

389COM: Games and Open Source - Part 2

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Game Funding alternatives - 1

- One Time Purchase.
- Since an open source game couldn't use DRM (even if that did work), the piracy endemic in the One Time Purchase model world would kill any potential revenue stream.

Game Funding alternatives - 2

- Episodic purchase (expansions/DLC).
- This model shares the same weakness as the One Time Purchase model.
- It's probably not relevant, because the DLC could just be released as a new main game build.

Game Funding alternatives - 3

- Subscription.
- Usually associated with a persistent online world, so not universally relevant.
- Would definitely require seed funding, since subscriptions couldn't start till the game reached initial release.

Game Funding alternatives - 4

- Sponsorship
- Usually in the game development world this involves a loss of creative control.
- However it is the most used method of Open Source funding, and in this area, loss of creative control is not common.
- A game using this approach would sell itself to sponsors as a 'value adding service'.
- Email, web browsers and social networking have been used in this regard.
- But there would always be conditions.

Unity Engine.

- One need only browse the Unity asset store to discover plenty of quality assets for sale.
- However, a quick search for 'asset flips' will show that this causes games to be created for sale which are just thrown together from asset packs.
- So yet another case where a potential revenue stream for small content developers has been overtaken by people out for a fast buck.

Steam Green Light

- Potentially another great idea, greenlight lets small developers sell incomplete games on the assumption they are intending to finish the game with the money raised.
- The reality is that Steamlight lacks oversight, and many games on it are abysmal efforts designed solely to con players out of money.
- There are good Green Light games, just as there are good games made with Unity Assets, but they risk being drowned by the dross.

Equivilent Markets

- We can learn something from examining equivilent markets and applying the experiences from those to the sale of Open Source games.

Writing - 1

- A market which can be viewed as similar to the one for games is Publishing (literature).
- Publishing is a market which has undergone and survived many technological changes.

- Magazines were initially threatened by the web, but now many have embraced it, enriching their customers experience and their own survivability.
- The end of the printed word (the paperless office) has been much spoken of, yet print co-exists with digital works, and this will likely continue.

Writing - 2

- The following (except for the statistics) is based around the short video presentation by Piers Blofeld of Sheil Land Associates titled [Seven reasons why you shouldn't self publish youtube link](#)
- Chosen because I see many parallels between a potential market for sale of Open Source games and self publishing of literature. It definatelly needs to be watched.

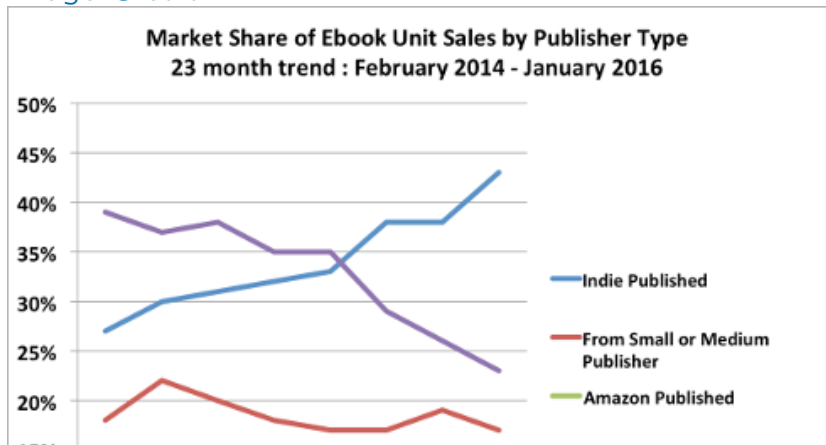
Writing - 3

- Nearly 460,000 titles were self-published globally in 2013 [source](#).
- In 2012, half of the self published authors made less than \$500 [source](#) making them almost not worth the effort.
- Many reasons for their failing probably relate well to the Open Source World.

Writing - 4

- Ebooks are popular, and sell really well, as this graphic shows, but the market is so saturated the per author earnings remain far too low.

Image Credit



Writing - 5

- In principle, Self Publishing is a good thing. In practice is is reall hard to do well.
- Most self published books fail, just as most Open Source Projects (98%) fail, and for many of the same reasons.
- The literature marketing process (as any marketing process) is complicated, so any time you spend trying to prepare your book for the market place will take time away from improving your product.
- As Piers puts it, writers should write.

Writing - 6

- The book market has been opened up to all comers with the rise of Self Publishing.
- There is frustration with the 'traditional' publishing world, because it is hard to get into, so some people resent its gatekeeping role.
- Amazon particularly have made it easy for writers to get their work published electronically, so it is increasingly fashionable to do this, bypassing the 'elitist gatekeepers' of traditional publishing.

Writing - 7

- The self publishing market lacks oversight. You can go from writing to published in a few days. This make the use of the term 'publication' a little vague. It seems to me little more than a technological gloss on photocopying your book.
- This in effect means you can put your work into a global slush pile without any checks and hope it might stand out.

Writing - 8

- It almost certainly won't do well, but the pennies you may make will contribute a little more to Amazon's profits, so they don't mind.
- Editing costs money, covers cost money, good marketing costs money. to quote Heinlein 'Nothing of value is free'.
- If you try to do everything involved with publishing yourself it seems unlikely it will work well.

Writing - 9

- If you pay someone to tell you your book is ready to publish, they will say it is.
- If on the other hand they only get paid if you make money, the equation shifts in your favour. This is where those 'elitist gatekeepers' come in. . .
- Note that Amazon don't say you're ready to publish, they just let you publish sans oversight. They only do this because they will always make money even if you only sell to friends and family. They have no real stake, so there is no risk for them.

Writing - 10

- Sometimes your work just isn't good enough, or just not yet. So you can damage any potential reputation by self publishing a sub par book.
- Having an experienced Agent to potentially be mean and tell you your book isn't good enough may not be nice, but it may still be needed.
- This also why Open Source can work so well, you are open to constructive advice on your product.

Writing - 9

- Self Publishing of ebooks (speaking mainly of Amazon here) has no in built opportunity for community to develop at point of sale, although sites supporting it do exist.
- These sites do sometimes seem to exhibit a certain *them vs us*, mentality, which isn't helpful.
- That kind of thinking harmed the Free Software Foundation, eventually bringing the Open Source movement into existence out of pure necessity.

Writing - 10

- Relating this to software.
- The problems are identical in both fields in all respects other than we are trying to sell a product that is 'free' in a closed source dominated market.
- Lessons can be learned from the self publishing market.
- I think the main point is that oversight for quality is needed if an Open Source game is to stand a chance as a paid product.

Farmers Markets - 1

- On the face of it, nothing like software engineering, but only on the face of it.
- Farmers markets provide an avenue for artisans or small farmers to:
 - ▶ Sell products direct to consumers.
 - ▶ Gain future direct customers through direct repeat purchases.
 - ▶ Meet other small producers.
- The key point here is that it is an opportunity for communities to develop.

Farmers Markets - 2

- The Artisan food market is taking off again, people are becoming less satisfied with shelves full of identical, low quality products that use the names formally associated with higher quality.
- **Stichelton Dairy** is a prime example of meeting this need. Most Stilton is made counter to the original recipe, making the Stilton name no longer really applicable, but it has been adopted to refer to the new recipes, so they can, and do, control it.
- Stichleton is actually *real* Stilton, but due to his use of raw milk he can't call it Stilton.

Farmers Markets - 3

- Open Source software is very much an artisan movement. Products created to solve specific needs, where quality is, or should be, the primary concern.
- Artisan food makers have many of the same issues as Open Source Developers. They are competing in a niche market, often against overwhelming commercial competition. They also need to group together to be effective.
- The main difference currently is that Open Source is not usually sold, although this lecture is about how to change that.

Access to products - 1

- Traditional games have plenty of sales avenues to choose from, such as Steam, GOG.com, or Mobile/OS App Stores.
- They also dominate console gaming, which still has a strong shelfware market.
- Shelfware has also been extended by Amazon, who sell boxed 'shelf' versions. Open source developers still lack access to this point of sale.

Access to products - 2

- At present Open Source games are released in the same way as most other types of Open Source software.
- This means there is no easy way to promote them as things to exchange money for.
- You could of course put an open source product for sale on your own site, but without community to address criticism or consumer concerns, success would be hard.

Changing software landscape - 1

- In the last decade the hardware side of computer science has changed fundamentally.
- Mobile Computing
- Better Internet availability.
- IOT is a thing now.

Changing software landscape - 2

- Games have started to change, with smaller devs having great access to the mobile market.
- The closed source model still dominates the commercial games landscape, in spite of the increasing importance of Open Source in other software markets.
- Smaller devs/modellers/designers increasingly find that there is a direct way to make money from their work independant of big industry.
- Can Open Source solve all these problems? Almost certainly not.

How could it be done? - 1

- Initially, no open source game could have millions for development.
- If you can't afford to pay someone up front, then they would need a financial reward from the outcome of their work.
- This is analogous to Startups with no seed capital.

How could it be done? - 2

- If it were to be a job, people would need a source of income from somewhere.
- Games are complex, a place to initially meet and plan would be required. Many globally distributed Open Source organisations exist, we are working with two of them, so that can be managed.

How could it be done? - 3

- The fantasy of Startups with lots of money would need to be dropped.
- Small teams of hackers working from home to a common goal would need to replace it (in fact this is how Apple started).
- Eric Raymond was the spokesperson for Open Source, promoting it. Open Source Games would need their equivalent, or many such people.

The main issues

- The gaming public perception of Open Source games as games that are always free of financial cost for the end user would need to change.
- Piracy at least would be an irrelevance, piracy cannot occur with Open Source.
- New models for game delivery, and the concept of games as product would need to be re-evaluated.

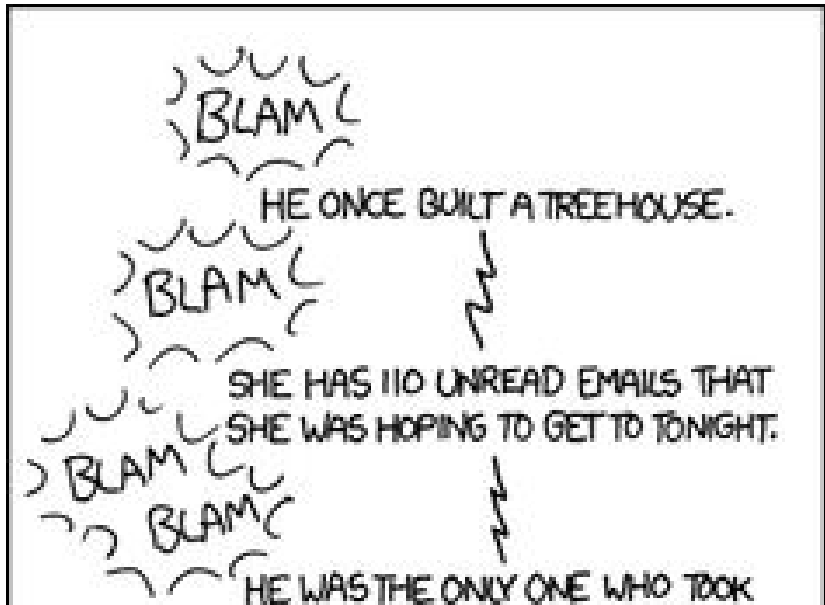
Online Platform - 1

- A platform with a public front for browsing of products, such as the one provided by Steam could help (but not anything like GreenLight).
- But people would want some element of ownership in the project too.

Online Platform - 2

- What features might an online presence for commercial Open Source Development need? These are my thoughts.
 - ▶ Project Forums, instantiating a form of social network.
 - ▶ A donation based contribution system for interested parties (for non complete games).
 - ▶ Project Hosting (probably in partnership with someone like Gitlab).
 - ▶ Firm community oversight by volunteers.
 - ▶ a formal payment scheme for completed games suited to the medium.

Obligatory XKCD



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