

Rise of the Indie Game Studio Roundtable

This document summarizes the "Rise of the Indie Game Studio" Roundtable held on September 1, 2024 at the Hilton Motif. The event brought together 41 attendees from various countries to discuss challenges and interests in supporting indie games and game studios. The roundtable was facilitated by Jennifer Yi and featured five other hosts. Participants were divided into six teams to address key questions and propose solutions for the indie game industry.

Reported by Seattle Indies & Clove Experiential



Question 1: Challenges and Interests in Supporting Indie Games

The first question posed to the participants was:

What challenge or interest do you face in your role supporting indie games / game studios?

This question set the stage for the discussions that followed, focusing on various aspects of indie game development and studio management.

Resource Needs

1 Knowledge Gaps

Major knowledge gaps exist within indie studios, often not knowing what they don't know. This creates challenges in various aspects of game development and studio management.

3 Education on Studio Management

Running a game studio is not typically taught, leading to a lack of knowledge in areas such as legal matters, HR, and general business operations.

2 Service Provider Connections

There's a need to create an ecosystem that makes it easier to match service providers with indie studios, addressing issues like marketing and promotion.

4 Knowledge Hub

Participants suggested creating a knowledge hub with resources on various topics, including legal advice, HR guidance, platform certification requirements, and checklists for studio success.



Communication Challenges

Internal Team Communication

Poor communication between different teams within a studio (e.g., business development, developers, creatives) can create conflicts and take focus away from building great games.

Training and Support

Studio teams need to be on the same page, but often lack the resources to find training or support to improve communication.

Transparency with Customers

Indies sometimes copy AAA playbooks and keep their plans secret, which isn't effective. There's a need to communicate more openly with customers.

Discoverability Challenges

1

PR and Marketing Knowledge

Indie studios often lack knowledge about PR and the importance of marketing campaigns. There's a need to connect with studios early on to provide strategic counsel.

2

Budget Constraints

With limited budgets, it's challenging to get games into the hands of press and influencers. Studios rely heavily on wishlists and marketplace features.

3

Visibility and Awareness

Indie games face massive challenges in gaining visibility. Publishers are critical for providing visibility, and understanding the "why" of a game can help reach wider audiences.

4

Building Interest

Indies must build a wave of interest that larger industry players will notice, often relying on influencers and platform tools to highlight their games.

Data Challenges in the Indie Game Industry

- Need to consider what data is needed to inform the industry, noting that different stakeholders use data differently
- Difficulty in defining what constitutes an indie studio
- Lack of standardized target metrics from publishers
- Metrics-driven publishers won't support a game if metrics don't show commercial viability

These data-related challenges highlight the need for more standardized approaches to measuring success and defining the indie game landscape.

Funding Challenges for Indie Game Studios



Investor Education

There's a need to educate investors on the real risks vs. perceived risks in indie game development.



Funding Strategy

Indies often lack clear plans to raise money, resulting in constantly depleting runways.



International Funding

Investment funds are available overseas, but cultural challenges must be understood and navigated.



Innovation Funding

There's a chicken-and-egg situation where funding is needed for innovation, but investors often want to see innovation before funding.



Additional Observations

- Indie studios can be categorized as young & old or newbie & veteran
- Newer developers often don't understand the business aspect of running a studio
- Management of funds and people are significant issues
- Making a product is the "want" - running the business is the "need"
- There's a need to develop tech ecosystems and talent pools (local, regional, and international)

Initial Solutions & Parking Lot Qs

Solutions:

- Create a public repository, possibly using GitHub pages, with highly accessible resources (no paywalls)
- Help indies understand how VCs work
- Align on one set of analytics in the industry
- Recruit or train founders with "American know-how" to run complex projects

Parking Lot Questions:

- What metrics are great indicators of game / studio success?
- What attributes should matter for game studio metrics?
- How should we, as an industry, define an indie game studio?

The group spent just over an hour focused on question #1. The roundtable ended and folks stayed to network for the hour following the roundtable.





Next Steps and Conclusion

1

Regional Development

Seattle Indies and Clove have met with the WA State Department of Commerce to discuss advancing games development regionally, focusing on creating a professional association, developing a gaming innovation hub, and organizing a B2B program.

2

Resource Repository

Explore the resourcing of a highly accessible, managed central repository for the games industry to contribute resources.

3

Continued Communication

Invite all roundtable participants to a Seattle Indies Discord group thread for ongoing communication and contact exchange.

4

Follow-up Meeting

Schedule a follow-up meeting in mid-November to continue discussion on how to best serve the needs of the indie industry.

Thank you to those who participated for your invaluable feedback and time.

