Make boardgames great again!

by Emiel Ament (version 3)

Introduction

This document is about creating boardgames and is free for download. (If you paid for it you're pretty much scammed lol. :P) The title is of course a joke as there a lot of good recently published boardgames out there. But... can you make even better ones? Continue reading and maybe I can help you out a little.

About

Yo whats up! Its me Emiel Ament (a.k.a. Mile83) and I make boardgames. Im not an expert but dont leave yet because I got some nice pointers to teach you! (At least thats what I think. :P) If you got some ideas yourself or just want to contact me dont hesitate to send me a mail: emielament@hotmail.com. You can also find me on facebook: facebook.com/emiel.ament. And if you want to see more of my work visit: emielament.nl. (Its in Dutch though.)

Creativity

If you're a designer you're a pretty creative mind. Praise yourself for that! (Because making stuff is cool!) If you got ideas write them down as soon as you can before you forget about them. (Even if you're not planning to make them into working boardgames.) You never know when you're in the mood to continue with those projects.

My experience is that creativity can be boosted by taking a walk, playing boardgames or share your ideas with other creative minds. Dont push yourself too hard though as creativity comes and goes. If you got work where you have to be creative and its just not there its best to take an old succesful project and make a revamp of that.

What makes a boardgame good?

A boardgame needs a winning condition. One of the players win (competitive) or everyone wins against the game (cooperative). Its also fun if there is some interaction with the other players. For example by helping them, blocking them, attacking them or making trade deals. Its also very important every action a player does matters. If its your turn and theres nothing to do just isnt much fun.

Be sure to test the boardgame a lot to make it well balanced. A good game is fun for every player (not just the winner). Playtest it a lot against yourself. Once the boardgame

is balanced enough try it out against some reallife players. Recommended are players who are experienced boardgamers (or makers) as they have a more critical view on things. Reallife players will probably show you tactics you'd never thought of.

Having a boardgame end in a close call is pretty fun. Although some boardgames are focussed on skill (like chess). In skill based boardgames you can get better at the game if you play it more. Chance is high the one with the most experience will win and also like the game most. Problem with those games are they are not very beginner friendly. If you make such a boardgame just be sure the conditions are fair for every player. This is also the reason why most people dont like games who are too randomized. Randomization is exciting but dont overdo it or it will just be a game of chance.

Game type

There are a lot of boardgame types out there. Most of them allready have a name (like strategy, worker placement, dice rolling etc.). Recommended is to make a game type you like most (as you're the one who has to test it a thousand times). Its also more fun to have a game in your collection you'd like to play once in a while. You dont need to worry if your boardgame is going to be played as every game type already has its fanbase. They can be easily found on the internet nowadays.

Theme

A theme is not necessary (as there are also a lot of good abstract boardgames out there) but could make your boardgame more fun to play. It doesnt matter if the theme is overdone (like for example fantasy). Just go for one you like most.

Graphics

A good boardgame has good graphics. As a player you want something to look at. If you're not very good at graphics you can choose to collaborate with an artist. (Look for someone who you know and who is good in drawing.) That is if you're going to have it webpublished and free for download though. If you're planning to sell it to a publisher you dont have to bother much with the graphics. (You can for example use pictures from the internet.) The publisher will hire an artist to revamp the game anyways.

Popularity

Making a boardgame popular is a slow progress. I recommend making a boardgame without the idea it will ever become popular. Although it is of course nice if it ever does. A good way to make your boardgame popular is by presenting it to publishers. They have the know how and once published they want your boardgame to be sold as much as possible. (Better ten people promoting the game than just you.) A good place to find publishers is a boardgame convention. Although you can also and try to contact them directly.

Another way to make your game popular is entering a boardgame competition. Sometimes they are organised on conventions but you can also find them on the internet. (Boardgamegeek.com is a good example.) Then you'll be sure someone is going to take a good look at your production. On the internet is expected you take a look at the other people's productions too though.

Popularity groes exponential. One person likes the game and tells it to his friends. All those friends tell it to their friends and so forth. Expect it to be slow in the beginning. Dont wait for it to become popular but just focus on new projects instead. The benefit of having several boardgames ready is that if one of them ever gets popular there is a big chance people will also check out your other productions.

Making money

So you want to become rich with your boardgame? I can help you out of your dream: you probably wont. Even if your boardgame becomes very popular the publisher would probably snatch most of the income. Also the graphic designer, the producer, the seller and the truck driver have to be paid. I recommend just getting a decent job if you want some income and use your free time to work on your boardgames.

Print & Play

You can also choose to make your boardgame free of charge! Just make a print & play version and publish it online. You can make your own website about it (and hope people find it by using a search engine) or post it on an external one (like boardgamegeek.com).

Print & play means its available for download and made to print at home. Recommended is to make the content compatible for a common printer. (A4 in Europe and US letter in the USA.) Of course you can include poster size content but then the chance people will print it will be smaller. (They will then have to bother to visit a copy center.)

A colored boardgame always looks better but it is recommended to also make a lowink version. This means you make graphics in grayscales and with as much white as possible. This way it uses less ink to print. Some people like to have the game cheap or just want a simple version to test the game.

Kickstarter

I dont have any experience with kickstarter but what I do know its a good way to aqcuire money for the production of a boardgame. You do need a well tested and complete boardgame for that though (including nice graphics). Also you need a producer ready to produce a large quantity of your boardgame. To make it even more succesful you need some promotional stuff too (like a banner, photo's and even better: a video).

From what I understand its recommended to give your first backers something extra. Just to get things started. Maybe some extra miniatures or some nice merchiandise.

Like I said I do not have any experience with kickstarter, but its very popular and a lot of boardgame producers make succesful use of it..

Outro

I hope you like this little document on making boardgames. Keep on making stuff and maybe we will meet on the internet some day!