MITOCW | MITCMS_608S14_ses17

PROFESSOR: OK, So let's get started. Today we have got the pleasure of two local game builders. So they're here to talk to us about some of their work. We've got Glenn, and I don't have your last name in front of me right now.

Given. Glenn Given.

PROFESSOR: Glenn Given from Games by Play Date. And you're located in New Hampshire?

GLENN GIVEN: Yes. Well, 2/3 of us are. It's like a three-person studio. Two of us in Andrew and one of us who's in [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: Great. And then you do board games and card games?

GLENN GIVEN: Yes, a lot of them.

PROFESSOR: And then Mack. How do you spell your last name?

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Mackenzie Cameron.

PROFESSOR: And he is one of the co-organizers from the Game Makers Guild, a local meet up, meets up at various places around the Cambridge area for people who are interested in developing board games and card games and meet with each other and learn more about how to make them.

So each here, we're going to go just Glenn then Mack. Talk a little bit about what you do, about the kind of work you do, and then afterwards, we're going to open up for questions.

GLENN GIVEN: Sure. So make games. I make board games. I make card games. And I try and never stop doing them. I don't have a particular-- anything that I can play that I can make happen, I'll do it. We do Targi games.

So I just got 2,500 copies of my first party game delivered to my house three hours ago, which is interesting, moving those myself and then getting here. But I also am developing a gigantic, stupid board game that's just called a Big Dumb Wargame, which is like these guys play Axis & Allies or any of those old.

So I used to play that when I was in high school because I liked being lonely and then I decided I wanted to make a version of that that's actually fun. We're also working on a game called Pack the Pack, which is-- you guys know Cards Against Humanity?

So they're running this contest called the Cards Against Humanity Tabletop Deathmatch, and they got indie developers from all over the country to submit stuff. And so one of our games is in that. It's like if you've ever played Old Diablo, remember when you would collect loot and you would have to fit it in your bag and it was all weird shaped?

So it's been inventory Tetris games where everyone is pulling tiles, which are effectively dominoes with different images on them, and then you're aligning them to make gems. So it's like an analog version of Super Puzzle Fighter. But the moral to the point, everything I've just described to you doesn't tell you anything about the games except in reference to other games that I talked about.

But that's how I do design. I look at games that I like and then I dissect them and take the parts that I want and then put them back together with other parts and see if there's a theme that goes with it. But yeah.

Also, I did printing and publishing for 10 years, and then that drove me madder than normal. So I left that to do this. So me and my team very rapidly design games. We bring a design all the way to a publishing level in about a month, from conception to execution.

They're not big, huge endeavors, but it's good to stay really busy with it and exercise with it and realize that sometimes a project is going to fail and you can back away from it and go, ah, well, that month is kind of a bust. And so we're actually also exploring different kind of business models for board games because this isn't really a huge leap. There's very few people who are going to be very wealthy on it or even do good on it.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Scare them off, right?

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah, seriously. So maybe you make the next Settlers of Catan and then you're selling a steady 5,000 copies a year, which is really not that much when you think of it. Depending on the way your business is set up, you may see a fraction of that money. So that's why a lot of very, very good designers, like I'm a big fan of Bruno Faidutti who just came out with Mascarade. Mascarade is a really cool game.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: [INAUDIBLE]?

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. So he'll put out a couple of games, and then he just gets a cut from each of them. But using short-run printing, we directly manufacture our monthly games, and then people subscribe to us through stuff like Patreon. And then we send them physical copies of the games that we make. And I brought nine different games that I've made in the past six months.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I didn't bring any.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. Well, you can borrow some of mine. And then you can borrow the bad ones. And then also we go to Kickstarter for larger games, ones where we want to make multi-thousand copies of it. But yeah, I will never stop talking. OK, cool.

Yeah. Board games are really awesome. I think that you guys know that. And they're more awesome now than they used to be, not just because they're more complicated because complexity isn't what makes a game really good. In fact, usually a really complex game is really bad because it's a sign that there was a huge problem and that the designer said, oh, I know how to fix this. I'll add another page to the rule book. That's poor planning.

But games are better now because people want them more. I mean, what I think the reason people want them more is because we crave physical, analog time with other people now more so than when I was a kid because we're super interconnected with smartphones and all that stuff that we can't live our life without. I'm twittering all the way down here doing 80 on the highway because I'm a bad person.

But the ability to say, OK, I've been staring at these screens all day long, and my entire life is scheduled. I need to schedule my relaxing time and it needs to not be me staring at the screen. So I think there's something in the zeitgeist of that personal feeling that people had that has caused a resurgence in face-to-face gaming.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Yeah. Because Even like apps and stuff, I will straight up just hands down beat anyone that plays the Race for the Galaxy app than playing them face to face because the skills that you need are completely different. Just like this board games do really well that you don't find in other mediums.

GLENN GIVEN: So I play a ton of Netrunner, which is a really awesome game.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: The rule book on that is awful.

GLENN GIVEN: The rulebook is the worst. But some people have hacked together. There's a program called Octagon, which is like a virtual tabletop where you can basically simulate any game that's been made. I mean, there's a whole interesting other discussion of how do you do internet piracy of board games. That could be a class. It's a good idea for a class.

Anyway, so Octagon is really neat except one of the things about Netrunner is that-- if you played it, raise your hands so I know--

AUDIENCE: Does the original version count?

GLENN GIVEN: Yes. Sure. Although the new version is better. You should totally get back into the new version. It's amazing. So it's by the same guy who designed Magic, the Gathering. It has some sort of similarities to that. But what makes it really neat is that it's an asymmetrical game.

Like I'll be an evil corporation, for instance, and you might be a scrappy computer hacker. And you're trying to infiltrate my servers, which are represented by my deck of cards, my hand of cards, my discard pile of cards, or like other things that I have installed and find what my nefarious plans are. And you get all these crazy programs that allow you to circumnavigate my defenses, and I get all these programs that allow me to put down defenses, or maybe I get a card that says, I orbitally bombard your apartment building, which is always fun.

But a huge part of that game, although you can play it on Octagon, a tremendous part of that game is it's bluffing because what makes the game really rich is not that it's asymmetrical, but there's a huge component of hidden information. As a corporation in that game, everything I do I do by placing my cards face down. So I know what they are, but you don't.

And you have to start to count cards a little bit or start to make educated guesses about what you-- can I attack his hand even though I have no offensive capabilities here? Is that going to mean that he explodes like a thing in my brain and my computer hacker dies? There's all that.

So a lot of that game is about managing what's called pilt, which is something you get in poker. If you play poker, when you start losing poker, if you forget that poker is kind of a long game

and that you should really be playing it with an eye on what the rest of your weak looks like as opposed to this hand, you'll start to play worse because you're doing worse and you'll just pilt.

So it's kind of like a tell, but it's more than just saying I've got a bad card in my hand. It's going, I'm losing so I need to play harder, which would be great if it was handball or something, but in a card, that doesn't work because really what you want to do is establish regularity in what you're doing, especially in a game that's that mathematically perfect.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I think I'm going to go ahead and introduce myself.

GLENN GIVEN: Please do. I don't even know where I am.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: So my name is Mackenzie Cameron. I'm an event coordinator for the Game Makers Guild. So we host a lot of events, which you guys have had any games at any level of prototype, whether it's nearly finished or you just scrapped down something on a napkin and you're like it might play. Let me go grab some dice or whatever, we accept that. Check out our site. meetup/gamemakersguild.

Actually, we just recently got gamemakersguild.com. So you can go to that website.

GLENN GIVEN: That's a coup.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: --which I'm a little [INAUDIBLE]. It's sweet. I'm slowly trying to make sure that we build copies for that.

GLENN GIVEN: [INAUDIBLE].

MACKENZIE CAMERON: gamemakersguild.com, which is awesome. I don't know how we managed to get that without somebody else already having it. But I host some of other events that we hose. We have your standard play testing, but we also do indie board games showcases, actually. I've hosted that in Brookline three times now, where we just get anyone that has a cool design. So make your designs, and then we try and bring it out to the public.

And then what's the other stuff that I do? I try to get my hands in everything board game related in Boston. I help out at Knight Moves, the board game cafe out in Brookline, which is a lot of fun. If you guys don't know about it, you pay $10, you get in. They have a library of something like 700 games. You can play for as long as you like with anybody that's around.

I also do a board game seen to web comic, overboard-comic.com. And then there's one more thing. I'm going to be doing a panel of techs this year. Me and five other folks are going to be talking about board game language, which should be pretty interesting. It's talk like a board game geek, if anyone is going to PAX. Who's going to PAX?

Not many of you. You should totally go. It's the best thing. It's The reason I moved to Boston. And then in the sort of a distant future, I've got plans for my maiden voyage into Kickstarter called Killer Croquet, which is the croquet-based murder simulator. That will be a board game. And it's amazing.

Not to say that Glenn is wrong about everything, but I'm doing the one idea, build it up, do the kickstarter sort of thing. The rapid iteration is really important, but there's definitely lots of different paths towards making a board game and having it be successful.

GLENN GIVEN: I think the main difference is that he has another job.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Oh, yeah.

GLENN GIVEN: And I don't.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: That's true. I do this for no money at all.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. I did this for no money too, except that's a problem. So rapid iteration. But do you want to talk about how you went from game idea to the prototype?

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Sure.

GLENN GIVEN: I mean, do you want to let them ask questions?

PROFESSOR: [INAUDIBLE]. Process.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: And then the next question.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: So process. Mine is definitely rapid iteration, but I've finally settled on one idea that I actually watch you push forward rather than trying to bundle them up in small ideas, get the one big

one.

I think the main difference of that is that I'm hoping that with that one idea, I'll be able to use momentum to generally generate more funding for the general brand name of my design studio. But coming up of that idea is definitely a rapid iteration process where you come up with the very sketchy idea. Some designers start with a mechanic, so they're like I want to do something that's deck building where you build decks over the course of the game, which makes an engine that you then draw to then do other cool things.

And then other designers, myself, I'm usually like this. Start with some sort of system or some sort of theme, like a croquet, and see if you can turn that into a board game by adding different mechanics and seeing what works and what doesn't, which the Game Makers Guild is pretty fantastic for that. Because when you get a game and you design it and on your first [INAUDIBLE] you look at your game and you go this is amazing. This is going to work.

And you try and tell someone about it, and you try and have them play it. And that doesn't always work so well.

GLENN GIVEN: It never works.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: It never works, actually.

GLENN GIVEN: The first time you put your thing down on the table, it's going to maybe burst into flames.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Yeah. A best case scenario is that it bursts into flames and you've made some mistakes. And it's basically unplayable because you need dice. And you realize that when you roll the dice, the numbers always add up to some combination of factors that when you apply that to system, it's like oh, well, you're supposed to move one space, but every time you do this, you actually just die immediately.

GLENN GIVEN: Yes. So people can break it in mechanically. You find a tautology element in it and just repeatedly--

MACKENZIE CAMERON: But one of the worst thing that you can do, I had a game that I was developing for a while. I pitched it to Game Salute. And it was a semi-cooperative game. So the idea was that all players have to work together so that everybody doesn't lose, but then once you're going to reach a certain threshold, only one player can win. And kind of a difficult concept to really

balance well, but I'm eventually going to really finagle it and get it working.

And a bunch of my play testers played it, and it worked out exactly the way I wanted to. They'd play it to a certain point and then they turned on each other and then there's this big, climactic battle, and it was fantastic. I was Watching just the mechanics of how it works.

And then I asked them, it seemed to work out really well. How did you guys enjoy it? They said, it was awful. I said but it works. You guys functioned in the way that was really functional. Yeah, but it wasn't fun, which is something that you realize as a designer, you're putting stuff together that the things that you necessarily think are really interesting or even if they're working don't necessarily come across as fun.

AUDIENCE: But that's really interesting. They finished the game. They didn't like playing the game, yet they both played the game.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Yes.

AUDIENCE: Is that common when you do play tests? [INAUDIBLE].

MACKENZIE CAMERON: They're involved in the game.

GLENN GIVEN: Usually like, especially if it's in a dedicated play testing group and especially in the Game Makers Guild where it's primarily designers, that has its own downsides to it. But yeah, they'll see it through. I mean, they'll go [INAUDIBLE] on it, push that boulder all the way up just to see-- I mean, even when we found stuff that is completely broken in a game.

I was playing a game where it was robots rising up against humans or something and there's this whole propaganda element. And then in the first few turns, we had identified that if you just went to this one space on the board and continued to buy propaganda posters, you could shut every other player out of the game.

And so it's just I'm going to go there. I'm not going to move. I'm just going to keep doing this for the entire game until I win. And at that point, you could be like, OK, I don't want to play this game anymore. This is dumb, but we just did it for a half hour and different people tried different things using the rule set to unseat that bad decision.

So sometimes even when you identity something that's broken, it just gives you a new wound to start poking at to see does this hurt? It's like a doctor. That's how doctors work. Stab you.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Well, that's that doctor's game. Solve them. That's great. Encouraging play testers to finish a game can be an art in and of itself. Oftentimes, when you get designers that think that they can fix your game for you, it will be hard pressed to get them to finish the game because they're like no, no. This is where you should do it like this.

But in trying to urge your play testers, we actually had an event where we brought somebody in who was an expert on generating play tests feedback, actually, for video games, which need a lot of paper prototyping, so it was a carry over. And often times it's just trying to encourage players to go all the way through because sometimes even as players, even with published games, you'll play a game like in the first playthrough you'll be like, oh, this one strategy is completely broken.

I don't know if anyone is familiar with the card game Race for the Galaxy. Maybe a couple. But there's one particular strategy where the first time you play through, there's a military strategy where if you have a certain level of military, you can play a lot of cards roughly for free, which is based on the mechanics. And almost everybody that plays the game for the first time realizes, oh, man, military is such great strategy. How did they make this game?

And then the second time you play through, two players try and use that strategy, and the third player does a different strategy. And all of a sudden that's the strategy that's overpowered. And oftentimes, because the game doesn't completely lay itself out in front of all the players in the first play test, the perception that it's broken is not always necessarily true.

GLENN GIVEN: And you can't find that kind of stuff until you play test it. [INAUDIBLE]. Questions?

AUDIENCE: Essentially, I think [INAUDIBLE] example of that is [INAUDIBLE], where how many people [INAUDIBLE], like oh, man. This strategy is so overpowering. This person scored 70 points with it, and none of us were above 40 or so. And then you respond like 70. [INAUDIBLE].

GLENN GIVEN: Well, there is always stuff like that. I think that illuminates another interesting thing about play testing. The group that you're play testing with really can make a huge difference, not just is this person a designer or is this person not a designer, but how deeply they want to get into mastering that system or how much they care about mastering that system.

MACKENZIE Yeah, because we offer multiple tiers of play testing at the Game Makers Guild. We have like

CAMERON: just the standard where you come and you play with a bunch of designers, and they tell you it's crap. And you go home and you cry, and then you make it a little bit better and you feel a little better.

But then also we have intensive play testing, which is phase two after you get a certain number. We have a nomination and serration system. We're trying to set up a game maker's seal of approval so we can hopefully better pitch our games to designers and the general public.

But the phase two intensive was the chance for you to get the same group of people together and play your game a bunch of times. And I mean, again, part of the fun of that for Play Chesters, for a designer, it helps to iterate that even if the game is broken so you can find those little bits and pieces where the games completely falls apart.

But at Play Chester, it can kind of fun to just find-- I mean, it's like when you play a video game and find some element of the game where the graphics are screwed up or you fall through the world or almost just the exploration of that. And I have a lot of play testers. They enjoy finding the chinks in the armor, so to speak

GLENN GIVEN: Well, I think the other thing about do repeat a play test especially if it's the same group, has anybody played the Vlambeer game, Luftrausers, that just came out? It's great. You should play it. It's Totally worth the money. It's kind of like a *Lunar Lander* meets *Asteroids* game. So you're kind of drifting, but you can customize your airplane with different engines and different bodies and different weapons. And they all make the game play-- they all screw with the physics of the game in different ways.

Well, unless you put three or four hours into playing that game, which is a lot of time for a very arcady-style game, you won't really know how do I get past this certain threshold of points. And what is my sweet spot in controlling this airplane that I can maximize how powerful I am with it.

The same thing in boardgames. Often, it doesn't happen in that time frame. But for instance, with Netrunner or Magical or whatever, you play and play and play and play. And you start to realize that some of the things in this game are just red herrings. They're just included to dilute the power of other things, or they're included to counterbalance very specific scenarios. And things that seem like total waste are actually really important later on in the game and you just

can't get that up front.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: So just real quick. Going back to Sulkeen really quick is that there is a certain difficulty with the length of games. So if you have a game and you're trying to play test it and you hit 30 minutes and it's not fun, and then you tell your players, don't worry. There's two and a half hours more to it and we'll get it figured out, you've got a much harder row to tow on that, which actually, you'll find I think, in part you'll see a lot more games that are designed for the 45-minute mark because that's usually-- I mean, that's the easiest way to iterate a game.

GLENN GIVEN: It's also about the time. I mean, think about the amount of free time you really have in your life.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Well, they certainly have a lot. They're students.

GLENN GIVEN: But even that, I mean, there's kegs to stand on and all that stuff. I don't know what they do at MIT.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: It's some sort of giant-like robot.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. You build a robot. I'm sorry. I have a dime in my time because I'm a professional. It's just driving me mad. Otherwise, another important thing about being a designer, develop a mental disorder. That will really, really help you get the tiny problems like dimes in your tie out.

So yeah. Half hour, 45-minute games are becoming the thing. As board games become more and more popular in America, because they were always-- well, for the past 25, 30 years they were very popular in Europe. And when we were talking about board games, I think we're not talking about traditional games like Monopoly, Scrabble, that kind of early American family board game, I think.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Because they're still a great game. There's so much. When we talk about board games, we talk about they're roughly this big because the designer's name on the box, they take between 45 to 3 hours. Produce some things like War Hammer and different war games.

Because there's whole other cultures out there, which is really cool. But when we say board games, we're talking about that again.

GLENN GIVEN: And that's different from say, I like to use the term tabletop games, but I'll expand that really

far. I did a tabletop producing for the Boston Festival Indie Games, which is coming up in September.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: We should talk about that.

GLENN GIVEN: The game is like a hockey rink filled up with indie games. I don't know much more than that. We just opened the submissions yesterday.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

GLENN GIVEN: Well, one of the differences from last year that when I came onboard because it was my first year doing it, I really wanted the stress was that a tabletop game or an analog game is a different term than a board game. A board game is literally something with a board.

But a tabletop game, I'll stretch that and say card games are tabletop games. Roll-playing games are tabletop games. You can be playing the clunkiest most grognard DMD-- "grognard" is a French term for curmudgeonly old guys. That's basically it. I think it actually is for generals or something. They're the worst.

So Apples to Apples is a tabletop game. What's the game where you're pulling out the sticks and the marbles fall down? Ker-Plunk. God, I love that game. Ker-Plunk is a tabletop game. Dominoes is a tabletop game. Bocce Ball is not a tabletop game, but it's great.

But also if roll-playing games or tabletop games, does that mean a LARP is a tabletop game? Because a LARP is just the roll-playing game without dice. And if LARPs are tabletop games, then how about--

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I think they're technically dexterity games.

GLENN GIVEN: Well, if you're doing proper LARPs. But if you're doing something like a Nordic LARP, which is the brand of live-action roll playing from Norway, Sweden, and Finland--

MACKENZIE CAMERON: God, those folks leave me nuts.

GLENN GIVEN: I was invited to a convention with those people last week, and they are hilarious.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: The only one that I know that they do there's a *Battlestar Galactica,* where they actually they rent out an old--

GLENN GIVEN: Battleship.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: --battleship.

GLENN GIVEN: For a weekend.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: [INAUDIBLE] on it for a weekend, and yeah, they go and they play this game on right on a frigid waters and military bunkers playing *Battlestar Galactica-themed* live action role playing game.

GLENN GIVEN: So it is a roll-playing game, but it's also like an interactive theater performance. That game was crazy, apparently. So is everybody familiar with *Battlestar Galactica?* OK. So there's robots, and they look like people.

So it was a *Battlestar Galactica,* and then they had people who were cylons who were agents. And then anyone who was wearing red was a hallucination. It could only be seen by specific characters.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: It gets better.

GLENN GIVEN: From the second day of the LARP, and this is like a three-day thing. You frigging sleep on this battleship and everybody is in character the whole time. On the second day of the LARP, one of the guys who has red who was part of the plot as a hallucination, they brought his twin brother in who nobody else knew that he had a twin brother. So all of a sudden there's two identical hallucinations wandering around the ship, and everybody is flipping their fucking wig.

So I guess what I'm saying is, if we can rent a battleship for [INAUDIBLE]. And then like games like Johann Sebastian Joust, which is a digital game, but is it really a digital game? It's really kind of like tag.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: No. I wouldn't say-- what is it? Spaceteam. I don't know if you guys know Spaceteam at all. iOS game. You play it by basically you have a user interface. And you press buttons before a timer runs out. Unfortunately, what button you have to press is not on your screen, but on

someone else's screen.

So they'll tell you to flash the paper screw, and you look on your thing and do I have the paper screw flash? But at the same that is that a video game because there's not really much to it in terms of the digital aspect so much as that it's a timer and you have to press buttons at the right time. You could make an analog version of that.

GLENN GIVEN: You can make an analog version of that.

AUDIENCE: So that brings us into the funding aspects of things. All these different categories, all these different markets, you can think of. How are you exploring? How are you marketing your games? What are you marketing your games as? What's your [INAUDIBLE]?

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Well, certainly--

GLENN GIVEN: I have no idea.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Certainly, when we say board games, we mean like against the box about yeah big, which is, in this instance, I call it the hobby industry, though there's a lot of very nebulous terms of what that falls under. But the hobby industry is separate from the toy industry, which I was actually at Toy Fair in New York. Mostly, I actually just wrote an article on my blog about there is a difference between a game inventor, a game designer, and a game writer, and how it separates out the different industries that are out there.

But for myself personally, our kind of industry and where we're hoping that we're seeing the most growth is the feeling that people that are mostly on social media, a lot of people that are really into Kickstarter, and very into thematic games that are both themselves semantically interesting as well as the systems that are within them are fair and balanced and are worthwhile to do.

So my strategy is actually to initiate. My Kickstarter is in about six months. And in that time, I'm going to be creating a trans-media storytelling ad campaign that will take the theme of the game, turn it into sort of a story, and then promote that as well as talking about just the general design as a result hoping to engage social media networks that will then generate the needed buzz for when the Kickstarter campaign actually launches.

GLENN GIVEN: A lot of fundraising has less to do with what you're making and more to do with what you can

conceivably accomplish in marketing. So if you have no budget, you have to rely on certain marketing techniques as opposed to others. A lot of people who have no budget like to think that commercials don't work. That's stupid. Why would anybody do that as a way of kind of convincing themselves that they've made a noble choice? No. They just didn't have the money.

Sometimes commercials really work. For instance, as I was touring on my way down here, I relaunched a Google AdWords campaign for our game Slash because now I can fulfill orders for it. Using multiple marketing vectors in order to get people interested in your project is really, really important, especially because the means-- it's a very competitive space.

It is an industry that is like a hobby and toy industry was like $6.1 billion last year, which is not insignificant, but it isn't video games. But unlike video games, it is an industry that has grown 11% on average, for the year over year for the past five years.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Before that it was even growing more so than that.

GLENN GIVEN: No. It's actually gone up, but it's predicted in 2018, I just got the University of Texas research. I take it real serious. So it's a very fast growing industry because there's space in America for it. It's not as fast growing in Europe because that's already a supersaturated market.

But stuff like Kickstarter, Patreon, and Indiegogo, even just going to shows and selling your wares, which is actually really the best way to do it. The way that you get people to come to them is to find the audiences that are already keyed into that. They like the idea of I'm helping a person make a thing. I'm not investing, but I'm kind of like pre-ordering this thing.

So you've got to identify what those markets are and find the best ways to get them and convince them to throw money down a hole called Kickstarter. Because not everything on Kickstarter gets funded, and not everything that gets funded on Kickstarter gets done. And then--

MACKENZIE CAMERON: There's some horror stories.

GLENN GIVEN: --many of the things that get funded and get done are crap.

MACKENZIE [INAUDIBLE] a little bit. Like you said, it's a growing industry. So the hobby end of the growing

CAMERON: industry as opposed to the toy industry. So if you're trying to get your games to Hasbro or I guess Parker Brothers, but anything else that ultimately leads back to Hasbro.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah, because Hasbro, [INAUDIBLE].

MACKENZIE CAMERON: But anything you want to get you game into Toys R Us, at that point, that industry is pretty static. So as a result, it's very hard to get known or mentioned at all in that. But because the hobby games industry is growing, there's more and more people that are looking for the ground floor. And as a result, if you can get your foot in, make a little brand for yourself, get your name out there, then when you actually do you start making games, people will recognize you, and you'll be able to kind of market yourself as a brand.

Again, that's probably one of the most important things. And the only reason this is possible is because game designers start putting their names on the box. When we talk about designers, let's talk about Reiner Knizia, one of the most prolific game designers. And all of his brands are great, but his name is known in the hobby game industry because the dude designed like 300 games and actually has them all published.

And as a result, when you see Reiner Knizia's name on a box, you're going to start to recognize that a little bit. When you're able to generate--

GLENN GIVEN: I mean, they're not that all good.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: They're not all good. But Reiner Knizia. I've heard that name before.

GLENN GIVEN: I agree. I mean, he created a brand for himself just like video game companies d, or labels in music. The music industry, you guys weren't around in the '90s, so you don't know it exists. For you, still exists.

Yeah. So I think the interesting thing about the market and being able to have that personal brand as a designer is really important because the people who are playing board games right now and the growing market are, I guess, they're iconoclastic people. They're hey, we're all individual types, but they're all we're really big on geek culture.

And then geek culture is bringing 75,000 people here this weekend, so maybe it's not as marginal as we'd like to think that it is. But it is a market that values individuality and individual productivity. So finding the ways to market to those people directly can often be really

rewarding, especially if you're putting your face on what you're doing.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Another example is Daniel Solis, who's down in--

GLENN GIVEN: North Carolina.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: North Carolina. For the longest time, I mean, he was a graphic designer, but he started a board game blog. He just talked about his expertise in designing a lot of games. He's a very prolific guy, and he does a lot of stuff that's just completely open source, print-and-play games.

GLENN GIVEN: Actually, he works out of his house like I do, and we actually do a conference call every morning with a number of other designers.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I was wondering how you knew him.

GLENN GIVEN: He's just released-- you guys ever watch *Firefly?* That show? So he just did the layout for-- like his normal job is doing graphic design layout.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Where's your other stuff?

GLENN GIVEN: So he just laid out the Firefly BG, which is available for download now as PDF and then they're provisioning it later. So he does that, and then he has this whole I'm going to make games a lot and put them up on DriveThruCards, which is an online service that allows you to do print on demand, which is another one of the things that in the past year has really shaken up the board game industry.

You used to not be able to get anything done unless you're are ready to do 3,000 copies of it, but now I can make a game, put it up through DriveThruCards, and you can go send $10 and download it. Or they would actually send you individual print in seconds.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: But again, some of [INAUDIBLE]. So Daniel Solis has been doing all this stuff, just presenting himself as an expert creating a brand of himself. Actually, I brought him up to Hacks last year as an expert. He, about six months ago, ran a Kickstarter for Bell of the Ball.

And he leveraged some of his connections. And the game itself is very good, but the

Kickstarter was wildly successful. I think he got something like three times what he asked for just in terms of kick starting the game.

And as a result, I believe, a lot of his connections and leveraging his brand as an expert. I think at some point, he's got 5,000 Twitter followers and decent blog presence. And as a result of having that before he launches a Kickstarter of starts to generate pre-sales for a board game, that he's going to do much better.

And the effort that he puts into it is really just talking about board games, putting information for free online and establishing himself as someone who's an expert.

AUDIENCE: So all of these crowd funding models, there is a little bit of precedence in a publisher [INAUDIBLE] groups like GMP. But for the most part, they're fairly recent developments. because we'll be willing to give money online. I'm assuming that your interactions [INAUDIBLE]. But what is this role of stores, especially hobby stores?

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I do you also work at a games store Eureka! Puzzles down Brookline. And that's an interesting function as well. I do a little a little bit of research in general on retail stores, not just board game stores, but anywhere that sells things. It's taking a nosedive as an industry, which is hard to imagine just stores selling things as an industry.

But idea is with the internet and [INAUDIBLE] like with Amazon Prime, oftentimes, you can find the same product online. And even with shipping, they can beat the price of any retail store, which is board games, war game retail outlets are pretty hard.

Because you can go and hell, I work at Eureka! Puzzles. I get in and play discount, and it's still cheaper for me to go on Funagain Games and buy a game on that end. With shipping, it's still cheaper than what I pay at Eureka! Puzzles for a board game.

As a result, a lot of retail outlets are starting to realize that if they're going to survive, they can't do it by trying to beat prices with online stores.

GLENN GIVEN: I turned it down.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: As a result, they're realizing that they're strength is that they have a physical presence. So their idea is that if they're going to charge more for board games that you can get online, they need to add value to that.

GLENN GIVEN: They'll probably do stuff like the Knight Moves Cafe, where they're taking that. So the interesting thing about this-- well, one of the interesting things about this is comic books, right? So comic books, in the '90s were huge, and then they went through this bust, and the people who owned comic book stores started to see the margins on their products get shorter and shorter and shorter and less and less and less people buying comics. So it's a really dire situation.

And in the past 10 years, it's become really easy to pirate comics online, but more so than that, there are apps for your phone or your iPad like comiXology or the Marvel app that actually do a really, really good job of presenting comics to you. My wife wouldn't read comics at all before just because sometimes people who don't really know how to do layout end up doing layout for comics.

And so literally, it can be confusing to read just because they don't have artistic mastery of how to make someone's eye flow across the page. One of the things that comiXology app does is that you can just zoom in panel to panel to panel to panel to panel, and it's a surprising shift in the way you can read it.

Anyway, the important thing is that comic stores were getting a lot less money, and so what they did is they took all their floor space and started to dive heavier into the parts of their business that were generating the money, which was board games and hobby games. And the ones that survived-- because a lot of them have gone out of business. The ones that survived tend to be really, really good. And the reason that they're really, really good is because they realized that they're not in the business of selling you comics. They're in the business of creating a community.

I drive an hour to my comic store because I'm an idiot. I could just be buying them online. I drive an hour to my comic store because they have their good operators creating a good community for people to come together and talk about different projects. They're always running events. It's barely a store. It's like a little mini convention that's always slightly happening.

And so a large part of that is realizing we can get people in this store for a longer period of time if we're all playing games together, if we're running card game tournaments and board game tournaments.

MACKENZIE The interesting part is how do we as designers take that? What's their role to us? And I mean,

CAMERON: before it was definitely, you could your game picked up by distributors or to a publisher and a publisher gets picked up by his distributor. And all of a sudden, you're not selling to a direct audience online. You're selling to hundreds of thousands of little mom and pop stores across the nation, the numbers are huge. But now--

GLENN GIVEN: You can still wind up making a lot less.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: True. Because your margins are going to be--

GLENN GIVEN: Because your margins are worse.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: But the part of the thing you can do now is that board games can really help with the promotion of your game. I know Eureka! Puzzles, Knight Moves are huge online. If you've got a game that you want to show people that you come and teach it to a bunch of people at their store, they're happy to do that because on the one hand, you're adding value to their store which they love and need.

So people will, like oh, your new puzzle. They had one guy come in and that was really cool. I learned how he made this game. But then you're getting value out that, and now people know about your game. And then when a store buys games from you, you still get maybe not necessarily the margins you need, but--

GLENN GIVEN: They're still a lot better. So normally in traditional publishing, if I was going to put out a board game 20 years ago, 15 years ago, I would have to find a distributor like Alliance or Diamond or something, and then I would sell my game to them for 20% of the MSRP, which is the manufacturer's suggested retail price.

So if I had a game that was $25, I would sell it to the distributor for $5, and then he would turn around and sell it to a store for somewhere in between that $5 and half the MSRP, and that's his cut. And in between, there's all these other people who are taking their cut and taking their cut and taking their cut.

And the reason I've made jokes about the music industry model from the '90s is because it's the same fucking model. It's The same thing. There are people who are creating stuff, but because there is no really awesome way for them to get it directly to the people who care about it, they have to go through all these weird side projects, side industries or middleman

industries.

Only a few people who are tapped by very, very powerful companies got to be famous in the '90s. And then the internet came and destroyed all music, even though music is making more than it ever has and all these other things. But what was rediscovered in that shift, and this is something that's happening in board games right now, is that people want the direct audience to create a connection.

If you could spend $20 on a CD because they used to be $20 or $20 on a ticket to go see a show, of a band that you enjoy, even though you don't get to keep that show forever, come on, it's so much more enjoyable. Because you could get that CD in a million different ways from a million different locations. It's really easy, but you're getting an experience with the other thing.

And you're getting to know that you're directly supporting the creator, which is something that a lot of audience members are really invested in. And as someone who is a creator, I'm very invested in that. But also it's financially beneficial.

So for me, for instance, I can make a short-run print product for $3 and sell it for $20 and then cook the mailing price into that and get some-- I've actually made a reasonably good profit on it. But if I make it for $3 and want to sell for $20, I end up having to sell it to a distributor still for like $4 or $5.

And then in order for it to be worth my time, I really need to make a whole lot of them. And the distributors probably only want it if I can make a whole lot of them. So now I've got find a way to make 1,000 of this thing, which, in board games, is a ridiculous number of game to have. Unbelievably large number. But unfortunately, you can't get it affordable unless it's above that number.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Right. And that's the front end of financing too. But if you think about Bell Publishing and stuff, OK, to make it, I'll need 1,000 copies. And you'll be able to get a decent budget and figure out how to use it. All right. That's fine.

But then when you do things like, OK, I'm just going to keep these in my house until I sell them all, you don't realize how much space 1,000 board games takes up until you see it.

GLENN GIVEN: Oh, actually, I have a video because I have 2,500 in my garage right now. And it takes up exactly a car's worth.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: You have $2,500?

GLENN GIVEN: 2,500 copies-- 25,000.

[LAUGHTER]

MACKENZIE CAMERON: It's a card game?

GLENN GIVEN: It's a card game. It is this card game. And I've got 2,500 of them in my garage and then some more of them down at the port [INAUDIBLE].

MACKENZIE CAMERON: We should bring up-- I don't think you ever said it. There is some benefit to going through traditional publishing.

GLENN GIVEN: It's right for some people. It's not right for--

MACKENZIE CAMERON: And the reason I would suggest that is if you get a really good game idea and you pitch it to a publisher and they really like it, there's so much more to that than just being like take this game. You love your game. Well, take it.

GLENN GIVEN: And here's money. Forever.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: If you create an idea and you sell it to a publisher, you're done.

GLENN GIVEN: And it's not your idea anymore.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: And it's not your idea anymore. But all of a sudden, with self-publishing, I mean, the amount of effort to make a game fly is huge. It's massive, especially if you're doing it on your own. But if you sell it to a publisher, you're not going to make as much money, but there comes a point where you're not doing anything and you're still getting paid it.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. 100% of a small number or 5% of a big number.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Yeah.

GLENN GIVEN: And it's a question of what are you in it for? And what does your time look like? For me, I make games and I chose to leave a life that was not making me happy but was making me lots of money for a life that is making me significantly less money but is making me really happy, because I get to create things and they're fun.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: You seem like a really happy person.

GLENN GIVEN: It's the medication. Also, I don't work in an office so well. So it fulfills that artistic or productive drive. And that's not something to be ignored. Total up. [INAUDIBLE].

MACKENZIE CAMERON: The major point is that it is you want to make your career making games, do yourself and you're really big. If you want to put a few games out there and do a lot of other things with your life, like once a month sending out all of your games to every publisher you've got email for, you don't have to make it your life.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. It's like if you were going to start a band, is the band your life, or is it what you do for fun with some of your friends? Neither is an illegitimate way of doing it. They're just right for different people.

PROFESSOR: We have more than five minutes. So one question.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Really? We've have time for two hours?

GLENN GIVEN: I can do that.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]. Self publishing is undertaking that [INAUDIBLE]. Learning curve, so to speak. And you guys have your fingers on the pulse of the community, and you know what uP and coming designers have and the skill sets. Have you considered publishing other people's games?

GLENN GIVEN: I have considered it, and I've been approached to do it, but I've said no to it. Because I worked in publishing for a long time, and I am ideologically opposed to that model. That being said, one of the things that I do I do this on a consulting basis and I also do this just through our website and the fact that all games are Creative Commons licensed and the whole process-- Frank, can you turn that down? --is teach people how to do it. Because it is an undertaking but it's nowhere near as hard as you would think.

The kind of effort you would put into studying for a class is the kind of effort you need to put into figure out how to deal with Amazon fulfillment services, or what does it take to, oh, god, figuring out shipping.

If you ever start at Kickstarter for anything, figure out the damn shipping. That will kill you. I had a friend of mine who made this really cool game called Mobile Frame Zero, Rapid Attack, which is a robot fighting game where you make LEGO robots.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Oh, yeah. It's on [INAUDIBLE].

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. So they're doing-- and some of it's new on this weekend, which is like a rockets in space or something. Anyway, he raised $85,000 on Kickstarter to publish what was just a book and mail it to people. But because he had not-- and he's a smart person-- because he had not figured out the shipping costs, he ended up $25,000 in the hole. Yeah, because you didn't go to the United States Postal Service and go, what are your rates?

MACKENZIE CAMERON: So $85,000 and it cost him roughly $100,000 just to make it.

GLENN GIVEN: So that is what a publisher does for you. They figure don't even frigging worry about it. We're take 90% of whatever this game makes, 95% of whatever this game makes, but you don't have to worry about any of that crap.

And so for some people that's really--

MACKENZIE CAMERON: What you're actually finding a lot is that there's tons of small publishers and these are actually starting-- I mean, Game Salute is one, Mayday Game, I don't like that one as much. Anyway, Mayday, they do--

GLENN GIVEN: Like my neighbor.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: [INAUDIBLE], which you might have seen on TV Cops.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah, that's Dave Chalker.

MACKENZIE Yeah.

CAMERON:

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah, he's a really good guy.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: But lots of small companies that-- it was a designer. He had one games. He's like I'm going to do it myself and try and make this work. [INAUDIBLE] was another one. There's a lot of these little--

GLENN GIVEN: [INAUDIBLE] Games just started like that. Now they have whole conventions [INAUDIBLE].

MACKENZIE CAMERON: They start with an idea, they do it themselves, and hey, it works out. And then from there, they realize, hey, we should do a lot more of these because that was successful, and if we're successfuyl at it, we can make it work. And after the one designer takes and build the company. It becomes three or four people, and it becomes mildly successful, and they push out all the games that they've felt they can. I made all the games that I want to setting out.

GLENN GIVEN: Or they've used all their hours in the day and they just can't do it anymore.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Well then once that happens, a lot of publishers will then start to look for other designers and publish their games. Because you're designing your games, you've got your A idea, your B idea, and your C idea. these are all great. And once you publish all of those, you start to realize maybe those other ideas that you have are good, but maybe you'd be more successful if you could pick out some other ideas that other people submitted to you. Really, that's actually better than what I would do myself.

GLENN GIVEN: Or maybe a lot of times what will happen is as a designer you do have a lot of ideas and if you're a smart [INAUDIBLE], you realize that most of them are probably not good. But that's fine. That's absolutely fine. Nothing springs forth from someone's head like Athena perfectly formed. That is not how things are made.

All of your favorite musicians practiced forever to get really good. It's just the way it is. In game design, it's the same thing. You have to make a lot of really crap. There's a really good phrase about writing which is that every writer has 2,000 bad pages in them, and the good writers are the ones who got the 2,000 out somewhere else. So you've got to keep that in mind.

But I think that the ability to find publishers is not diminishing, but the ability to self-publish is rising, especially, although we have great self-publishing tools now and the internet is really good for sharing things, the biggest thing that's happened in the past year and going into this

year is 3D printing.

So while we've hit the head into what self-publishing is, we're just beginning to see what desktop manufacturing is, like people who are just running their own little factories in their houses, which is super cool.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Actually doing that for my game.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. That's so cool. I really want to do that so much.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I think we have time for a question.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]?

GLENN GIVEN: It depends on the scale.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]?

GLENN GIVEN: Yes. This was printed in China. Like I said, just got off the boat. So I worked with a printer on this because I've been doing printing and publishing for so long, I know the jargon and know the lingo.

Again, another thing that a publisher can be really good for is that you don't need to study to figure out all of the things. They have made all those mistakes in the past for you.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: You don't need to screw up your bleed lines, your print cards and all of the-- they're all offset.

GLENN GIVEN: If you've got the expertise or you can organize the expertise amongst the people you know, you can get past a lot of it. But think about it, everyone who's printing stuff or making things, they want you to use their services. Because they are a service industry, they're going to make it as easy as possible.

And if they don't make it easy, there's someone like four blocks down that is probably going to do it because yay, capitalism. There is, I think, god, one [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] like buy a printer?

GLENN GIVEN: No, it is. It's actually a huge expense to buy a printer. The problem with printers is that they're super expensive to have and not use.

AUDIENCE: It's better to have a team run it.

GLENN GIVEN: Oh, yeah. You want that machine running losing money because you'll lose less money than if it wasn't running at all.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: There are a decent number of American manufacturers, certainly for prototype-level materials.

GLENN GIVEN: And in Massachusetts, like [INAUDIBLE] of Massachusetts.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Specifically, Massachusetts, there's a lot of stuff. I would say from what effort, nothing will beat China in terms of cost.

GLENN GIVEN: It depends on the exact scope of your project and the number of units that you're doing. So if you're doing a few units of a very complicated thing, you could actually probably get good prices in America. If you're doing a lot of units of something relatively simple, you're right. You can't beat it.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Right. And then oftentimes, some people will do piece mail so they'll get some printers for some things like the boxes, the rule books. And you can pull that together, and that can be a nightmare.

GLENN GIVEN: It can be. But there are specifically services that you can hire. They're called pick and pack warehouses where let's say I had a board game and it had components coming from the four corners of the earth. I could get them all shipped to one place and then pay a person a quarter per unit to pack it all together and whatever.

And if I filled out my spreadsheet correctly, I will realize whether that is a financially viable thing or not. So one of the things that I like about self-manufacturing is that I can figure that stuff out as I'm doing it. So for instance, on early prototypes of Slash, I was printing all the cards and cutting all the cards and killing myself because it's a lot of cards to cut.

And so it digs back into the design. Well, if I change the size of the card, I can use this machine to cut it, and it's going to save me a half hour on every single unit.

MACKENZIE And that's a whole other thing is design around like--

CAMERON:

GLENN GIVEN: Your typical capabilities.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Which you'll actually see the rise of super small games.

GLENN GIVEN: Micro games. Because they take a lot less to make.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Yeah. The biggest game you can create using 10 wooden chips and miniature dice and fit into a package about this big.

GLENN GIVEN: So there's that threshold. So one of the things I have with this is that when you do printing, you usually have one big, let's say for cards, one big piece of paper with a bunch of different cards on it then you cut it all out.

Now, if I'm making 24 copies of the game, it just so happens that I can fit 24 cards on one sheet of paper, which means instead of printing card A, B, C, D, E F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, whatever on that one page and then cutting it out and then sorting it, I can print A 24 times and then do that 400 times in a row, stack them all together, chop it, chop it, chop it, chop it, chop it, chop it, chop it, chop it, chop it, and I don't have to sort me thing anymore.

I have cut hours off of that pick and pack time. And now multiply by the number that I just got out of it. Instead of making one game every half hour, I'm making 12 games every 15 minutes or something.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: I just want to go back again to the China versus the States as well as I'm finding a lot of kickstarters. Realize that the margins they need for small amounts, they have to go to China if they're going to break even.

But if they exceed goals or go much and they can do larger quantities produced in the States, then they use the same margins. So a lot of people will, if they can get a game big enough, will try and have a stretch goal, bring games to the United States if they can sell enough of them.

GLENN GIVEN: This is a challenge that is unique to analog games, obviously. You don't need to worry about where you're getting your cards cut, I guess unless you're making some kind of Pokemon AR game. That would be super cool.

How do they have that? They've got to have that, right? Do they actually interact with each

other? They should. Because last year they did a kickstarter for Goal Marcana, which is like an app and a miniatures war games where your dude has a QR code on it, and then it uses the app to do all the combat.

AUDIENCE: There's a [INAUDIBLE] tradition of Japanese arcade games that reads cards probability.

GLENN GIVEN: Oh, god. I remember that.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Mario Kart of our games, I've got one. That's great.

PROFESSOR: [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]?

PROFESSOR: Yeah. [INAUDIBLE]. We're going to play until. Thanks for coming. One second. Thanks again for everybody. So we're going to spend the last two hours of class. Well, first we're going to have to take a break, check in with y'all.

Did you do that already with games? We'll check in with y'all to see how you've formed into teams yet for that project. And then we're going to be playing-- do you have a couple of your games?

GLENN GIVEN: I brought I think eight different games that I've made.

PROFESSOR: Well, great. So we're going to play some of those games, and we're all going to play, we've got three games that are related to the assignment that we've talked about.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Also if anyone is interested, I'm going to go ahead and leave some of business cards up here. As I go through the process of making my game through Kickstarter, I'm basically going to be posting my experiences every step of the way from design to manufacturer.

So if you want to watch someone struggle immensely through the process and watch the mistakes that I've made and laugh immensely. It's going to be hilarious. Just grab a business card. If you're interested in playing Croquet and also murdering each other, this is definitely the game for that.

GLENN GIVEN: And so just to show you guys, these are the three phases of prototypes. Well, these are the two phases of prototypes that I went through.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: They each have VHS cassettes.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. And so here's the trick. The reason that it's in a VHS cassette is because this will fit into the smallest flat rate priority mailer.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Oh, really?

GLENN GIVEN: I can get any game that fits in this size anywhere in America for $5 in two days. And you can't beat that. And so if I wanted to get a lot of these games out and not get a second mortgage on my house because I'm not an idiot, I designed that. So I actually do that with all of my monthly games.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: And the cases are probably--

GLENN GIVEN: The case are dirt cheap. They're like $0.08 each.

MACKENZIE CAMERON: Yeah, because nobody uses them anymore.

GLENN GIVEN: Yeah. No one needs it. So I found a place that is still selling them. So supply chain stuff.

AUDIENCE: So [INAUDIBLE]

GLENN GIVEN: No, I did not. I don't know Maybe I did. My artist is supposed to be getting it to me today.

PROFESSOR: Thanks for coming, guys. What are you guys doing?

GLENN GIVEN: Oh, thanks. That was great.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]