Unlock the secrets to 7-figure online businesses Special offer: Join Starter Story

How I Started An Online Gaming Company And A Free Arcade Game That Generates $16K/Month

Christian Tuskes
•
Published: May 7th, 2023

ABOUT

BUSINESS

TOOLS

BOOKS

SAVE

Christian Tuskes

Founder, **Dilly Dally Games, LLC**

$16.5K
REVENUE/MO

1
FOUNDERS

0
EMPLOYEES

Hello! Who are you and what business did you start?

My name is Christian Tuskes and I'm a solopreneur. I started a casual gaming company called Dilly Dally Games, LLC. My flagship product is **Mexican Train Dominoes**.

It's available on the web, the **App Store** (iOS), **Google Play**, and the **Amazon Appstore**. The game is free on all platforms. I have customers across all demographics but my main demographic is females aged 65+.

I have over 10k daily active users (combined across all platforms). My top country is the United States followed by Canada and the United Kingdom as distant second and third.

My top acquisition channels are Direct and Organic Search. I think what makes my game unique

is, one, it targets a demographic that generally goes underserved in the gaming industry, and two, it lends itself to long playing time (ie, time spent in the app).

Generally speaking, users can spend between 30-60 minutes playing the game. I make between $16-17k/mo from ad revenue depending on seasonality and other market conditions.
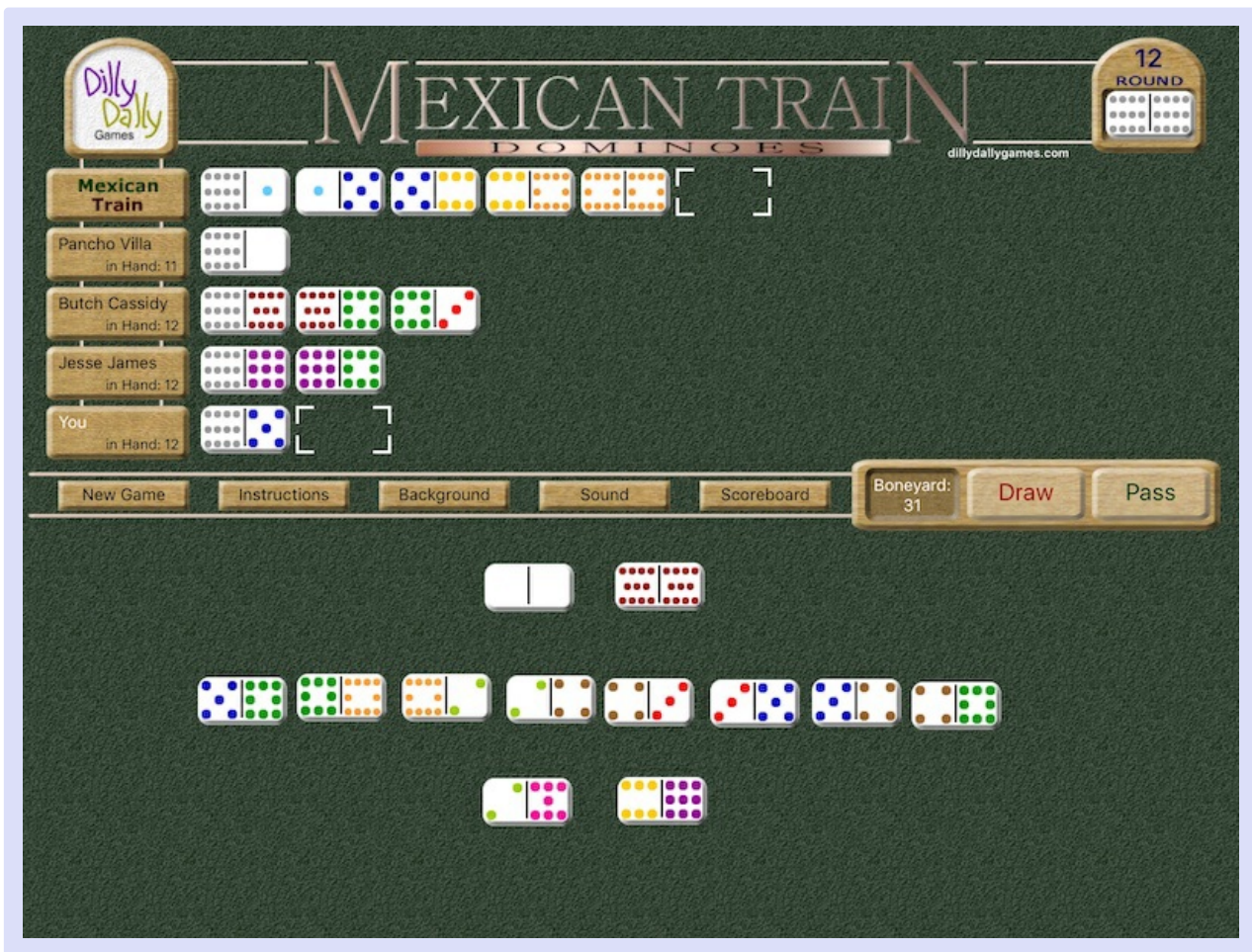
What's your backstory and how did you come up with the idea?

In 2006, while employed full-time as a defense contractor, I was working on my master's degree in Computer Science when I needed an idea for a final project. Around the same time, I was meeting regularly with friends of my mother-in-law to play a game they taught my wife and I, called Mexican Train Dominoes. I wanted a project that would not only meet my degree requirements but be something I could continue to work on post-graduation and possibly monetize.

I decided to program Mexican Train Dominoes using Adobe Flash. All I needed was a computer, software, the skills to code, and time. I know these tools aren't free but I tend to think of them as free since I already had them. For distribution, I was going to sell software licenses on eBay and ship the game via CD. After lackluster sales, I switched to an ad-supported web-based model, which made all the difference.

Take us through the process of building the first version of your product.

The first version of the product was fairly straightforward. I already had the software tools I needed to create it. Adobe Flash and Fireworks were my tools of choice. Flash was easy to program in and I could export my game for the web or as an executable file to run as stand-

alone software.

The hard part was the user interface (UI) design and the user experience (UX). The physical version of the game takes up a lot of tabletop space. I needed to adopt a horizontal domino layout pattern to maximize screen space instead of the typical circular-spoke pattern used in the physical game.

After making some design compromises and fighting the urge for perfection, I decided to release the product. Good enough was both good ✓ and enough ✓. Later, I learned what an MVP (minimally viable product) was, so I felt vindicated.

Describe the process of launching the business.

This is an interesting question. I didn't have a launch strategy per se. Nothing formal anyway. I kind of just tried things and let the successes and failures guide the direction of my product.

I guess you could say I had multiple launches. The first was to sell the game on CD. The second was to distribute my web-based game across a multitude of gaming sites. The third was the launch of the app on iOS. The fourth was a launch for Android. Finally, the fifth was the launch of my dedicated **website**.

These launches didn't happen all at once. They happened over the years and were responses to changing market conditions. For example, ad-supported Flash-based gaming was going well, until it wasn't. The world was going mobile and Flash wasn't supported on the iPhone, so I pivoted and decided to program my game as an app for iOS and then eventually for Android.

Later, targeted advertising was restricted on iOS, so I pivoted back to the web with my dedicated website to make up for the drop in revenue on iOS. The lesson here is to remain agile and learn to read the tea leaves. I find change to be exciting, not scary.

One noteworthy point regarding my iOS app is that I tried several different monetization models. My first release was as a paid app. After some mediocre success and revenue leveling-off, I switched to freemium. I offered some free playing time, then presented a paywall. This model didn't perform any better.

Finally, I threw caution to the wind and landed on an ad-supported free version of the game with some additional features offered as IAPs (in-app purchases). The ads proved to be the most successful, but not the IAPs. I'm not motivated to try subscriptions. I don't think I need to try that experiment.

Since launch, what has worked to attract and retain customers?

Two strategies have proven fruitful in attracting and retaining customers.

First, in late 2019, I did something crazy. I decided to go all-in on Facebook ads with the revenue I was making from my game. I planned to spend 100% of the previous month's revenue on ads. I found someone to create three short ad videos for the iOS version of my game. For the next eight months, my ad spend was like rocket fuel as I witnessed my user base skyrocket from roughly 2,000 DAUs to 15,000 DAUs.

from roughly 2,000 DAUs to 13,000 DAUs.

In total, I spent $78k running the ads. This was the ultimate gamble. At the very least I would know whether Facebook ads worked or not. The verdict was 'yes'. They worked. I was happy with the increase in DAUs. My only regret was I should have tried aggressive growth marketing sooner.

Second, since the aggressive ad spend wasn't sustainable and because I wanted to focus on growing my website, I decided to embrace SEO with an emphasis on content marketing/writing. At first, I thought I would write the content myself, but it's not something I enjoy. I'm a coder at heart, so I decided to outsource the task.

I found a great copywriter and website consultant, Justin Harter, who knew all the best SEO strategies. He was able to get my site onto the first page of search results in six months for some key search terms. I'm happy with his service and am still using him to attract and retain users for my site.

How are you doing today and what does the future look like?

Today, I'm doing well. I've been self-employed (no more side hustle) since early 2020, just as covid was hitting the US. Ironically, my target date for full-time self-employment coincided with the pandemic-induced work-from-home migration.

My timeline was based on finishing my last software contract, not the pandemic. I started working from home but so did everyone else! The transition didn't feel monumental. The only difference is that while others are going back to the office, I don't have to.

The future Dilly Dally Games will be focused on releasing new games/products. I"m not sure I can grow Mexican Train beyond what it is, but if anyone has any ideas, I'm all ears. Recently, I released a new game, playbunco for the web. I'm working on its SEO growth using the same tactic of content writing/marketing. Without running ads, the growth will be slower but more sustainable.

You might be wondering which games I decide to build. I generally look for opportunities where a game is already well known (helps with marketing), there are no copyright or trademark issues, and I feel it's underrepresented in the marketplace. I'm looking to build a better mousetrap, not invent something new. For mexicantrain and playbunco, I felt the options for playing online were lacking, so I simply created a better option.

Through starting the business, have you learned anything particularly helpful or advantageous?

I learned I can't do everything myself. Technically, I probably could but I would be doing myself a disservice. Outsource the tasks you can't do or don't enjoy doing. For example, I decided to outsource my ad operations to Freestar which specializes in optimizing ad revenue.

I was trying to manage ad operations myself, but I didn't know what I was doing. I had a "set it and forget it" approach, but, to get the most out of ad revenue, it requires more attention and industry knowledge. This too proved to be a good decision. I'm earning more now than I did

industry knowledge. This too proved to be a good decision. I'm earning more now than I did doing it myself.

There is one other thing that's worth mentioning, which is cliche, but true. Working hard is the single most important trait to be successful. You don't have to be the smartest person or the most talented or skilled. Recognize that you are going to make mistakes but motivation and determination will help you overcome them.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

Xcode - coding environment for iOS app

Android Studio - coding environment for Android app

WebStorm - coding environment for the website version of the game

PhaserJS - coding framework for the website version of the game

Tower - source control tool for managing all code bases

Trello - project management

Google Analytics - analytics for iOS, Android, and web

Google Sheets - track revenue and expenses

Google Docs - content writing and business docs

Firebase - web hosting; other BaaS services

What have been the most influential books, podcasts, or other resources?

Stop reading books and listening to podcasts. Get to work! Learn by doing. Yes, you will make mistakes but every business is different. No one can tell you exactly what you need to do. You have to figure it out for yourself.

Advice for other entrepreneurs who want to get started or are just starting out?

Don't get bogged down by unnecessary things. Always think of what is minimally or necessary to launch your product or service. Focus on those things.

A good way to know if something is necessary is to conduct what I like to call the assassin test.

Imagine you have a whole list of features you want to get done before you release or ship your product. Now, imagine an assassin visits you and says, "You have 24hrs to release this product or I will come back and assassinate you". Things will come into focus quickly and you will undoubtedly find a lot of unnecessary things to eliminate. You can always go back later and add or change things, but get that product out the door!

Also, don't fall into the Field of Dreams trap. "If you build it, they will come" is not true! You need to work as hard at marketing as you do the building. You could discover a cure for cancer

but if nobody knows about it, no one will buy it. Plan for marketing to take time, effort, and some money.

Where can we go to learn more?

- **Mexican Train**
- **PlayBunco**
- **DillyDallyGames**
- **Facebook**
- **Twitter**
- **Mexican Train Twitter**
- **Blog**
- **Email**

-

○

Christian Tuskes, Founder of Dilly Dally Games, LLC

You might also like:

40 Lucrative Ways to Make Money on the Side
Pat Walls

Unlock the secrets to 7-figure online businesses

Dive into our database of 4,418 case studies & join our community of thousands of successful founders.

✉

Your email here

Join thousands of founders

See *exactly* how online businesses get to millions in revenue.

Our 4,418 case studies show you how ordinary people built businesses to millions in revenue - all starting from a simple idea or side project.

These aren't just case studies - they are real stories, from real founders who share their most intimate details with you - down to the exact amount of money they are making.

> *How did you come up with the idea? How did you find your first 10 customers? How much money are you making?*
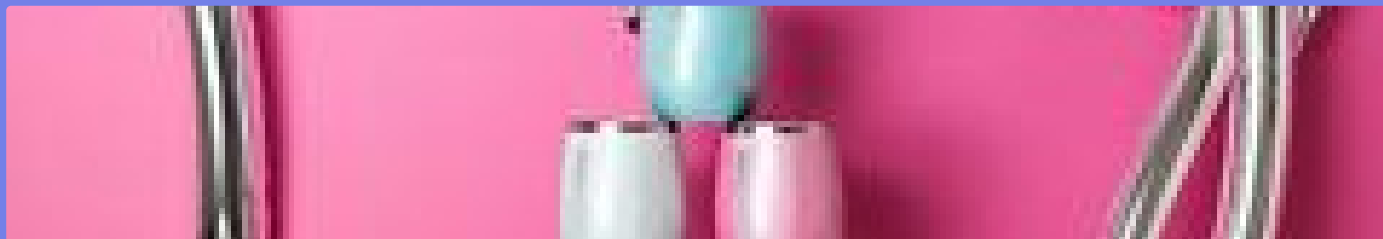
Our 4,418 case studies break down these exact questions. Every industry, trend, and how much money you can make.

You'll realize these people are just like you - and that, deep down, you can do it too.

Dylan

I Grew A Drinkware Brand To $1.1M/Month At 23 Years Old

Drinkware brand

$12M / month

Chris

How I Started An SEO Agency For Lawyers Generating $3.6M/Year

Seo agency

$10M / month

Matt

How I Started An $8M/Year Stock Market Research Website

Finance blog

$2.13M / month

Over 4,000 more case studies like these...

Surround yourself with founders who have been there before.

Building a business is lonely. And it's easy to feel stuck.

> *"How do you take the first step? How do you know you're making the 'right' progress every day?*

You finally have a place where you can ask these questions, get advice, and see exactly how successful founders did it before you

founders did it before you.

You're no longer building alone, because you have thousands of founders who are telling you to keep going.

Michael
$1.08M/YEAR

Scott
$300K/YEAR

Chad
$1.2M/YEAR

Garrett
$300K/YEAR

Resources to keep you building

Building a bus~~iness~~ is not a game of luck.
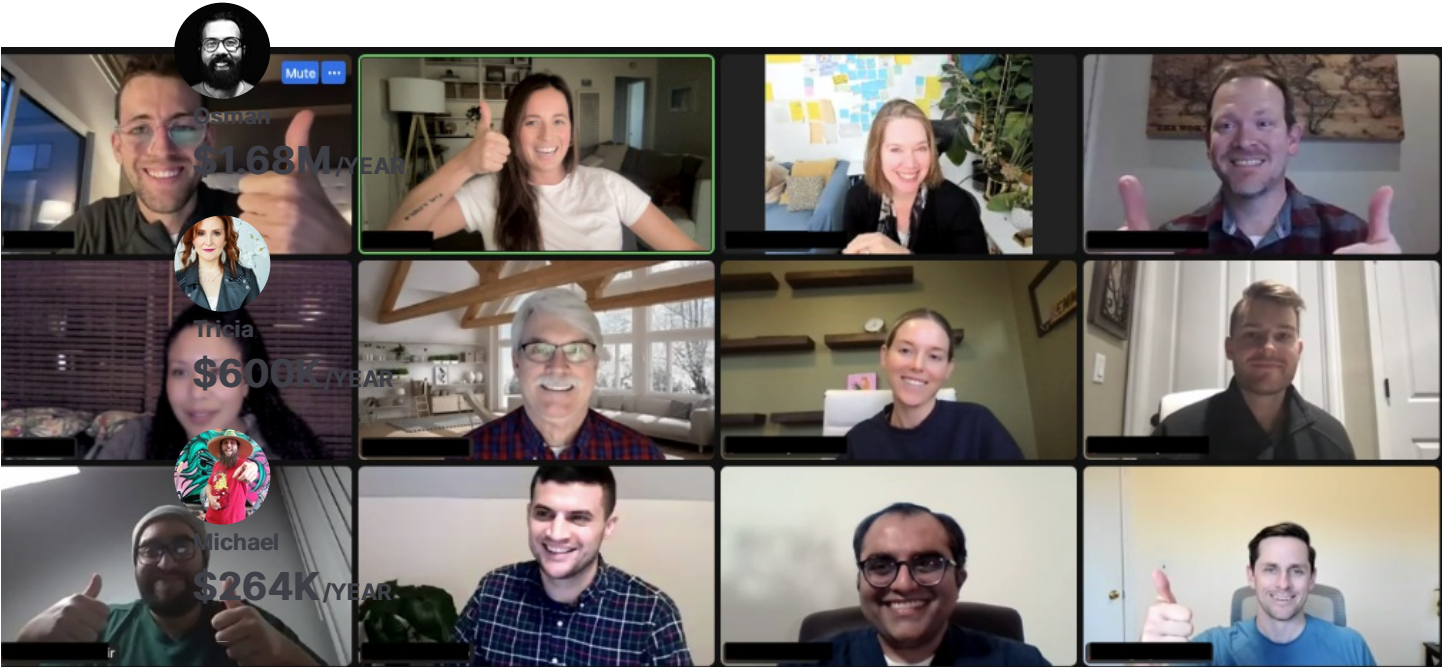
Abhishek
$12M/YEAR

It's about taking ~~action~~ every day.

You'll get acc~~ess to~~ courses, frameworks, weekly live events, alongside a group of people that genuinely want you to su~~cceed.~~

Samping
$432K/YEAR

You'll start making real progress, and experience first-hand what it's like to put your ideas into the world.

~~Osman~~
~~$1.68M~~/YEAR

~~Tricia~~
~~$600K~~/YEAR

~~Michael~~
~~$264K~~/YEAR

Everything you get

⊘

4,818 founder case studies

Explore our archive of 4,800+ case studies and get new stories every morning. Filter by industry, revenue, country, growth methods, and more.

⊘

Community of founders

Ask questions, get advice, uncover deeper insights on case studies, and get exclusive access to our private founder directory.

⊘

Courses and live events

Tap into our library of resources, including courses, live events, trainings and more.

⊘

8,628 business ideas

Access the world's biggest living, breathing database to help you find your next idea, side project, or product to sell.

⊘

200+ growth playbooks

Discover the 201 most effective ways that founders are growing their business right now.

⊘

$1M in software savings ⓘ

We've exclusively negotiated discounts on 240+ tools that are proven to grow your business.

Don't take our word for it

Sam Parr
My First Million

I love this website.

Rand Fishkin
Moz / SparkToro

Love Starter Story's transparency.

Johne Vang
Be The Match

You can't find this information anywhere else.

Trent Baren
Instagram

So much valuable information.

Bilal Budhani
Entrepreneur

I was hooked on Starter Story as soon as I discovered it. Resonated with me right off the bat.

Jenn Leach
Millennial Nextdoor

I made over $5,000 from my Starter Story membership in a week!

Don't miss out on creating your next big thing.

✉

Enter your email

Starter Story

Jamie

$1.62M/YEAR

Starter Story: Learn How People Are Starting Successful Businesses

About
Support
Privacy

🐦 📘 📷

Michael

$1.2M/YEAR

CASE STUDIES

All Case Studies SaaS Case Studies Blogger Case Studies E-Commerce

BUSINESS IDEAS

Low Capital Ideas Make Money Blogging E-Commerce Ideas

Michael

$3.6M/YEAR

START YOUR BUSINESS

How To Find Ideas TikTok Bio Ideas Learn SEO Grow Your Business

MORE STUFF

Share Your Story About Us Advertise With Us Impact