

GAME DESIGNER FAQS

FOR EACH STAGE OF
DEVELOPMENT



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When I wanted to learn how to make and sell a board game, I remember the process being very overwhelming and challenging. Several of the communities I came across were less than friendly as well.

I've created Streamlined Gaming to help new game designers learn about the process in a very welcoming and open environment. I hope this series of frequently asked questions helps clear up a lot of the questions you have about the ins and outs of game design.

For reference, I have sorted the **FAQ's** into the 5 phases of game design:

1- Planning

2- Prototyping

3- Playtesting

4- Publishing

5 -Promoting

So no matter where you are in the tabletop game design process, you should be able to find answers to popular questions for that stage of development. Let's start with the...

1. Planning Phase FAQs - Thinking about your game idea

1a. Where do I even start?

Typically, people that play tabletop games get an idea for a board game they want to create.

[This is how I started creating my first card game.](#)



Game designers don't usually want help thinking of new ideas as they typically already have one. But if you want a little nudge in getting started, [then check out our game idea challenge.](#)

1b. Will my board game idea get stolen? Should I copyright my board game idea?

The popular opinion on this is that your game idea won't get stolen and you don't need to pay to have your game copyrighted. Especially as a first time board game designer.

Here are several interesting notes on the topic:

- 1-** It takes much more work getting your game printed and distributed than it does thinking of the game. This alone deters most people from stealing your idea.
- 2-** Your board game is actually copyrighted the moment you create it (when it's printed)
- 3-** You can't copyright an idea. Only the finished game.
- 4-** No matter how awesome your board game idea is, some (most?) people will dismiss it or think it's bad.

The last one was especially tough for me to learn and I see other first time board game designers struggle with this as well. Now I'm not saying that your board game idea can't or won't get stolen. But in general, it doesn't happen. Paying to register your finished board game for copyright is said to be unnecessary by the majority of established game designers in the industry. And remember, your board game is automatically copyrighted immediately upon creation (printing) of your game.



2. Prototyping Phase FAQs - Making a 'rough draft' of your tabletop game

2a. What software is best for creating cards for my board game?

The 2 most popular that I see are **NanDeck** and **Adobe InDesign**. They do very similar things. 2 big differences being that NanDeck is free but Adobe InDesign integrates really well with other Adobe products.

[First time game designers just looking into making a game tend to benefit a lot from NanDeck because it's free.](#) While established board game designers tend to prefer Adobe InDesign so they can use it with other Adobe products such as Photoshop and Illustrator.

2b. Is there a more efficient way to print and cut out cards for my board game?

When I first started making cards for my board games, my process was.... Not optimal. As the years have gone by, I have improved and optimised how I print cards for my games.

[I hope the process I use can help save you time and headaches as well.](#)

2c. Where should I get my prototype printed?

Here are the 2 most popular websites in the industry for printing low numbers of copies of your board game (you can even print just a single copy of your prototype):

[The Game Crafter](#)

[Print and Play by AdMagic](#)



And if your game consists of only cards, I hear these sites are really good as well:

[DriveThruCards](#) (high quality and inexpensive but only standard sized cards, 2.5 in x 3.5 in and initially difficult to figure out where to submit your cards to be printed)

[Make Playing Cards](#) (high quality)

[SuperiorPOD](#) (inexpensive)

2d. How much will it cost to make my prototype?

“More than you will probably think.” There isn’t an easy answer for this but in general it will cost you a lot more to make your prototype than it would to print in bulk (500-2000+ copies).

The best way to see how much your prototype will cost to be made is to go to [the pricing tab on the Game Crafter](#).

Then search for all of the pieces (cards, board, boxes, components, etc.) your game uses.

While the cost is high, it’s very worth it to have your prototype professionally printed once you have 95% of the bugs worked out of it. A professionally made prototype is important when taking your board game to demo at conventions.

3. Playtesting Phase FAQs - Getting your game tested

3a. Where can I find playtesters for my game?

2 suggestions...

1. I have personally found Meetup.com to be a really great resource for finding people to playtest my prototypes. If there is not a Meetup in your area, you can always start one yourself. However, Meetup’s are much better in large cities. So if you don’t have a large city nearby, then I would suggest...



2. Online testing - [Tabletopia](#) and [Tabletop Simulator](#) are both great options for testing your board game with people from all over the world. Both allow you to upload images of your game onto digital board game pieces such as dice and playing cards. Then you can start playing with anyone else from around the world that has the software.

[Also, you might find this Facebook group helpful for finding playtesters on one of these online testing platforms.](#)

As for me, I usually get my family and friends to play. Though when I need a wider range of playtesters, I take my prototypes to Meetups or local board game stores. Someday I plan on learning the online simulators so I can test my new creations on there as well.

3b. What is blind playtesting?

typical playtest is where you sit down with several people and teach them your game. They can ask you questions and get your help learning how to play.

With a blind playtest, you give the players the game and rulebook. Then the players playtest your game without help from you. Get feedback from the players after they finish playing your game.

Blind playtesting is particularly good when testing out your rulebook.

3c. Are there people/companies I can pay to playtest my board game?

There are not currently many people or companies that you can pay to playtest your game. However, there is the Indie Game Alliance (IGA).

[If you are a pro member of the IGA then you can give them your tabletop game to blind playtest and more.](#)



Other than the IGA, I have not seen any paid options for having your board game playtested. Overall, I would recommend the Meetups or attending conventions and asking other designers to playtest your game there (when appropriate).

4. Publishing Phase FAQs - Getting your board game onto the shelves of your local board game store

4a. Where are most board games printed?

Most tabletop games are printed and manufactured in China. This is because costs are much cheaper there and they handle bulk orders well (500+ orders. Though some manufacturers require 1000 or 1500 minimum purchase).

Here are some of the top rated board game manufacturers:

[Whatz Games](#)

[WinGo Games](#)

[Panda Game Manufacturing](#)

Long Pack Games

[You can also check out my interview with Eva Xu of DoFine Games](#), a board game printer out of China.

4b. How can I self publish my board game?

The standard way to self publish your board game is to:

- Create your game
- Playtest it
- Print a professionally designed prototype
- Demo it at conventions and local board game stores



- Find out how much it will cost to print your board game in bulk
- [Create a Kickstarter to sell your game](#) for 5x the cost to print it.
- Fulfill the orders that you received through Kickstarter
- [Sell remaining orders through Amazon](#) or through a publisher

You could also crowdfund through other sites such as Indigogo. However, Kickstarter is currently the most popular in the tabletop industry.

4c. What's the best way to get my game picked up by a board game publisher?

Scott Morris is the President of Passport Game Studios, a board game publisher in the US.

[He gave a talk awhile back to new game designers trying to pitch to publishers.](#) See Scott's tips for getting your board game signed by a publisher in this post.

4d. Who are some of the board game publishers I could pitch my board game to?

[Here is a list that is kept up to date about board game publishers looking to take submissions.](#) Read about what type of games the publisher is looking for. If you think your game fits, then reach out to them to see if they will pick it up.

The common outcome of you pitching your game to a publisher is the publisher turning you down. I find it helpful knowing that and it makes it much less upsetting if/when it happens to you. There is always the option to try the next 1, 2, or 9 publishers on your list.



4e. How much will it cost to print my game?

This is a very popular question and yet another one that doesn't have a clear cut answer. So instead I will tell you how most game designers find out how much their game will cost to print.

(The following is assuming you have already playtested your game and have your final prototype printed).

Write out a list of EVERYTHING you will need to have printed for your game. Some common items are:

- Board
- Cards
- Rulebook
- Dice
- Meeples

Once you have figured out all the things you will need to have printed, contact several of the top rated board game manufacturers (links to them several questions above).

This is a lot of work and there can be some strong communication barriers, but this is what almost everyone does to find out how much their game will cost to have made.

Remember, minimum print runs vary by company but are typically a minimum of 500-1500 games.

Once you figure out how much your board game will cost to have made, you will want to know how much to sell it for...

4f. How much should I sell my tabletop game for?

The general rule of thumb is to sell your board game for 5x costs. So once you have figured out your costs, multiply that by 5 as your starting point. Each game is unique and has its own variables, but selling for lower than 5x costs usually puts game designers in a bind when it comes to shipping and fulfilling orders.

[Randy Hoyt wrote a great article at Foxtrot games where he lays out the 5x costs method.](#)



5. Promoting Phase FAQs - Telling people about your game

5a. How much money do game designers make at board game at conventions?

The majority of people that have a stand at a convention do not make enough to even pay for the stand. Let alone all of the travel expenses. The main reasons people sell at board game conventions are to meet people (network) and let gamers know about your game (brand awareness).

Remember that you aren't attending conventions to make money at the convention. You're attending them to make great connections and to show people your game. This will drive sales later on and build your brand which will mean higher sales of future games/expansions.

5b. Where should I start marketing my tabletop game?

There are many outlets to market your game online. I would suggest starting with just one of them and growing from there. It's VERY easy to get overwhelmed managing different social media accounts and a website. So start small. (Note - You don't HAVE to have a website to make and sell your game.)

"Marketing" can simply mean "showing people your game and why it's fun". In fact, that is where your marketing should start. By showing people your game's progress as you create it and have it playtested should be where you focus your initial marketing.



Several places you can market your board game are:

- Facebook Page - Good for building an audience and being able to easily advertise later
- Google Plus - Having a G+ account for your board game will also help your game be found through Google searches easier.
- YouTube Channel - Videos of your game are great! 'How to play' videos and just interesting things about you, the creator is a good place to start.
- Twitter - Quick and easy updates about your game
- [Board Game Geek](#) - upload your game at the location of the link. Then you can update your games progress as you go)
- Create a Website - A lot of work but makes you look very professional.
- Instagram - Show pictures of your game and people having fun playing it.
- Reddit - This isn't the friendliest place to only post about your game. But being active in the Reddit community and occasionally talking about your game has shown to be useful at times.

Oh man! I'm worn out just listing all of the places you could start marketing your game online.

Remember - The important part is to start small. By choosing just 1 of the 8 options above, you can start growing your audience and getting use to telling people about your game in a public forum (this is very difficult for someone like me to do).

And Now Your Turn!

Let me know what questions you still have about making and selling your board game by reaching out to me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Website](#).

Good luck going out to 'Make Your Game'.

