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The No Hit Wonder:

11 years and still going. How?

Jake Birkett (@greyalien)



GREY ALIEN GAMES



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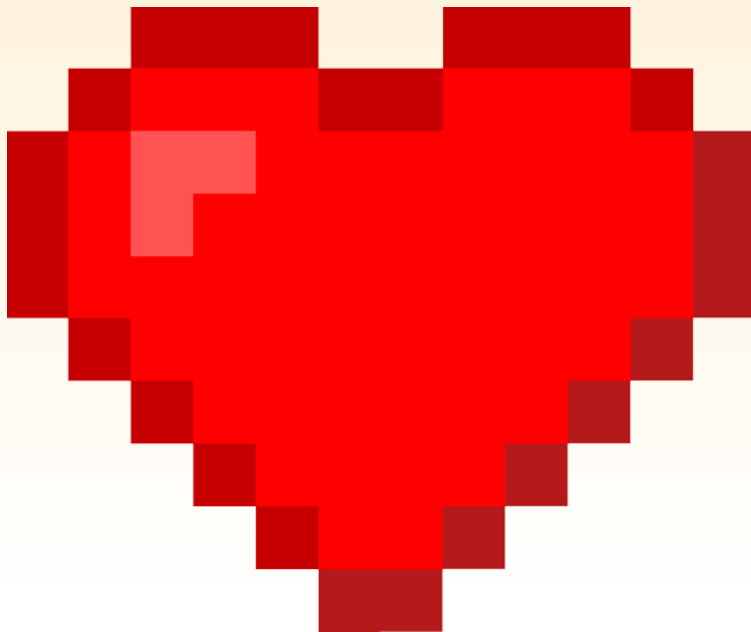




**You're not special,
nor is your game,
and you'll never ship a hit.**



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I'm a no hit wonder...

- Still here after 11 years.
- Shipped 10+ games. All made a profit.
- I've collected a *lot* of data.
- I own a cat

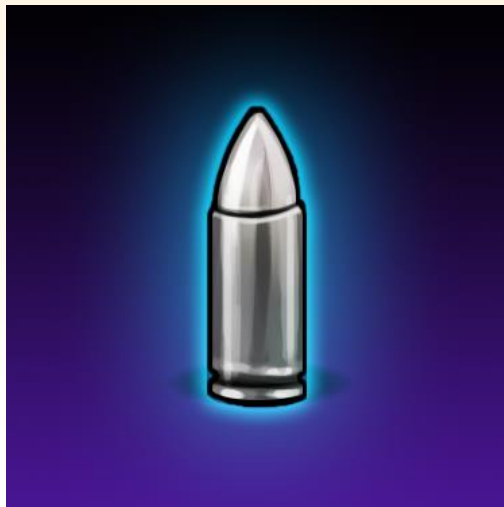


I believe that...

- You should focus on your own games.
- The long tail is vital to success.
- Adaptability and determination are key.



"Nobody knows anything" –Jeff Vogel





Magic Formula for Game Dev Success



= Make a good game
+ PR
+ contacts
+ *magic*



How do you define success?





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The Indie Dream vs Reality



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Indiepocalypse



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Indiepocalypse **PROBABLY**



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My Origin Story





The best computers evAR!!!1!

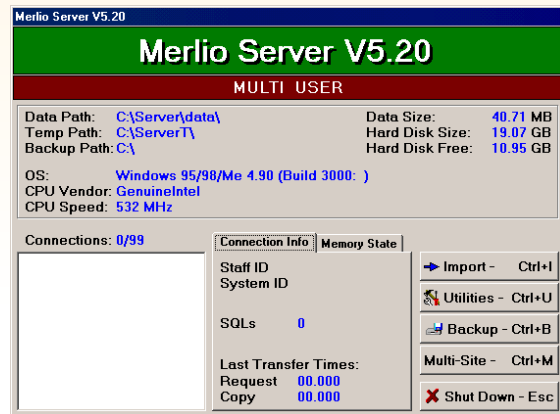




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IRON FIST





Why did I abandon Iron Fist?

- It was going to take too long.
- There was no market for it.

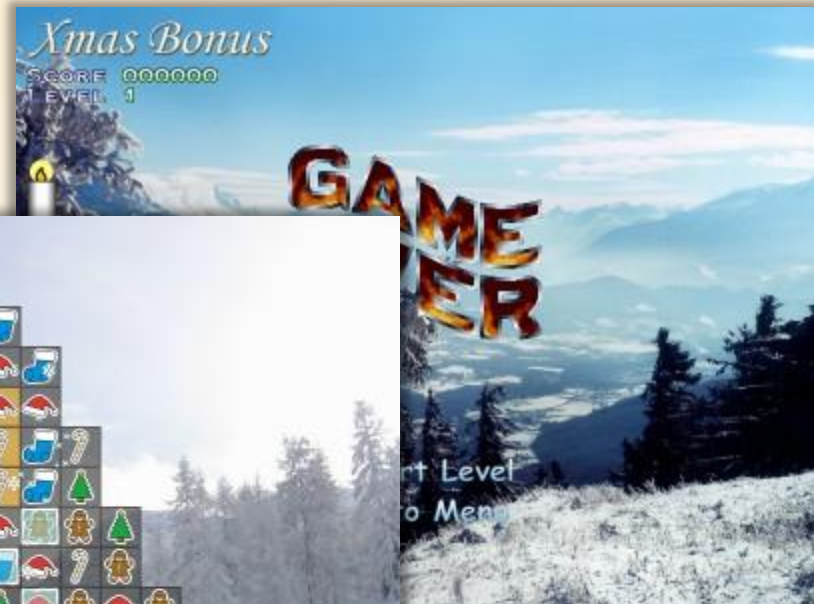
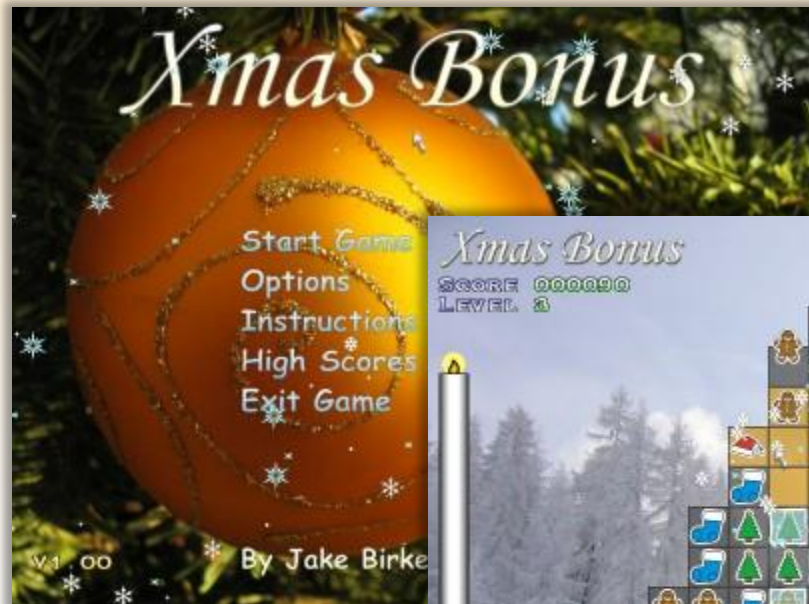


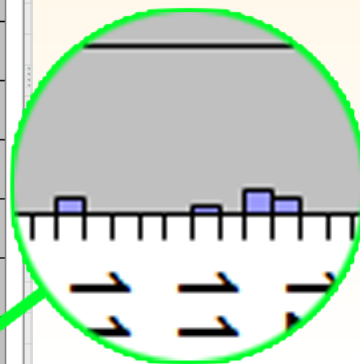
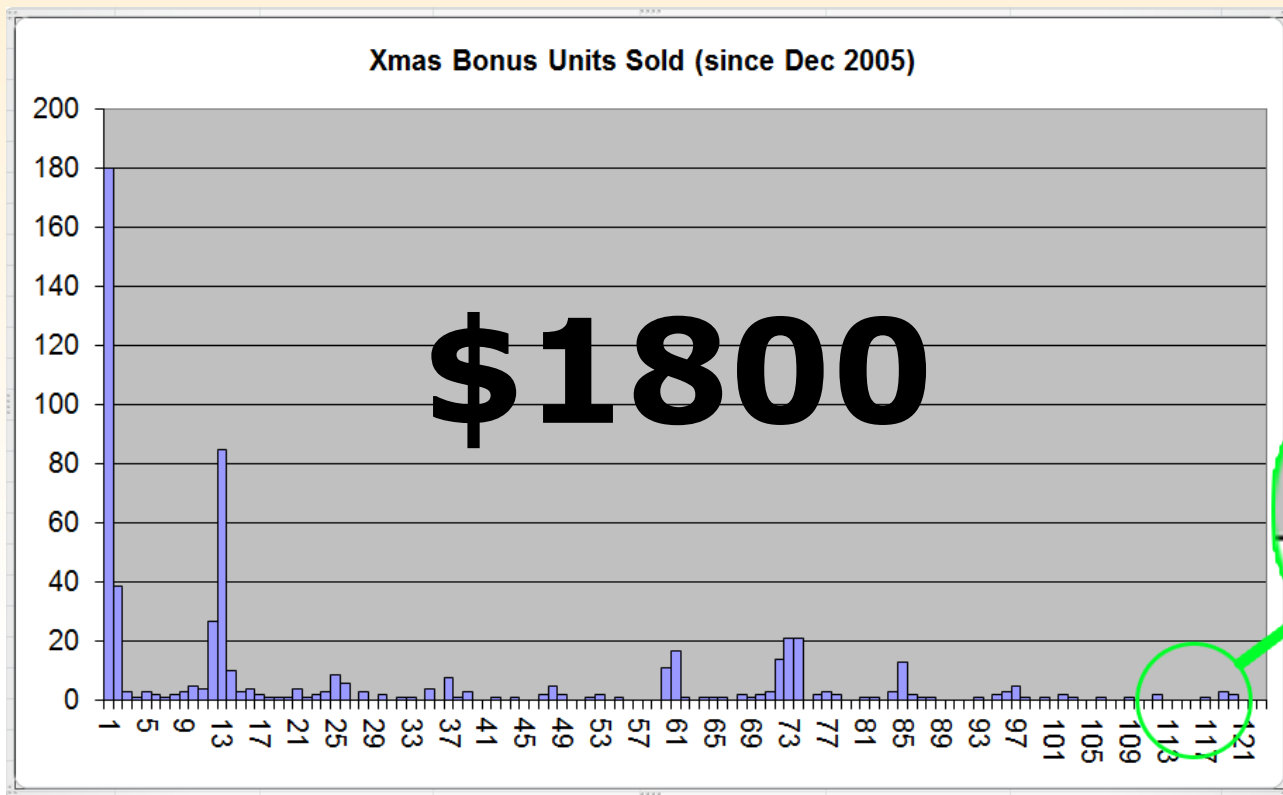
Start small



Bejeweled





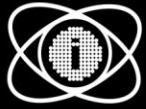


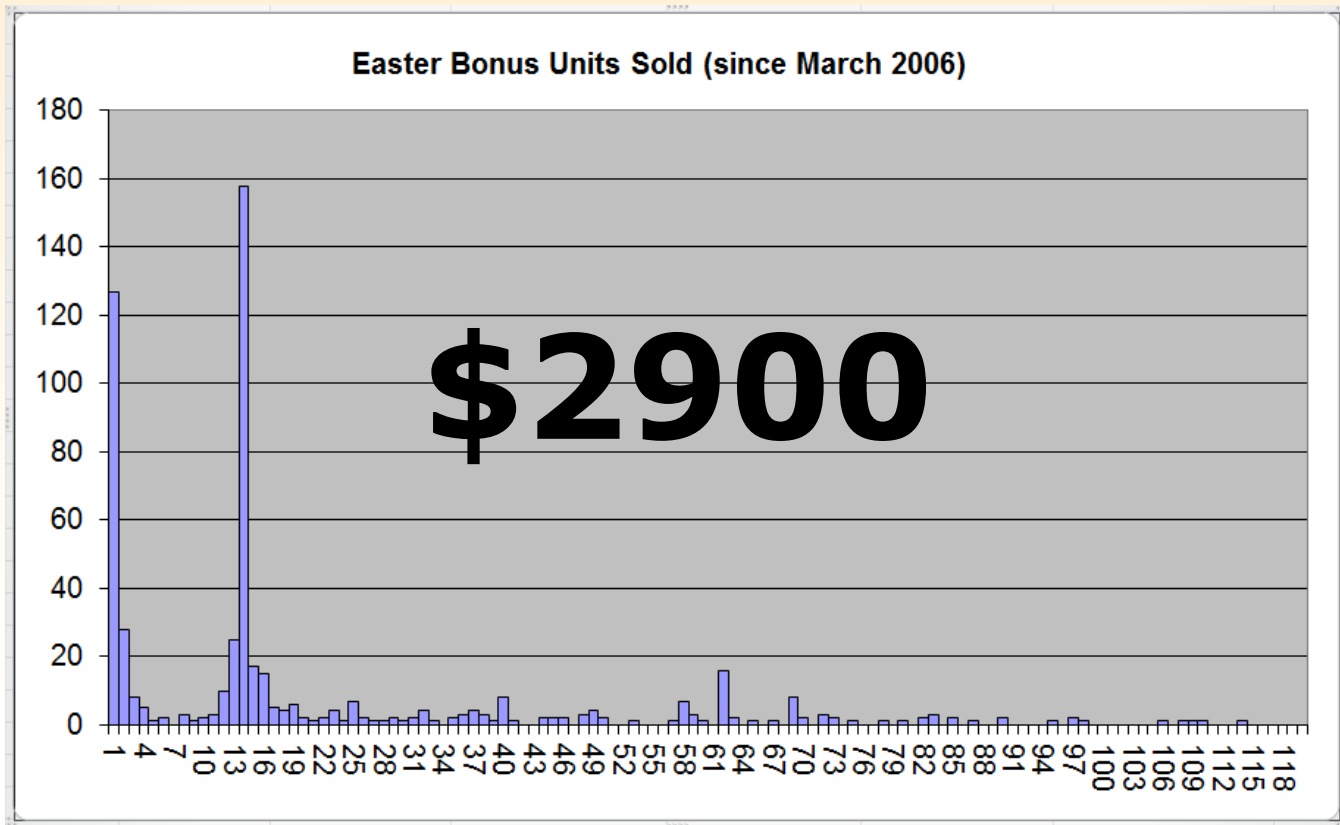


- Sold **591** units to date
- Cost **\$170** to make
- Took approx. **250** hours
- **\$6.50** per hour (woooo!)



- Sold 500 units to date
- Cost \$17 to make
- Took approx. 50 hours
- \$6.50 per hour (1000!)







- **558** units
- Cost **\$588**
- **185** hours work
- **\$12.75** per hour



- # FALL
- \$58 per hour
 - Cost \$58
 - 105 hours work
 - \$12.75 per hour



Financial Juggling



- IT consultancy + science writing
- Loans + 0% credit cards
- Low income tax credits
- Lived frugally



Start with a runway or...



Ready Fire Aim





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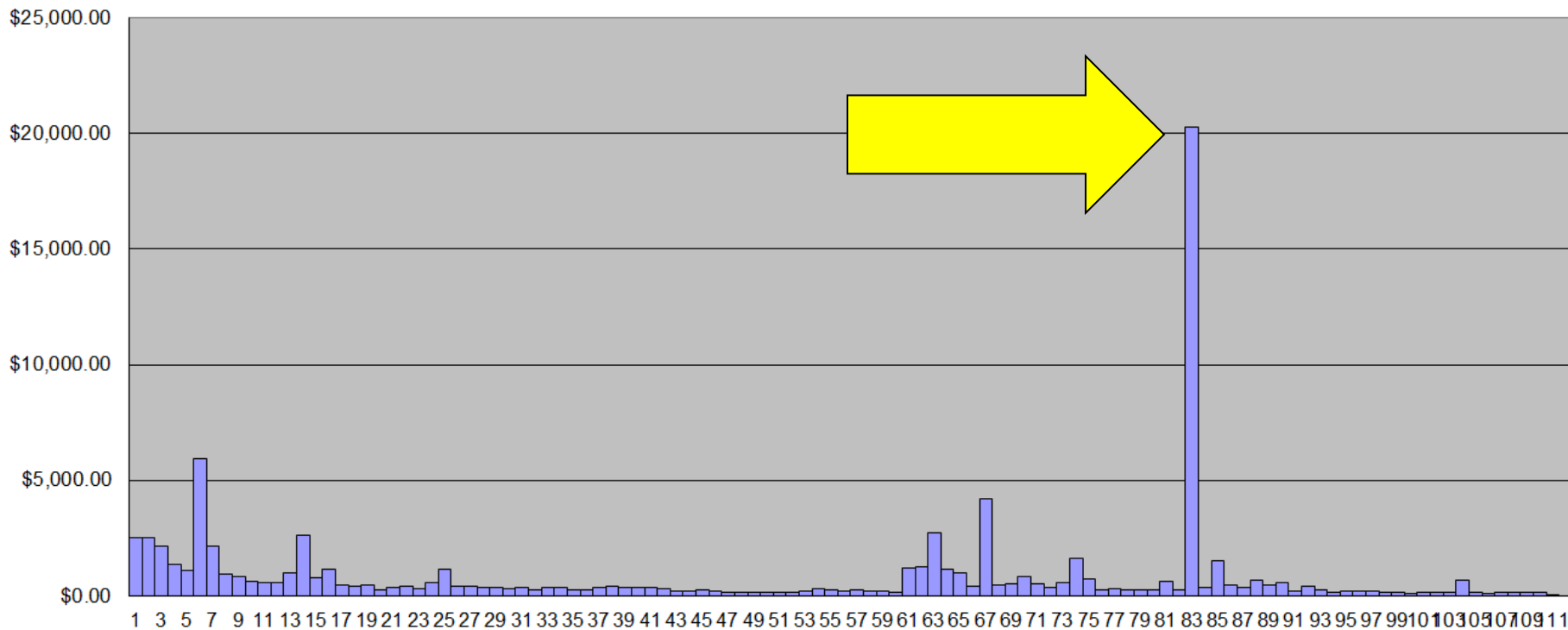
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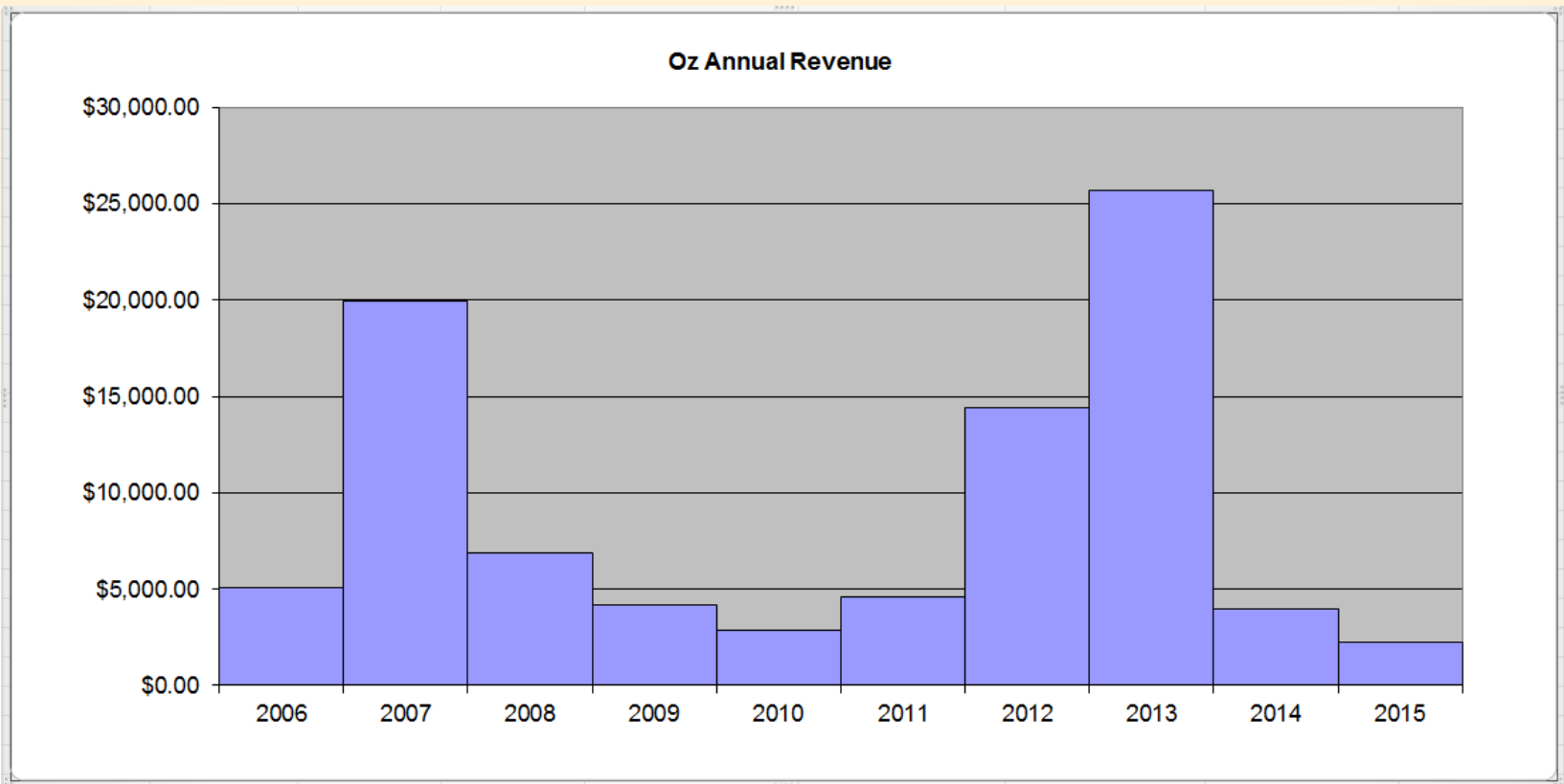


Spend money on art and audio



Oz Revenue







- **\$90,000** net revenue
- **26,940** units
- Cost me **\$0** to make
- **387** hours work
- **\$100** per hour



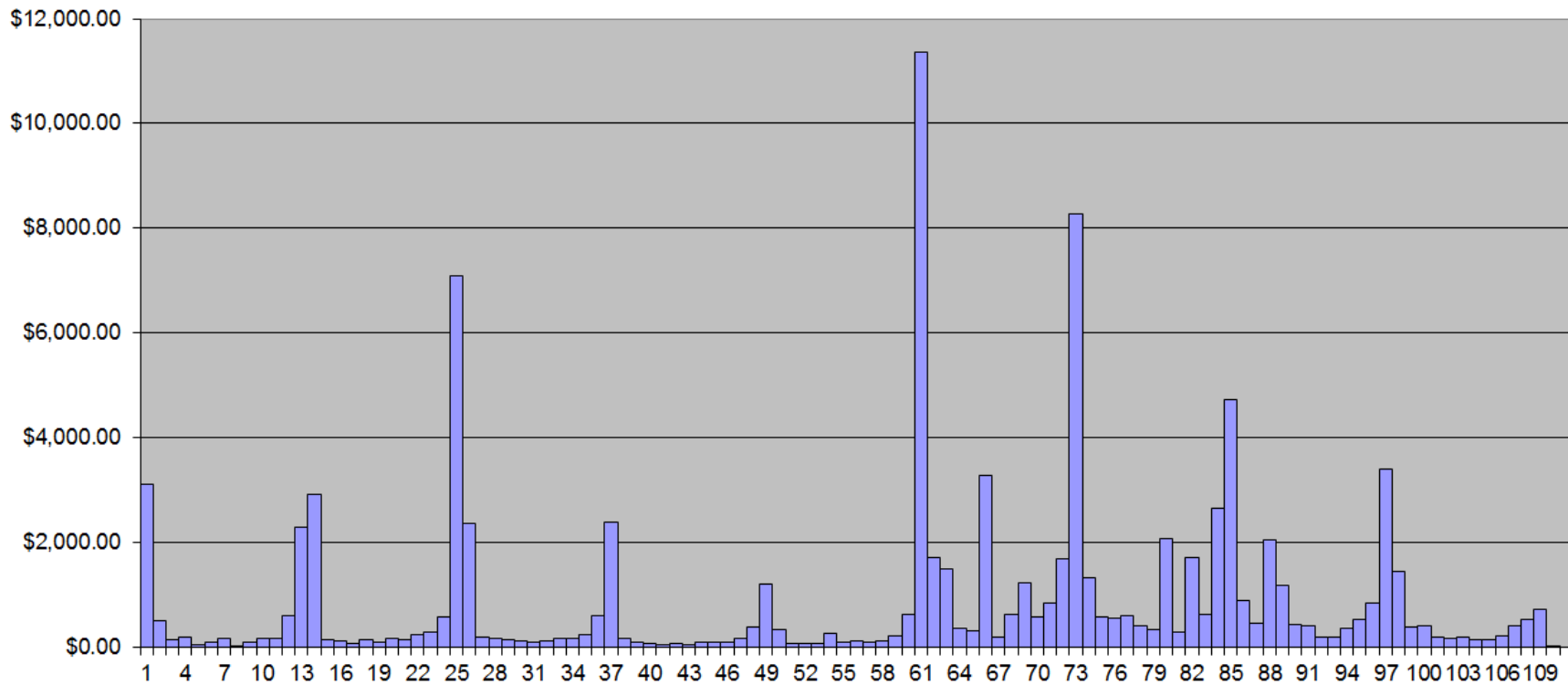
SUCCESS

- **\$90,000** net revenue
- **16,940** units
- Cost me **\$0** to make
- **387** hours work
- **\$100** per hour



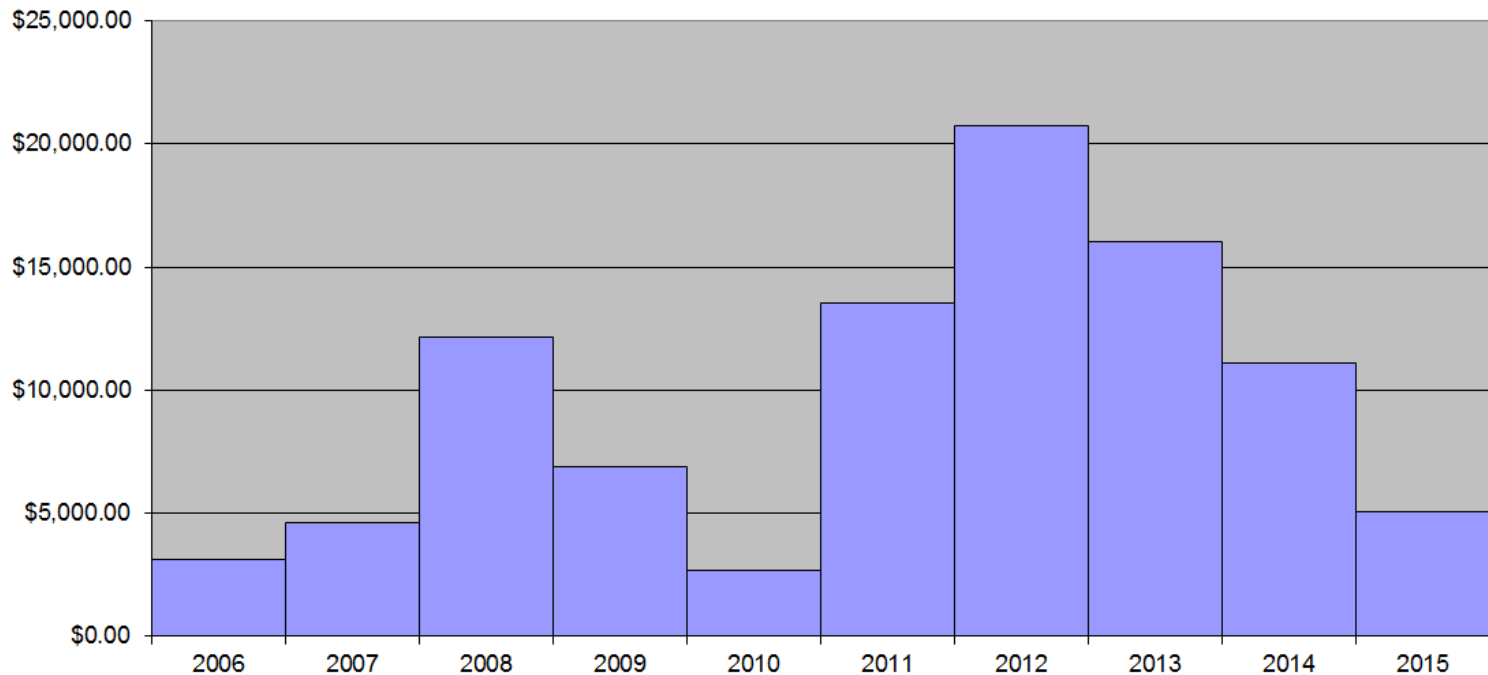


Holiday Bonus Revenue (Since Dec 2006)





Holiday Bonus Annual Revenue





- Re-promote every year
- New Portals
- Localisation
- GOLD version

GOLD



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Keep your game alive



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- **\$96,000** net revenue
- **28,655** units
- Cost **\$2000** = **48x ROI**
- **464** hours work
- **\$200** per hour



- **\$96,000** net revenue
- **28,635** units
- Cost **\$1,000** - **48x ROI**
- **464** hours work
- **\$200** per hour



1

- **1,056** units sold
- **\$5,455** net revenue
- Only **6%** of total!

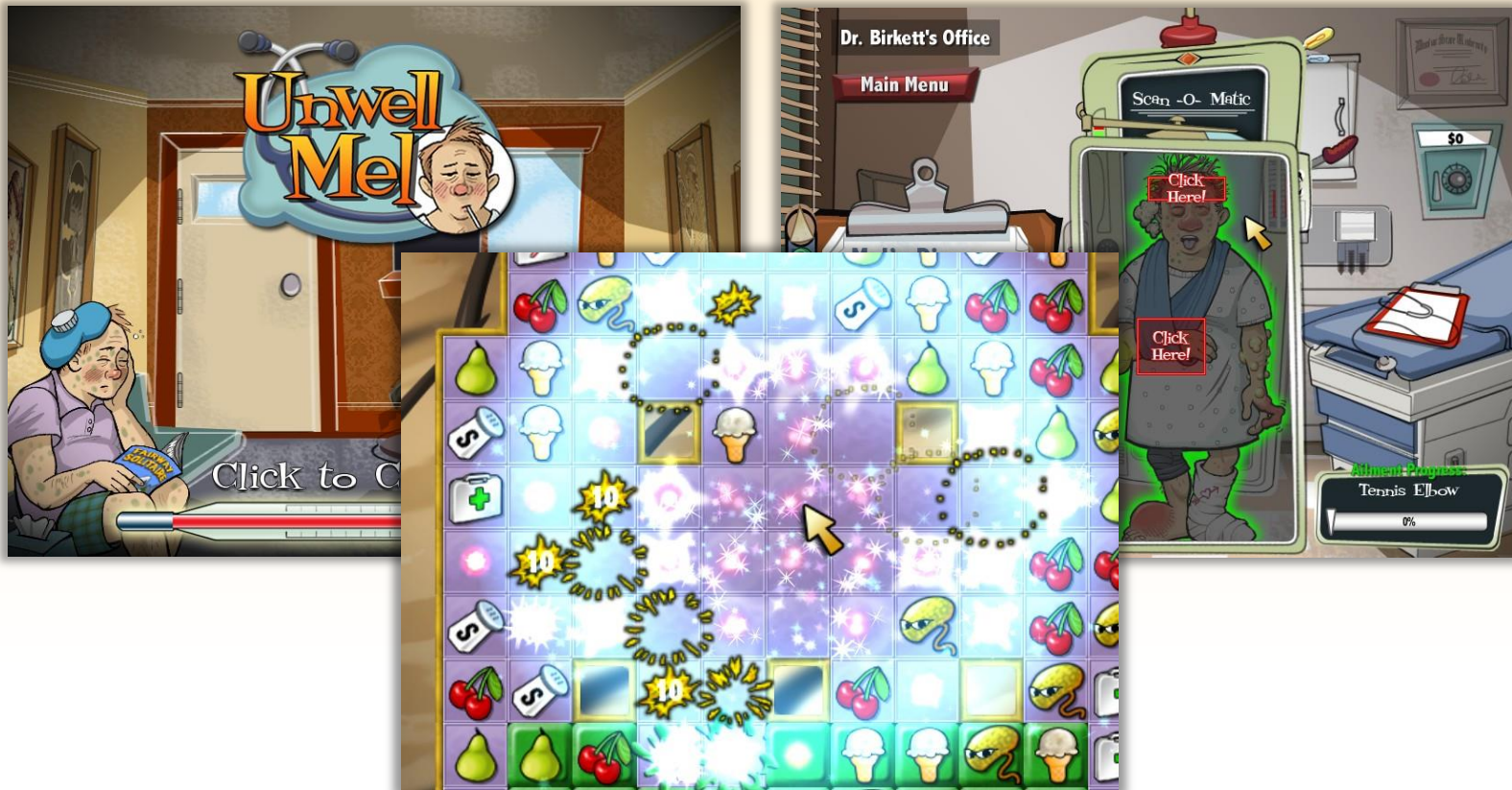


Think “long tail”





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**Only choose cool
contract work**



Vancouver





Say “Yes” to opportunities



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Learn to say “No”



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Full
Indie



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Make friends



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Help people out

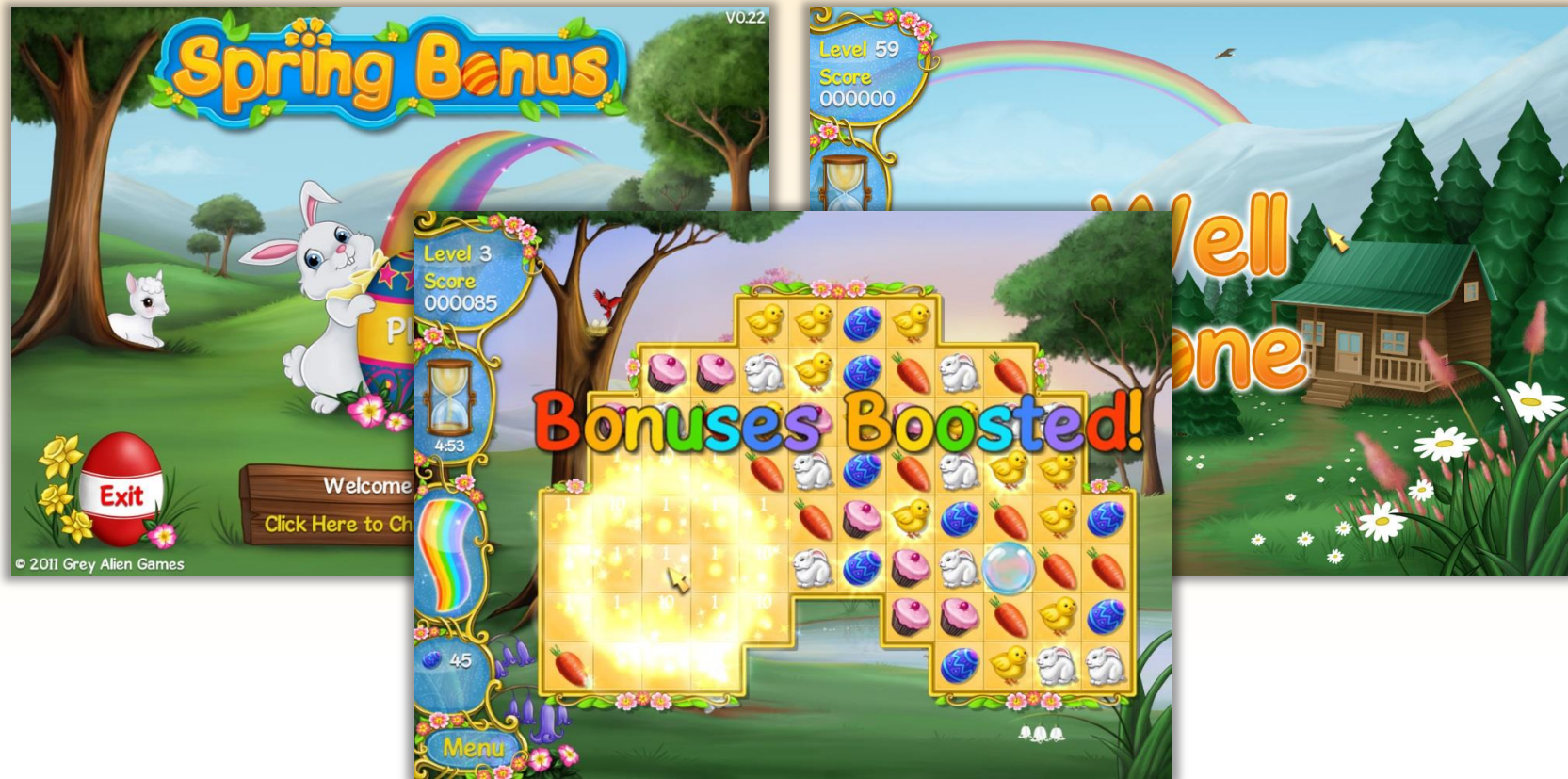


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So long, and thanks for all the (big) fish





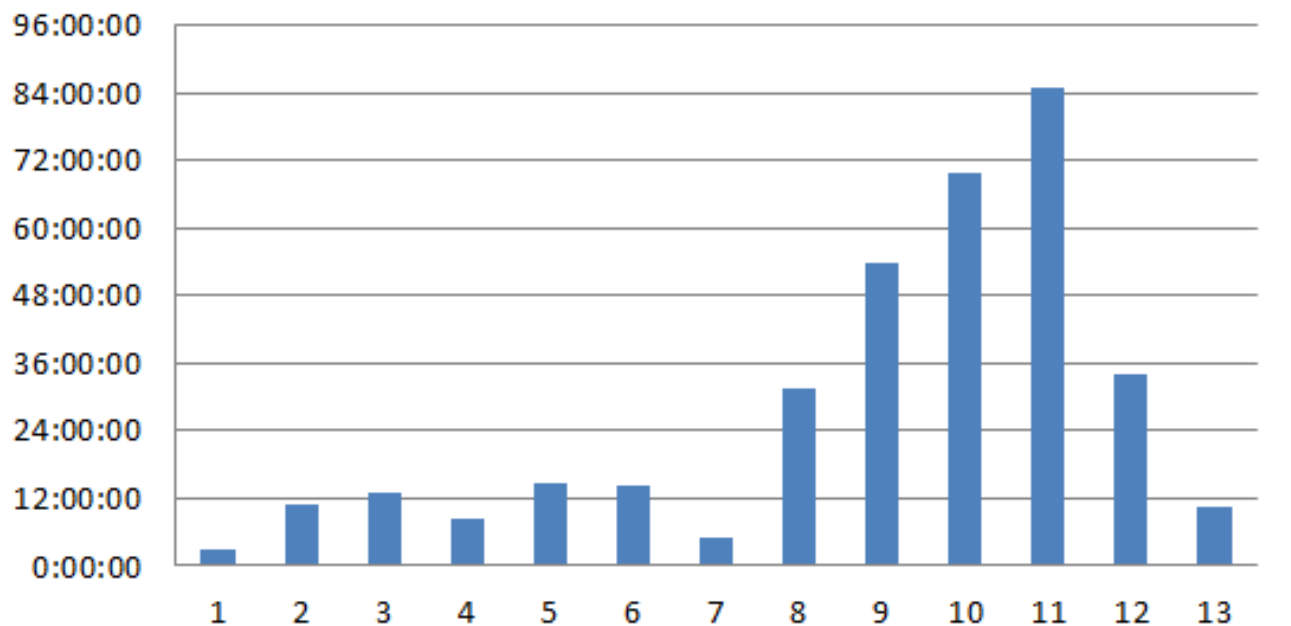


- Used social media to recruit artists
- Crowd-sourced localisation
- Used metrics and testers





Weekly hours worked

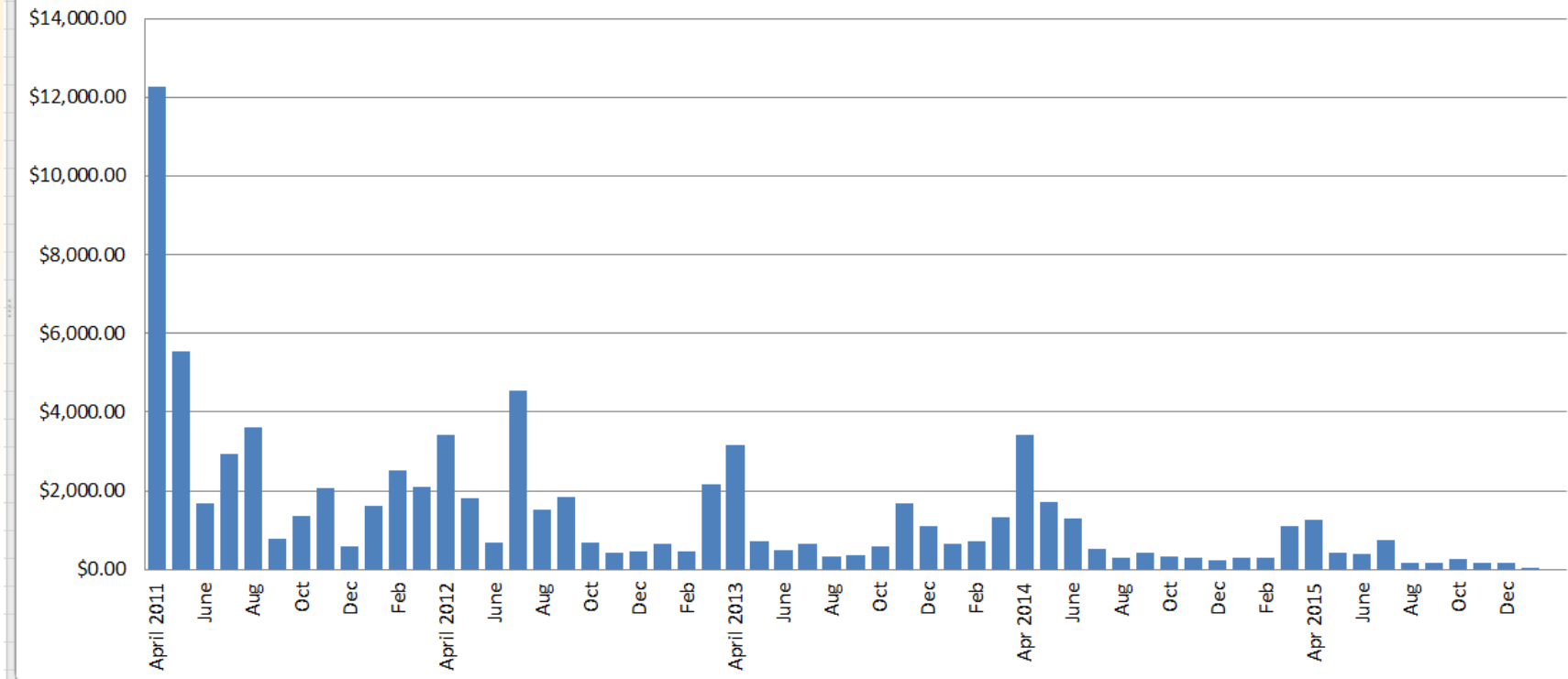




Avoid unhealthy deadlines



Spring Bonus Revenue (Since April 2011)





- **\$81,000** net revenue
- **24,891** units
- Cost **\$2200 + %**
- **500** hours work
- **\$130** per hour



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Mobile is sh*t



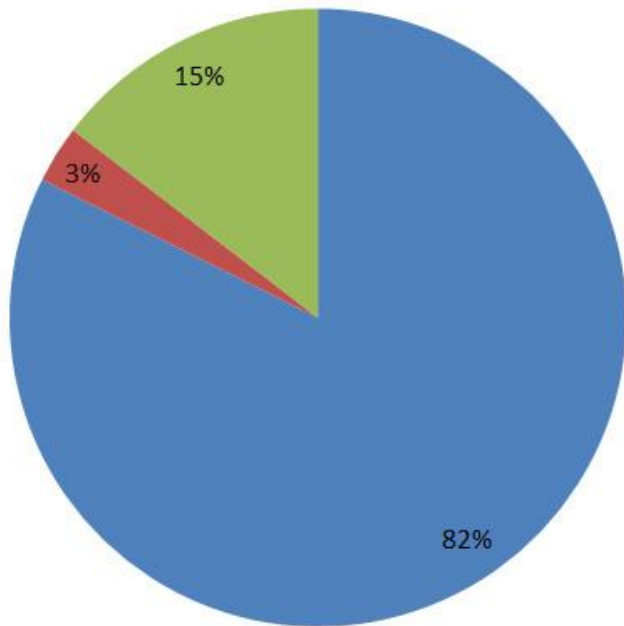
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Spring Bonus Revenue

■ PC ■ Mac ■ Mobile





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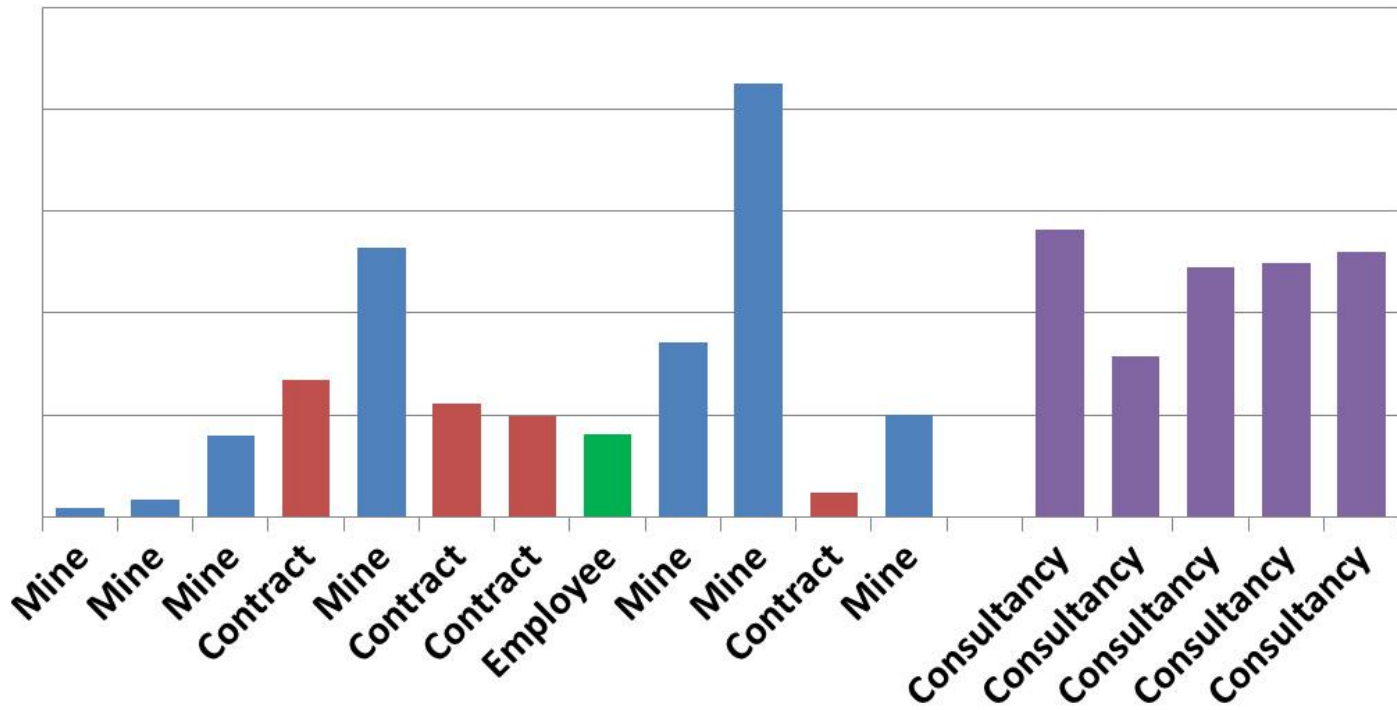


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Earnings per hour





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Make your own games



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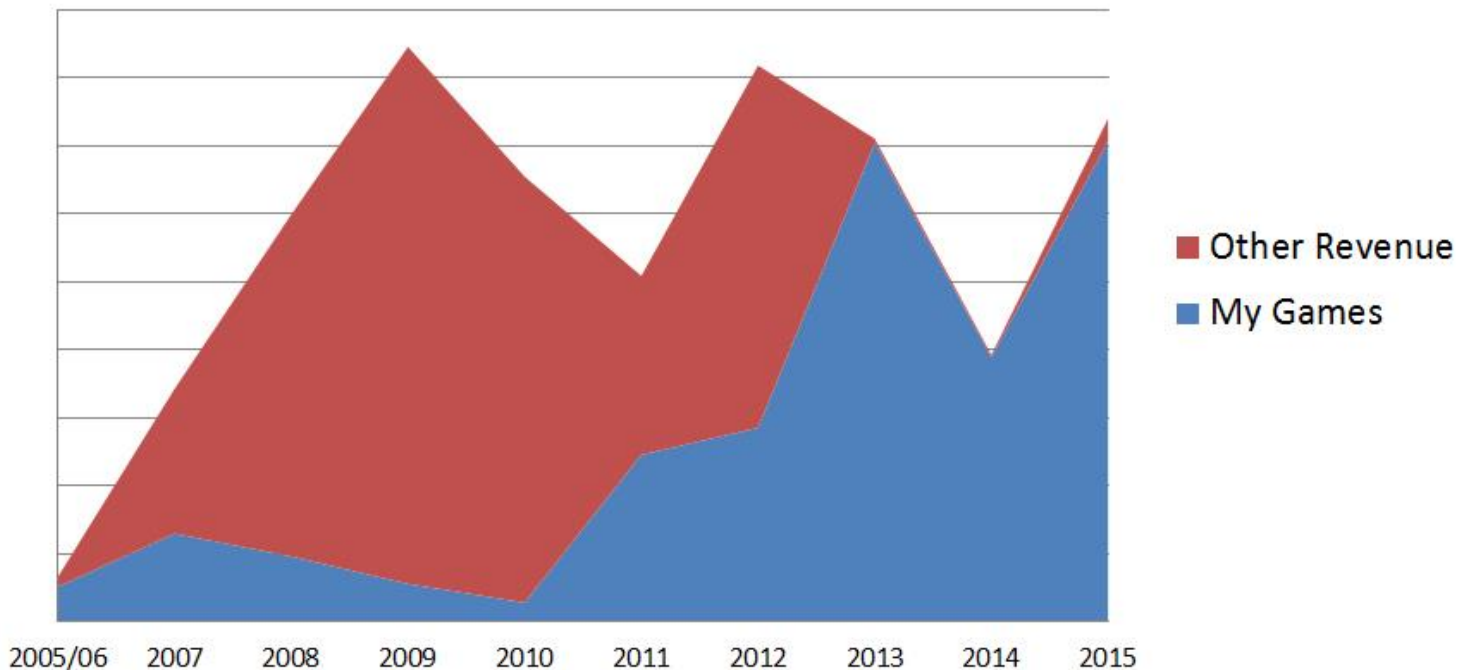


Annual Revenue Breakdown





Combined Income from Game Dev





Eggs in Many Baskets



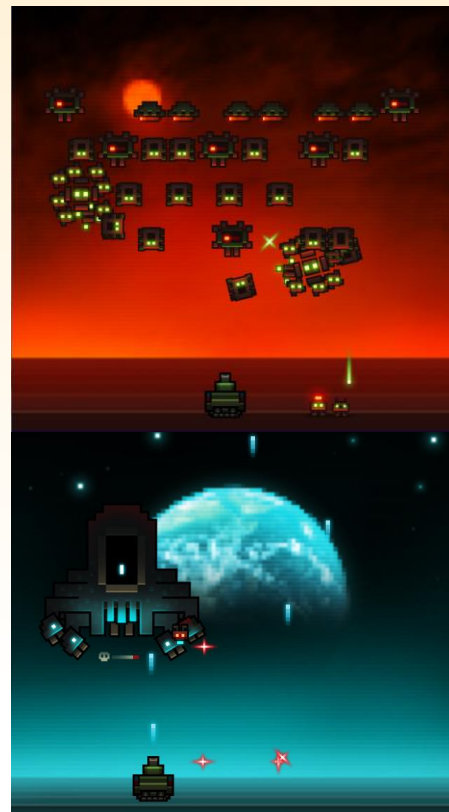
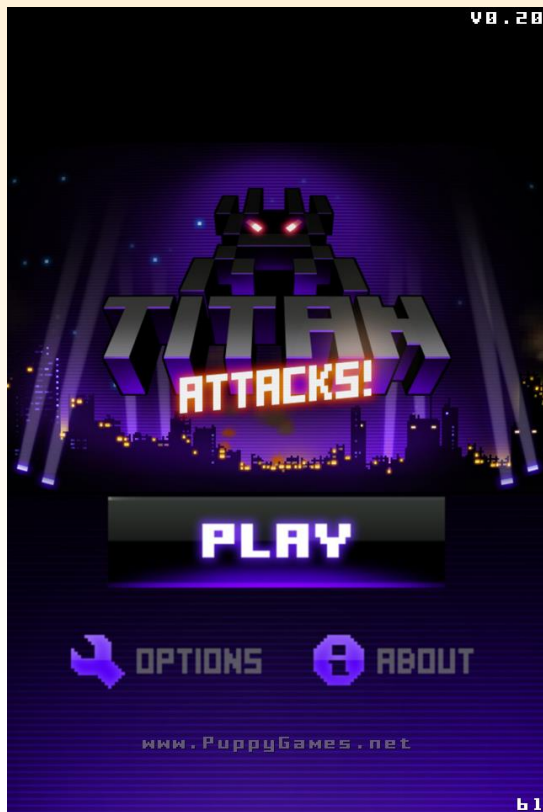
01/06/2015	SALES	BMT Micro
02/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Nextway
04/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Apple
05/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Real
15/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Amazon
15/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Big Fish Games
15/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Microsoft
16/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Exent
17/06/2015	ROYALTIES	iWin
18/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Google Play (Android)
18/06/2015		
29/06/2015	ROYALTIES	Steam

- Amazon
- Apple
- AppyNation
- Arcadetown
- BFG
- Boonty
- Direct2Drive
- Exent
- Google
- GreenManGaming
- HotHead
- IndieGala
- Intenium
- Iwin
- Marmalade
- MyPlayCity
- Oberon
- Oz
- Playfirst
- Real
- Reflexive
- Try Media (Real)
- WildTangent
- Youda Games



What did I learn in Vancouver?

- Became a better designer + producer
- Learned how to direct artists (haha)
- Importance of metrics and testing
- Networking + Speaking
- Everyone is obsessed with hockey.





Don't make decisions out of desperation



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A casual hit

- Small scope
- Resonated with audience
- Spent money on art
- No mobile version (focus)
- Localised
- Was my 7th match-3 game!
- Launched at a good time.



Everyone loves exploding pumpkins





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Get free money



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A good pitch

- Researched the market
- Researched sales data
- Sensible budget
- Unique but familiar idea
- Working demo
- Risks and contingencies



Other funding sources

- Bank loans/overdraft = no chance
- Other indie businesses
- Personal savings
- Tax credits
- Crowdfunding (shudder)



Funding Case Studies: Real Life Stories of Getting All the Monies

- Jason Della Rocca (Business track)



PERFECT!

- "Best card game of 2015." - Rock, Paper, Shotgun
- "Unsung games of 2015", Eurogamer Editor
- "2015 Staff Picks: The best of the year", Indiegames
- "Best Casual Game (2015)", Nerdy But Flirty
- "Top 10 Games of 2015", Giant Bomb/Felix Kramer



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REGENCY SOLITAIRE



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A learning curve

- Mentorship vs reality of shipping
- Using photoshop
- Design by committee
- Making a story fit the game
- Project management
- Different daily routines



2 > 1



Having kids = indie hard mode



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Photo credit:
Jason Alan Dewey



Gamasutra: Indie Sustainability Top Tips

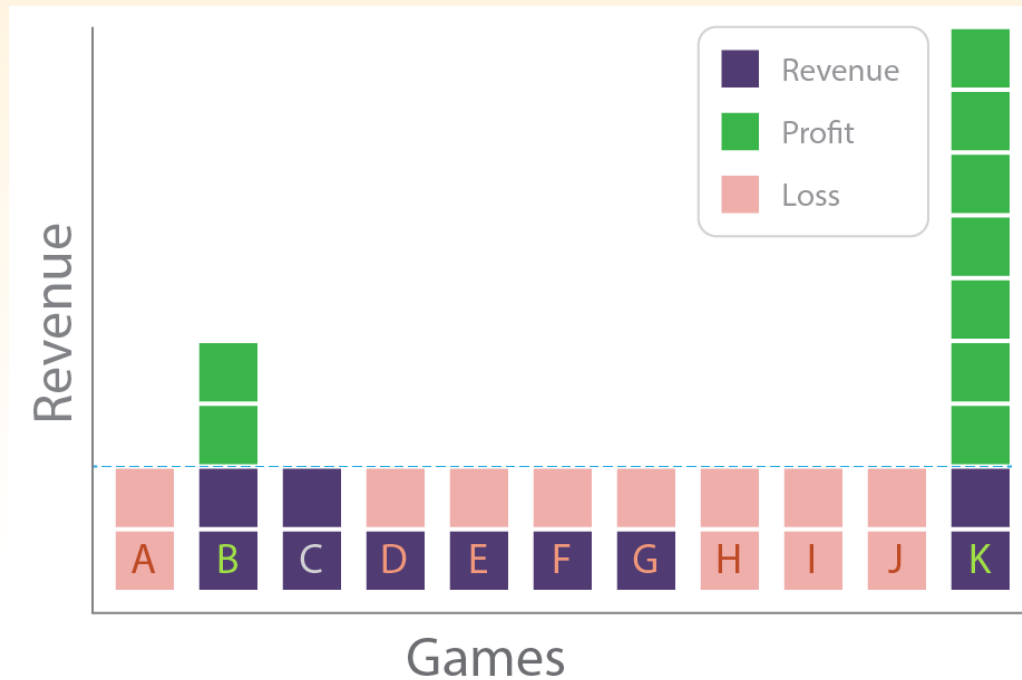
Spend as little as possible/move somewhere cheap/don't waste money/Don't go to conferences+enter compos	14
Contract work (Most people say they don't like doing this.)	8
Don't quit day job until you have enough cash	7
Don't spend all your money on a big game/Make small games	4
Spouse with good job	4
Be able to weather failures/line up next thing	4
Make lots prototypes	3
Endurance and Adaptability	3
Multiple revenue streams/Multi-platform/new opportunities	3
Offload risk to publisher/grant/investor	3
Ship at the right time/be lucky	2
Track your expenses/budget well	2
Don't copy successful people/find your own way	2
Look after yourself (health/mental/financial)	2
Make a series/franchise	1
Use contractors instead of employees	1
Be a programmer or have a partner who is one. Don't pay for one.	1
Pick the right projects (study the market etc)	1
Spend on art/tech	1
Build a network (helps for contracting + investment etc)	1
Build your brand/SEO	1
Think long term/don't rely on hits	1
Go big	1



HIT OR FLOP?

2005	Xmas Bonus	Huge flop
2006	Easter Bonus	Huge flop
2006	Grey Alien Blitzmax Framework	Minor Success
2006	The Wonderful Wizard of Oz	Eventual success
2006	Holiday Bonus	Eventual success
2007	Fairway Solitaire (contractor)	Hit
2008	Unwell Mel (contractor)	Success
2009	Fantastic Farm (consultant)	Hit
2009-2010	Working at Big Fish Games	Employed
2011	Spring Bonus	Eventual success
2012	Eets Munchies (team member)	Success
2013	Spooky Bonus	Hit
2014	Titan Attacks mobile (contractor)	Only sold in Humble Bundle
2015	Regency Solitaire	Success
2015	Animism (consultant in 2012)	Unknown
2015?	#project11	???

Minimum Sustainable Success – Dan Cook





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“Cultivating Burning Desire” – Steve Pavlina

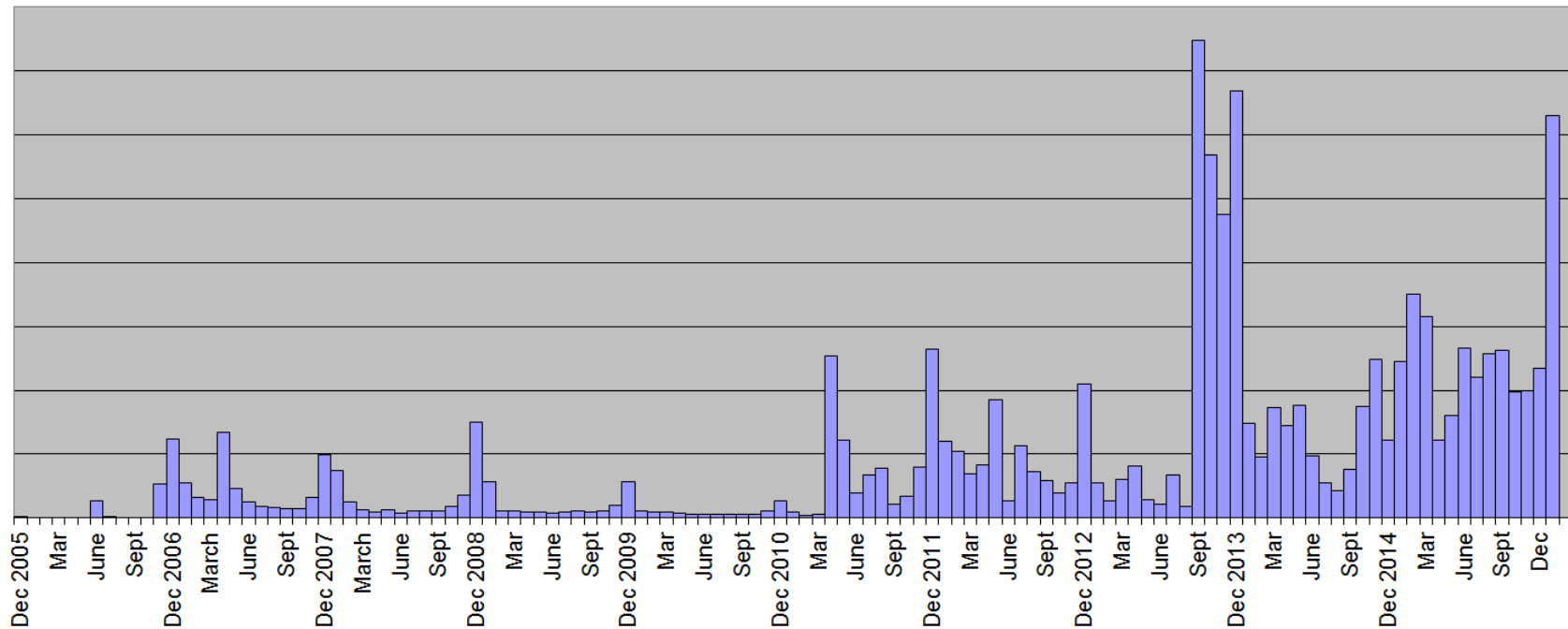


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Total Revenue from 8 games (Dec 2005 to 2015)





**One step at a time,
One punch at a time,
One GAME at a time.**

- Game Dev Rocky



Questions?

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- **www.ShadowhandGame.com**