and developer Q&A sessions, will be cross-posted across social media and video sharing platforms.

The last marketing channel for Sad Pumpkin Games is direct targeted advertising through Google Ads. Since the marketing budget of SPG is so low, only approximately \$3,000 for each stage of development, very specific targeted advertising will need to be used in order to maximize the potential clickthrough rate for each dollar spent. Each title developed by SPG will receive its own separate marketing budget, so advertisements would be constructed that would appeal to the type of audience

each title is geared towards. At the start, the SPG team will use their best judgement to design and target advertising campaigns, but once the studio has an engaged audience proposed advertisements will be workshopped through that audience before being published online in order to maximize appeal.

Future Marketing

One future marketing channel that Sad Pumpkin Games has considered is influencer marketing. When in-development titles are nearing their release window, at the end of a stage two development cycle, gaming influencers will be considered for sponsorship. Since the marketing budget for each title is so tight, it is unlikely that any big influencers would be involved, but smaller up-and-coming influencers with engaged viewer bases could be targeted. In addition to actual paid sponsorships, influencers with reach into the target audience for upcoming titles could be sent free copies of games to play and give to their audience. While not a guaranteed return, the investment for sending out free game codes or preview builds is almost zero, so any return is massive by comparison.

Logo



The logo for Sad Pumpkin Games is meant to draw attention to the studio's sad pumpkin mascot. The sad pumpkin, an aging jack-o'-lantern, is meant to be evocative of pumpkins left to rot on

the vine in the late fall. Much like the audiences SPG intends to serve with their niche games, the sad pumpkin has been overlooked and left out of the fun.

Slogan

GAMES WITH PLAYERS

The Sad Pumpkin Games slogan, “Games with Players,” is simple on its face, but contains more detail upon further inspection. Firstly, “games.” Sad Pumpkin Games makes games and nothing else, not interactive experiences, or tools, or apps. Secondly, “with.” Sad Pumpkin Games isn’t making games for the target audience, the players are an active participant in the development process in contributing their ideas, their feedback, and their support. Additionally, “with” speaks to the SPG lean development methodology, if at any point an in-development title doesn’t have an obvious potential market that is excited for it, that title’s development stops. Finally, “players.” Sad Pumpkin Games titles aren’t made just for those who identify as gamers, they’re made for all kinds of players.

Brand Strategy

The overall brand strategy of Sad Pumpkin Games is to appeal to underserved consumers and audiences that the traditional large developers ignore. In doing so, SPG aims to be as transparent, fair, and equitable as possible. The “with” in the company’s slogan is meant to convey the developers’ ties to the audiences they work with, not just making games in the dark and releasing them cold to an audience of players that had no input. Sad Pumpkin Games wants to be associated with small titles that appeal to the audiences they were developed with, even if those titles lack any broad appeal to the wider audience of players.

Threats and Competition

There are hundreds upon hundreds of game developers in the world, ranging in size from solo operations to multinational corporations with sway over governments. Sad Pumpkin Games has a lot of potential competition. To account for this, Sad Pumpkin Games doesn't aim to fight the competition but instead to completely subvert it. SPG doesn't plan to compete with the big game developers, because SPG doesn't plan to make games that appeal to the broad bases that the big developers must appeal to in order to validate their costs. SPG doesn't plan to compete with the small game developers either, because SPG isn't making passion projects or their own "great idea," instead focusing on what the players want not what the developers want.

Positioning Goal

The goal for positioning Sad Pumpkin Games in the mind of the audience is as a boutique indie game development studio that caters to niche audiences underserved by existing game developers. SPG wants to distance itself from both the larger, shareholder-led, game development studios and the smaller, dreamer-led, game development studios in the mind of the players. Sad Pumpkin Games wants to occupy the position of the first studio a person thinks about when they think of a great idea that they'd like to see made into a game, or when they feel underserved by the current offerings.

Positioning Reinforcement

If Sad Pumpkin Games achieves its goal for market positioning, it will be reinforced in a number of ways. First through the actions of the studio itself, with developer diaries, progress updates, development livestreams, and other developer-to-player communications all cementing in the minds of the players that Sad Pumpkin Games is a studio built on transparency and truly develops games *with* its audience. Second through social media posting and audience interaction, building a rapport with the

audiences that SPG aims to serve. Finally, through prominently displaying community members who were instrumental in either the idea generation, the community building, or user testing of upcoming titles on the website and in the credits of each game.