

Learn How To Plan, Create, and Promote Games

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Hi, I'm Thomas Palef. I've build a dozen games in the last few months that were played by hundreds of thousands of people. My goal in this short ebook is to provide clear information that will help you make great games. Here's what we will cover:

1. Plan a Game
2. Create a Game
3. Promote a Game

So let's get started! :-)

1 - Plan a Game

Here are the first steps you should take to plan your first few games.

Choose a Framework

There are now thousands of game frameworks available out there to help you code faster. That's great, but which framework should you choose? Here is some advice to help you filter down the frameworks into just a handful of them:

- You should aim for a framework that is actively maintained with a strong community. This way you can be sure that it will keep getting better, and that you can easily get help when stuck.
- Only look for cross platform frameworks. Making games that work on both mobile and desktop is a must nowadays.
- Know your needs. Want to make 2D or 3D graphics? Do the games have to be playable in a browser? And so on.

For your information, here are some of the most popular frameworks right now: Unity, Love2D, Phaser, Cocos2D.

Start Really Small

It's easy to fall into the trap of wanting to make a really complex game: "Let's make a Zelda-like, with quests, dungeons, puzzles, and bosses!" But most of the time these projects are put on shelves because they are too difficult to make.

Instead, start making really simple mini games like Pong, Breakout or Space Invaders. And when you become comfortable making these types of projects, you can start more ambitious ones.

Find an Idea

Finding an idea is difficult. There are so many possibilities and so many choices to make that it's hard to pick a specific idea. Because of this, a lot of people keep changing their minds over and over again, and then end up with nothing.

One powerful tool to avoid this trap is to use constraints. With constraints you are artificially getting rid of a lot of ideas, and having less options means that it's easier to pick one. So instead of focusing on your idea, try to pick constraints that you find interesting. Example: make a 2D platformer, in less than a week, by using only 3 different colors for the sprites.

And if you really don't have any idea of what you could make, simply look at the games you like and try to do something similar. I'm not advising you to copy them exactly, but just starting with one game in mind can help you get started.

Keep Iterating

When making a game, you have to think about a lot of things: ideas, gameplay, art, level design, CPU usage, etc. So how can you get everything right? The answer is simple: divide your project into really small parts that you can test. For example, if you plan to make a platformer, you should do something like this:

- v0.1: just the player (a black square) moving in a super simple level (just a line)
- v0.2: add some enemies (red squares standing still) to make the player die
- v0.3: tweak the jump physics, and improve the first level

As you can see, each iteration is small and focused on just one or two things. At each version you can actually test the game, see what's wrong, and fix it. And after 10, 20, or 50 iterations, you'll end up with something you like.

2 - Create a Game

We are going to cover some effective techniques to create great games.

Graphics and Sounds

Graphics and sounds are really important, but you don't need to be a designer or a musician to make good games. For graphics go to the opengameart.org website, where they have tons of sprites available for free. For sounds you should use bfxr.net, which lets you create nice sound effects just by pressing some buttons.

The most important thing for the graphics is that they should be consistent. Use the same style and color palette across all your sprites, so that everything looks cohesive.

For sound effects, too many of them can be really annoying, and too few will make the game boring. So try to find a good balance.

Game Design

Game design doesn't really mean anything specific, yet it's super important to get it right. Here are some questions you should ask yourself while working on a project:

- Is it easy to understand? Players should be able to pick up the game for the first time, and start playing it without needing a manual or a friend to guide them.
- Is it interesting? The game has to be enjoyable, with surprises and rewards along the way.
- Is the difficulty curve well thought-out? It should be very easy at first, and then slowly become more and more challenging.

Game design is not an exact science, so there are no precise rules to follow. However, just getting these 3 points right can make a huge difference.

Add Juiciness

One common problem with amateur games is that they often “feel wrong”, and because of this they are not fun to play. It turns out that there is an easy fix to this problem: “juicify the game”. Let me explain.

The basic idea is to add animations, transitions, and delays to the game. These are just aesthetic changes, but they will make everything feel more responsive and less boring. This is a vast subject that I cannot cover here, but if you’re interested you should definitely watch this 15 minute-long [Youtube video](#) that shows how juiciness works.

User Testing

The best technique to make a great game is to see other people play it, because you will most definitely discover that your project has flaws. Here are some examples:

- If people struggle to find a way to start the game, don’t say “but it’s obvious, it’s right there!” Instead, make it even more obvious.
- If they keep dying on the first level, it’s not because they are weak, but because you are now super strong at your own game. So just edit the level to make it easier.
- If they keep pressing the wrong keys, maybe you should rethink the controls.

Doing this was eye-opening for me. If you really listen to people’s feedback, this simple technique will greatly improve the quality of your games.

3 - Promote a Game

Once a game is finished, you release it to the world and people will start playing it, right? It depends.

The Problem

When someone wants to play a new game, he can choose between the thousands that already exist, plus the hundreds that were released in the last few days. With that much competition, how could he pick yours?

There's only one way to achieve that: you need to build a really great game and make people aware that the game exists. That's easier said than done.

Really Great Game

We already covered some techniques to make a great game in the last email, but I want to clarify something.

It's not just about making a great game, you also need to convince people that the game is actually great. And that's not the same thing! Make sure to have a website where you explain what your project is about and what makes it different. And don't forget to include images, videos, player reviews, and so on.

You should try make your game a no brainer: "Wow, that looks awesome, I have to play it!"

Make People Aware

Here's the perfect system to make people aware of what you are working on, in 3 steps:

- Have a website or blog, where you write valuable content

- Drive traffic to your website
- Have ways to stay in touch with your readers: email, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

This way you will be able to easily send your content to your regular readers, who will then share it with their own network, which will in turn increase your readership count. Then, when you have thousands of people following you, launching games is going to be much easier.

Let's focus on the point that is probably the most difficult: getting traffic.

Get Traffic

Unfortunately, there is no magic method to drive visitors to your website. You first have to find where the people who might be interested in your project are hanging out, and then reach them. Note that you will probably be looking for different kinds of people if you're making the next Farmville or working on a multiplayer FPS.

The best places to look are forums, social networks, blogs, and meetups. That's where people gather to discuss some common interests. However, when talking about your projects, always try to add value to the community. Nobody likes people who are too spammy.

Promoting a game is a slow process that requires a lot of work. It's something that is often overlooked by developers, but if you want your games to actually be played, you'll have to do it.

4 - What's Next

Making games may be hard, but it's also an amazing process to go through. So if this is something you'd like to do, my advice is to go for it!

If you're still not sure what to do next, here are some interesting links:

- Looking for inspiration? Check out my [12 games in 12 weeks](#) challenge.
- Want to learn to code HTML5 games? Read my [Flappy Bird tutorial](#).
- Want to learn to code Unity games? Read my [Space Shooter tutorial](#).
- Want more knowledge? Read my [articles and tutorials](#) about game development.

Thanks for reading,

Thomas Palef