

Results of the Authors' questionnaire

Experiences with publishers

I have distributed my Authors' questionnaire in Göttingen, placed an online form on the Game author site (www.spieleautorensseite.de), and have published this in the SAZ and Spielbox-forum. This first attempt to study the co-operation between authors and publishers in a systematic way had the following result: Including my own-, I have received a total of 10 filled in forms. All the other authors seem to be satisfied ;)

Okay, the questionnaire was maybe not so thorough, and even I did not manage to complete all the answers without studying my papers. Questions about the amount of time spent on a project for example are simply too specific to answer. The awfully looking, but very practical forms with standardized grading for publishers were responded to by no less than 5 publishers. More concrete questions, also handicapped by the design of the questionnaire, were answered for only one publisher.

All of these results I will summarize below, while I will give the grades for publishers in detail even though they are not representative at all. I will conclude with some comments from authors.

For starters, a bit about the authors:

Some had not yet published any games at all, another one already had 48 games on the market. Half of the authors had about 5 published games. 6 of the authors were SAZ members, 2 weren't and one had concealed his membership ;-).

The average license fee for authors is estimated to be somewhere in-between the 4 and 6% of the net sales price. The real figures vary from 3 to 7%, in which 3 and 7% are the exceptions. For book publishing the fees are estimated to go up as high as 8 to 10% and sometimes even higher.

The participants estimated that a publisher receives about 150 to 2500 game proposals a year. The figure mostly estimated – 1,000 proposals – should be realistic for larger publishers. It is safe to say – what most participants said - that about 1% of these games will be published. (With extreme exceptions rating from 0,5 to 5%)

All of this would give a fairly good impression of the knowledge of game designers, had it not been for the fact that most participants have not answered the questions about a copyright for games or game ideas. There were two false and only two (apart from my own) right answers: Yes, games with the rules written down are subject to copyright, plain ideas are not. Everybody please read the SAZ news! These things are discussed and explained there. No kidding, you are already reading this. So please also read the SAZ zeichen! ;-)

Another unresolved thing was the question about the origin of the word Pöppel (German for pawn). One thought it came from Popelig (adjective of "bogey" or "booger") and sources like KMW (Knut Michael Wolf – webmaster of www.spielbox.de) were mentioned. I do not know if there is any truth in that. Does not matter really, anyway. More important: where does the shoe pinch?

Meeting publishers usually takes place on game-fests and fairs or conventions (5X). Besides that the following occasions were mentioned: requests by publishers (Spiel& Autor, reviews in Spielbox) and email presentation. Confirmation on receiving game proposals and updates on the progress are unfortunately not standard procedure, but not all authors think this is important.

A lot of criticism was regarding the lack of feedback, when a game is returned. I hereby wish to remind everyone of the feedback form prepared by the 'Bödefelder Gruppe'. You can download this from the SAZ site and send it along with your prototypes. It will make it easier for editors to give you some feedback. However, when you don't get your prototype back, it doesn't help at all. (See the chart for details.)

When things lead to the signing of a contract, the author's input is mostly welcome, some even judge the author's participation as very good. I think it also depends on the interest an author takes in the process. A contract will usually be signed for a period of 2-5 years, with "unlimited" also being below this period. As an advance sums between € 0,- up to € 5000,- Euro are mentioned. The average advance is around € 1000,- to € 2000,- , however some 5 digit numbers were also mentioned. Receiving 20 samples of your game is standard. Although sometimes it might be less (5-8 or 10). With a 2/1000 per run it is possible to get more samples along the way. Getting your name published on the box has become standard.

Chances to cancel the contract are only provided in most cases. Some authors allow for publishers to sublicense their games, without their consent per individual case. The fee for sublicensing is, according to two participants, 50% for the author and 50% for the publisher.

Standardized figures

1 = very good 2 = good 3 = so-so 4 = bad 5 = the worst (6 = unreturned prototype)

publisher	Contact (easy to reach?)	Contact in testing phase (Info for author)	In case of rejection (thorough feedback?)	After contract (author's participation)	Contract conditions	After publication (e.g. public relations)	sales	Overall opinion
Abacus	1- 112	3 33	2- 23	2	2	3	3	2
Adlung	1	1	2	1	1	3	2	1
Alea	1 11	2- 23	3 33					
Amigo	2 123	3- 34	3+ 224					3
Fantasy Flight								
Goldsieber	3+ 1235	3 234	3- 235					
Haba	2	2	1					
Hans im Glück	2- 1112344	3 1233345	3- 2333345	1	2	2	2	3 144
Holzinsel	1- 12	3 33	2	2 22	1- 12	3 24	2- 23	2 22
Kosmos	2- 11122334	3- 2333444	3- 222344 6	2 22	2- 223	3+ 125	2- 14	3+ 12344
Kuhlmann	1	2	2					
Noris	2	3		3	3	3	4	3
Phalanx	1 11	1- 12	3 24	2	1			1
Piatnik	2 22	4	3 33	2	3	5	4	2- 23
Philos	2	3		2	3	3	4	3
Queen Games	3+ 222335	245	3	3	3	2	3	3- 2,5+4
Ravensburger	3+ 1123345	3- 3344	2- 2233	3 33	2		3	3- 23
Selecta	1- 12	1- 12	2 13	3	2	2	2	2
Simba	5	5	6					
Schmidt	2 13	3- 34	3- 34	4	3	2	1	2
Zoch	1							

3+ = average figures 1123345 = singular figures (no singular figures = just 1 figure entered)

The variety in figures regarding one publisher is the obvious result from the experiences various authors had with one publisher.

If only one author has filled in his experiences with one publisher, the result, good or bad, is only based on that person's opinion. Regarding the results for contact with the publisher, the input and effort from the author him- or herself is also important. And on top of it all, it is also possible that the experiences some authors have might have been had some years ago.

What is it the authors would like to see happen in their contact with publishers? I will simply quote the answers given:

- *Qualify your reasons for rejection. Allow for the author to be involved in the development of the game.*
- *Open and fair contact. Information regarding publisher's programme plans.*
- *More guts when it comes to publishing abstract games.*
- *Feedback.*
- *Publish my games.*
- *Authors need publishers... publishers need authors.. Maybe some editors, who are not familiar with this concept just yet, at least have the decency to pretend that we are equal partners and need each other to achieve the same goal.*

Why did one become an author? The answers to this are as similar as unanimous.

- *It's fun*
- *A creative pastime, which I love*
- *Because it's fun, and because it is an interesting thing to do. Besides the personal importance of gaming in my life can be compensated.*
- *Alternative to everyday life. Business. It is interesting to achieve something in a professional way.*
- *Because it is cool to be mentioned as the "inventor" on a box of a game. And because it is fun to invent something new.*
- *Because it is a lot of fun to design games, and because the games I like to play are (partly) not out there..*
- *Because it is fun to develop games.*
- *It makes sense, is fun, creative, and I get to be my own boss for the most part*
- *Because it's the best job in the world. Right in this moment, somewhere in the world, some people are playing my game and are having a good time. That pleases me!*

And what is it that makes it so much fun? Here are the answers (XXX anonymized by me):

- *My fastest result: the decision to publish my game XXX for Israel was taken by the publisher after a 20 minute test game..*
- *Decent treatment by and conversation with the editor, without stranding in small talk, but instead being rather constructive. As an author one gets the feeling one co-operates with this company, and is not just anybody for this publisher.*
- *XXX wrote as a comment to the rejection of one of my games, that they would be interested in seeing other prototypes by me. When I saw them again in Göttingen and tried to show them my new game XXX as well as XXX did not have a lot of time and showed less than 30 seconds of interest. I thought this was peculiar.*
- *From an individually written rejection:*
„We did not have the impression that it is possible to influence the opponent in a tactical

way, while a lot of what's going on has to do with receiving the right cards. *In case we misunderstood the rules, and it is possible to play more tactical, the game still is not interesting for us, because we are not looking for a tactical game in this game series at this moment.*"

This game has now reached a 6 digit run.

Thank you all authors who have answered my questions. Maybe this questionnaire can be the basis of a better questionnaire for the future. Regarding the contents it might be meaningful to limit the grading of items, and rather provide room for personal opinions, in case someone wants to add a comment to the reason why he has graded a subject with a certain mark.

It would be nice to have only recent experiences in the results of this questionnaire next time. If more authors will fill in the form, it might be possible to update the results every two years. If anyone is interested in working on this, please feel free to come forward and contact me:

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Translation: Liesbeth Bos, Andrea Meyer, 12/2004

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Here's a reader's response to the German version of the survey which had been sent out with the SAZ news in October:

Hello Günther,

thank you for the results of the authors' survey which I received via SAZ. I have a question for you concerning your statement:

"The average license fee for authors is estimated to be somewhere in-between the 4 and 6% of the net sales price. The real figures vary from 3 to 7%, in which 3 and 7% are the exceptions. For book publishing the fees are estimated to go up as high as 8 to 10% and sometimes even higher."

Why don't you also give the actual fee, which is between 5 and 10% of the net sales price for the final customer (not for the shops). I do not know how much the net sales price for shops is with books, but I guess it is lower than their final net sales price. This means that the author's share resp. revenue is much higher with books than it is with games. It proves that the games market values the creative potential of designers much less than the books market does. The reasons for this might be the smaller print run and higher production costs. The percentage pays reminds of alms. Amazingly nobody seems to be disturbed by this ...

Best regards

Christian Matzerath

Hi Christian,

*the reason is: I forgot to give the actual fee.
Thanks for that hint and your useful comment*

regards, Günter