

# Australian Video Game Developers' Marketing Knowledge: Filling an Important Research Gap

**Jacqueline Burgess**

School of Business and Creative Industries  
90 Sippy Downs Dr  
Sippy Downs  
QLD 4556  
07 5456 5485  
[jburgess@usc.edu.au](mailto:jburgess@usc.edu.au)

**Alexander Muscat<sup>1</sup>, Anthony Grace<sup>1</sup>, Christian Jones<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>School of Business and Creative Industries

<sup>2</sup>School of Law and Society

University of the Sunshine Coast

90 Sippy Downs Dr

Sippy Downs

QLD 4556

07 5456 3159, 07 5456 3032, 07 5459 4849

[amuscat@usc.edu.au](mailto:amuscat@usc.edu.au), [agrace@usc.edu.au](mailto:agrace@usc.edu.au), [cmjones@usc.edu.au](mailto:cmjones@usc.edu.au)

## Keywords

Production, development, small developers, marketing, market research, brand management

## ABSTRACT

There has been a research focus on the production of video games in smaller studios and national video game industries including Australia (Banks and Cunningham, 2016; Keogh, 2021), Germany (Wimmer and Sitnikova, 2012), Norway (Jørgensen, 2019; Jørgensen, Sandqvist and Sotamaa, 2017), Sweden (Jørgensen, Sandqvist and Sotamaa, 2017) and Finland (Jørgensen, Sandqvist and Sotamaa, 2017; Sotamaa, 2021). However, there has been little exploration of the business aspects of video game production, such as marketing activities and knowledge.

In general, it is acknowledged the video game industry worldwide lacks mature business, management, and marketing knowledge (Kerr, 2017). However, given the lack of research into the business and marketing aspects of video game production, the actual skills, knowledge, and practices of smaller video game developers remains under researched. If there is indeed a lack of sophisticated knowledge, this is problematic for developers given the crowded video game marketplace. There are over 50,000 games available on Steam with up to 10,000 more added each year (Bailey, 2021). Developers need to market their games effectively to ensure they stand out, which makes marketing a pivotal and core skill for developers who wish to earn a living from their games (Kerr, 2017; Zackariasson and Dymek, 2016).

Given the importance of marketing activities, and the lack of research into marketing knowledge within the video game industry, semi-structured interviews conducted with eight small video game developers based in Victoria, Australia. The Victorian games industry is the most developed in Australia and home to over 50% of the country's developers (IGEA, 2021), so the state represents the most sophisticated understanding of video game business and production. An Australian-specific context is also

Proceedings of DiGRA 2023

© 2023 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

appropriate because examining local and regional contexts of video game production provides understandings for global Game Studies and production (Kerr, 2017; Sotamaa 2021).

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were utilized to capture the rich experiences of video game developers (Patton, 2002; van de Weerd et al., 2016). All of the developers were working to publish video games, derive revenue from their creation, and had between one and ten staff members. Interviews commenced with a grand tour question and asked about developer's current situation, rather than being focused on a deficit of skills. The coding was an iterative and continuous process, and interviews and themes were returned to and re-examined to refine codes and themes as the analysis progressed (McCosker et al., 2004). The analysis involved the phenomenographic approach as it involved iterative familiarization, analysis, and interpretations to consider collective meaning (Åkerlind, 2012; McCosker et al., 2004). The software program, NVivo, was used to aid the traditional human interpretative coding approach (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016).

All of the developers agreed that marketing was an important activity and skill if a developer wanted to make a living from their game design given the competitive nature of the industry. For example, one noted that 'with the amount of games, especially on mobile, that come out every day, if you don't do any marketing, you're not going to be seen'. However, despite acknowledging the importance of marketing, the developers found it challenging and they did not always engage in more advanced marketing activities such as brand management and evaluation. Three video game developers either were not thinking about their brand or had only just started thinking about their brand. As one admitted: 'it's something I'm definitely starting to think about a lot more. But I was only sort of recently made aware of.' Six developers were actively considering the reputation of their studio and games, the kind of values they wanted to embed, and how they wanted audiences to think about them. However, two developers that were actively working on their brand management equated this to focusing on just logo design.

Furthermore, only three developers were actively using analytics and statistics in their marketing evaluation to enhance their marketing activities. For example, one developer said that they 'sort of half monitor them, but we don't really get many people talking about us. And so I'm not watching them super closely.' This is despite three developers being disappointed with their marketing results and five developers noting they did not feel they knew which marketing activities were going to be effective. Their marketing was more ad hoc and based on feel. Developers were thus only undertaking a half-way approach to evaluation and not using or being informed by all of the tools and data at their disposal. This is not surprising because six developers did not have anyone specializing in marketing in their studios, and the two that did both had a marketing background. Four developers were upskilling their marketing, but it was informal such as reading news articles or talking to industry contacts.

The results found uneven marketing activities within the Victorian industry. Developers were attempting to manage their brands and evaluation processes but were limited by their knowledge and the ability to upskill. Some developers were engaging in sophisticated marketing, but this was because they happened to come from a marketing background. This pilot study has begun to fill a research gap concerning the business, specifically marketing, aspects of video game production. It has highlighted that, while there is a general understanding of the importance of marketing, there appears to be a lack of sophisticated marketing knowledge within the industry.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Åkerlind, G. 2012. Variation and commonality in phenomenographic research methods. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 31(1), 115-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.642845>
- Arvidsson, A. and Caliandro, A. 2016. Brand public. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 42(5),727–748. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv05>
- Bailey, D. (2021, 12 February). Steam just reached 50,000 total games listed. *PCGames*. <https://www.pcgamesn.com/steam/total-games>
- Banks, J. and Cunningham, S. 2016. Creative destruction in the Australian videogames industry. *Media International Australia*. 160(1), 127-139. [doi.org/10.1177%2F1329878X16653488](https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1329878X16653488)
- IGEA 2021. Australian video game development: An industry snapshot 2021-2020. IGEA. [igea.net/2021/12/australian-game-development-industry-doubles-revenue-to-226-million-over-the-past-five-years/](https://www.igea.net/2021/12/australian-game-development-industry-doubles-revenue-to-226-million-over-the-past-five-years/)
- Jørgensen, K. 2019. Newcomers in a Global Industry: Challenges of a Norwegian Game Company. *Games and Culture*. 14(6), 660-679. [doi.org/10.1177%2F1555412017723265](https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1555412017723265)
- Jørgensen, K., Sandqvist, U. and Sotamaa, O. 2017. From hobbyists to entrepreneurs: On the formation of the Nordic game industry. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. 23(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856515617853>
- Keogh, B. 2021. The cultural field of video game production in Australia. *Games and Culture*. 16(1), 116-135. [doi.org/10.1177%2F1555412019873746](https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1555412019873746)
- Kerr, A. 2017. *Global Games Production, Circulation and Policy in the Networked Era*. New York: Routledge.
- McCosker, H., Barnard, A. and Gerber, R. 2004. Phenomenographic study of women's experiences of domestic violence during the childbearing years. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. 9(1), 1-16. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Phenomenographic-study-of-women's-experiences-of-McCosker-Barnard/59c4ef3794f1639b7dfed889dddd8c9659ce87d4>
- Patton, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Sotamaa, O. 2021. Studying Game Development Cultures. *Games and Culture*. 16(7), 835-854. [doi.org/10.1177%2F15554120211005242](https://doi.org/10.1177%2F15554120211005242)
- van de Weerd, I., Mangula, I. S. and Brinkkemper, S. 2016. Adoption of software as a service in Indonesia: Examining the influence of organizational factors. *Information & Management*. 53, 915-928. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2016.05.008>
- Wimmer, J. and Sitnikova, T. 2012. The professional identity of gameworkers revisited. A qualitative inquiry on the case study of German professionals. *Eludamus: Journal for Computer Game Culture*. 6(1), 153-169. <https://doi.org/10.7557/23.6143>
- Zackariasson, P. and Dymek, M. 2016. *Video Game Marketing*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.