

# CHRIS DEALS WITH IT

episode notes




## EP 77 - A Creative Process: Part 3 - Production

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This is part 3 of a multi-part series about the creative process. We'll cover my thoughts on how this process applies to creating & publishing works, and how it applies to games, fiction writing, other creative endeavors, and our professional careers.

As always, the views expressed on this podcast are mine. What works for me isn't likely to work for you exactly the same way. The usefulness of these various pieces of advice will depend on your project, experience, tools, and more as I'll get into.

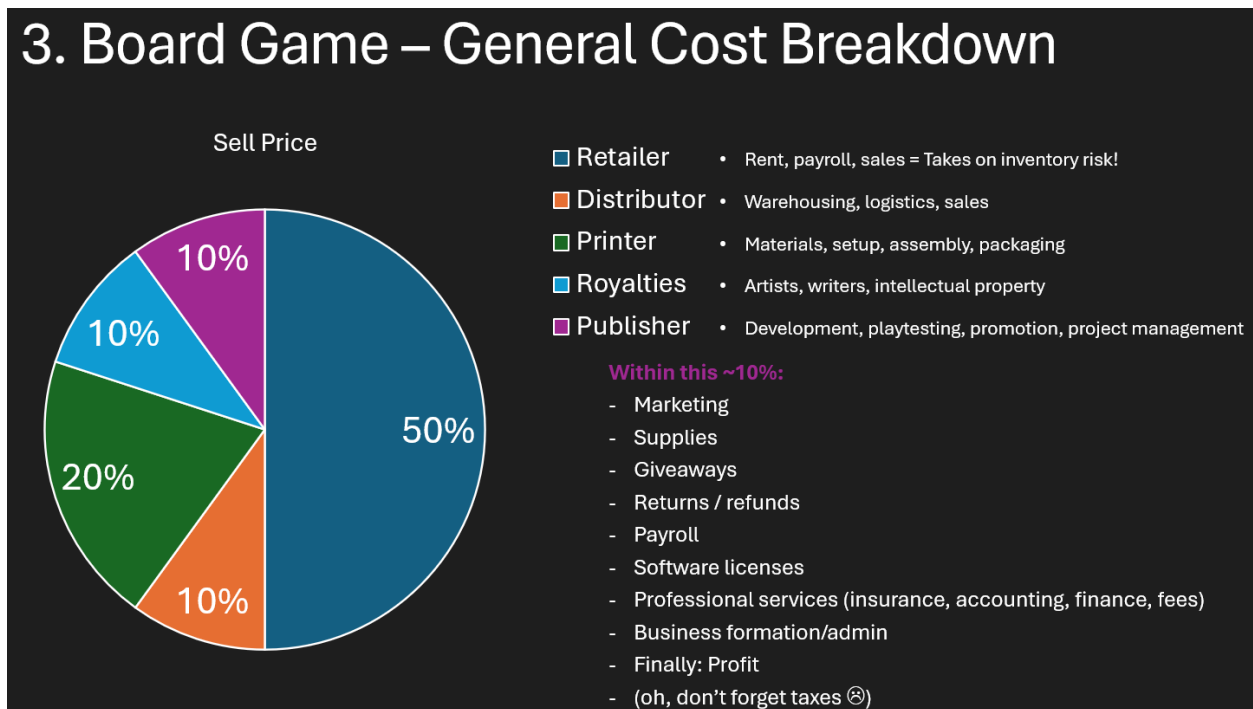
The goal of this series is to share my frameworks, mindsets, strategies, and experiences that have led me to this point of my creative journey. This is an ever-evolving process, as it should be for everyone.

## PRODUCTION:

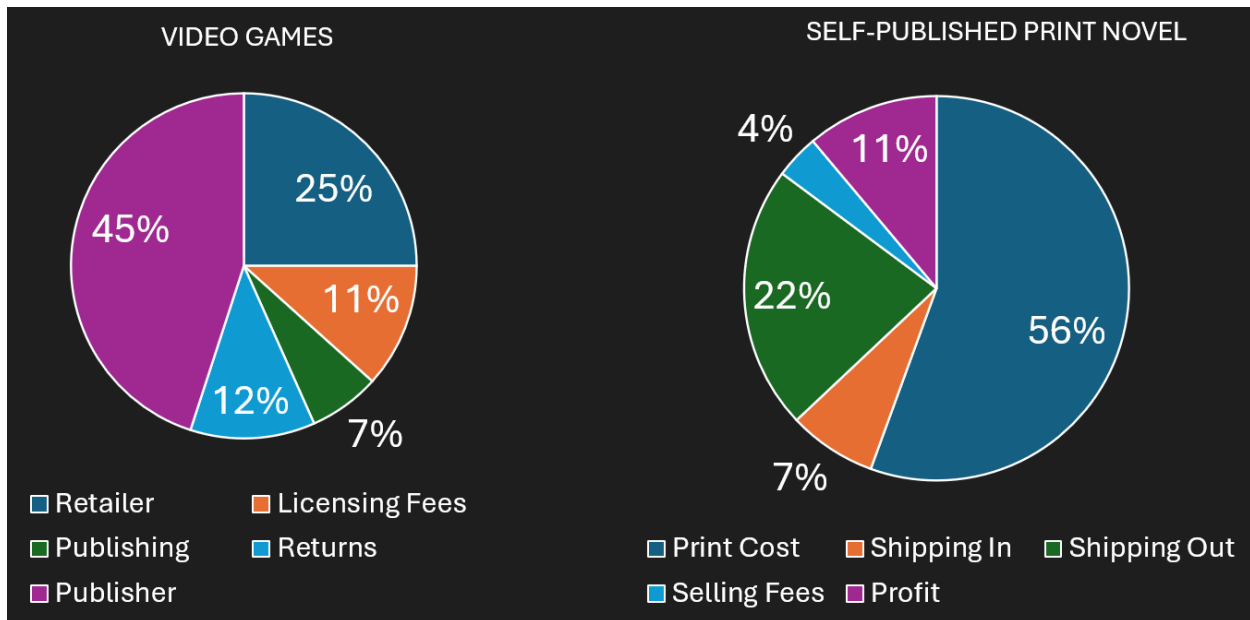
1. Turning a project into a product/service/experience.
  2. Being clear on the form factors and cost structure of your creative work.
  3. Evaluating your non-negotiables, and how the work can evolve during its production.
  4. The spaces in which we create things.
  5. My thoughts on the impact of AI on creativity.
- Depending on the project, this stage may require occasional revisits to the scaffolding stage, as you evaluate the usefulness of production factors as you start making the thing.
    - Example: Many early prototypes of Masquerade Games didn't survive their initial playtests. My design partner and I had many 'meta discussions' about our design process and game philosophies. Over time, these conversations gradually improved our ideation, scaffolding, and production skills - Shortening our development time and improving our overall design choices.
    - ***You get better at making things by making things.***
  - Consider the potential form factors of the final work:
    - Is it a physical, analog product?
    - Will it be digital? What formats/devices/services are needed to interact with it?
    - If you're planning a performance, what are the potential venues?
    - What's the price point of the final project? Is there a need to limit the number of components, packaging, actors, etc...?

- Consider what it takes to publish work - Be clear on how pricing works before you start spending money!

### 3. Board Game – General Cost Breakdown



- If you control the sales channel, you can capture this retailer margin - but you take on all of the marketing, infrastructure, and time requirements of those tasks.
  - Going direct to consumers also limits the degree to which retailers are going to want to support your game (are you undercutting them?)
- This chart is specific to retail goods - things look different depending on the creative work:
  - Video Games - More direct to consumer & more infrastructure cost to produce
  - Performance Art - Ticket agents, ushers, performers, A/V, Insurance
  - Books - Physical vs eBooks



- Crowdfunding is a popular method to front-load the financials
  - Takes a lot of social media effort before & during - hard to achieve funding if you don't have the pump "primed" beforehand.
  - Need to be clear up front on costs, tiers, bonus content possibilities, timelines
  - There needs to be a certain level of work already performed & invested in order to start a viable campaign
  - Have transparency about the creators, companies, and risks involved
  - Accountability after funding: Regular updates & engagement with your followers
  - This is followed by the commitment to deliver what you promised!
  - Success comes with many benefits - but be mindful of any retail expectations after funding!

## Non-Negotiables

- Be wary of establishing non-negotiables in your project too early: "It has to have X"
  - Limits can be powerful tools to ensure high quality work

- They can help prevent unnecessary bloat or complexity - “keep it simple”
- **But:** They also risk limiting the ways (and # of) people that will be able interact with your work
  - Limits can create logistical or distribution issues down the road
- Example - Epigo. Not having a folding board resulted in:
  - Our publishing partner asked us several times if we really wanted to go without a folded board - pointing out some of the issues I’ll mention next.
  - But we treated it as a non-negotiable, since the game was about sliding and pushing multiple pieces around the play surface.
  - The result:
    - 12.5" x 12.5" non-standard box size - difficult (and expensive) to ship individual copies
    - 2,500 copies → 11 pallets → 1/4 shipping container = \$1,500+ freight costs from Germany (2011 values)
    - Additional warehousing & distribution costs (\$10-11 per pallet per month) - Plus pick & pack fees!
    - Recall the cost breakdown I mentioned earlier: If you’re paying this out of the 10% profit off a \$30 game (\$3 per game) - that means after pre-selling some copies at release - we needed to sell more than 36 copies each month just to pay our warehousing costs!
    - It was a lesson hard earned.
    - Less transportability = slower spread of the game (shipping outside US prohibitive!)
  - ***But it sure made pushing pieces a better experience!***

## Making Things

- When you’ve got a solid scaffold for the project, it’s time to start making the thing!

- Put. In. The. Work.
- Utilize specific times of the day, dedicated notebooks or tools, and unique locations to help stay focused on your project.
- Allow the work to evolve and change if necessary.
- Think of the work as a feedback loop: The more you develop it, the more it develops you & your ideas. Those enhanced skills & ideas continue to develop the work... It becomes a virtuous cycle!
- You don't have to be married to your scaffold: If a project reveals an opportunity to change tack or add in a plot twist - explore it!

## The impact of AI on being creative

- Legal & ethical concerns - How much is actually your work?
  - Are you only cheating yourself - what about your audience?
  - Recognize the rampant IP abuses that trained many LLMs
  - It's theft of others' works → Likely your own as well.
- There's no denying the power these algorithms have
  - There are powerful, useful applications of it - such as the successes of radiology scan evaluation that significantly boosts detection rates compared to human review alone.
- Rampant AI use creates a regression to the average → This can cut both ways!
  - For those with the skill and resources to make great art: They end up missing an opportunity to transcend average into greatness.
  - For those lacking the technical abilities or resources: It allows them to bring an idea into the world that's more passable far faster & cheaper. But the best it'll ever be is average.
- For me, using AI creates a death of personality & uniqueness of voice in art
- AI generated works are flooding markets that were already too saturated: It's very difficult for unique work to be discoverable.

- Personally: I push back against any talk of AI “inevitability”
  - Sure, the genie’s out of the bottle - But it doesn’t mean we have to engage with it
  - Ultimately, I desire to make the best work I can. I don’t want to settle for average.
  - Case in point → My AI Statements on this podcast: *All elements of this episode are products of the author, Chris Kreuter, made without any use of AI tools.*
- There are some niche use cases in the creative world that I think may have some merit:
  - ideation: A brainstorming buddy to help work through plot options or analyzing flaws in your thinking
  - research: greater breadth & depth of access (accuracy is a concern though)
  - prototyping: faster development to test ideas in early stages to see if ideas are working

## Episode 77 Quote:

Listeners have heard several quotes from Shane Parrish’s [Farnam Street “Brain Food” newsletter](#) over the years. This gem gets to the heart of what it means to put in the work to make things:

*“What looks like skill is often just a lot of work that no one sees. Long nights, early mornings, sweat, tears. If you want remarkable results, you need to work remarkably hard. Professionals go all in. They don't leave at five every day because that's 8 hours from when they show up; they grind for small insights. **Knowledge accumulates in drips and gets leveraged in buckets.**”*