How to Make Your First Board Game

From Ideation to Production

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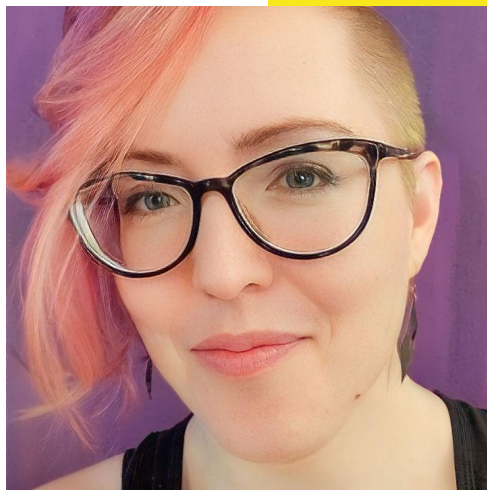
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Introduction to Game Design

The Easy Part

Intro to Game Design

1. Getting Ideas
   a. Play A LOT of games
   b. Take your favorite game -> change one thing about it, then change another
   c. Join a Game Jam
2. Making your first Prototype
   a. Buy blank cards/card sleeves
   b. Focus on playability, not aesthetics

Intro to Game Design

3. Playtesting your first Prototype

   1. Join local board game meetups
   2. Playtest with friends & family
   3. Join in-person and online prototyping groups:
      a. Break My Game
      b. Protospiel
      c. Unpub
      d. Local to Boston: Game Makers Guild

Intro to Game Design

4. Collect emails and make a mailing list

1. Collect emails of everyone who playtests the game
2. Mailing list will be imperative for marketing later
   a. Optional: Make a Facebook group or Discord channel to keep people engaged and updated

Intro to Game Design

5. Make presentable Prototypes for promotions

1. Various graphics software: Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, GIMP, Microsoft PowerPoint, etc.
2. Print on Demand companies:
   a. The Game Crafter (USA)
   b. Make Playing Cards (China)
   c. Shuffled Ink (USA)
   d. Launch Tabletop (USA)

Intro to Game Design

6. Okay, I have a playable game! How do I get it into the hands of millions of board gamers around the world?

- **If you want creative control over the process** -> You should self publish -> we will explain manufacturing, logistics and marketing
- **If you don't like the idea of starting your own small business ->** You should pitch the game to publishers -> we will not cover in this panel, but we can answer Q's in the Q&A

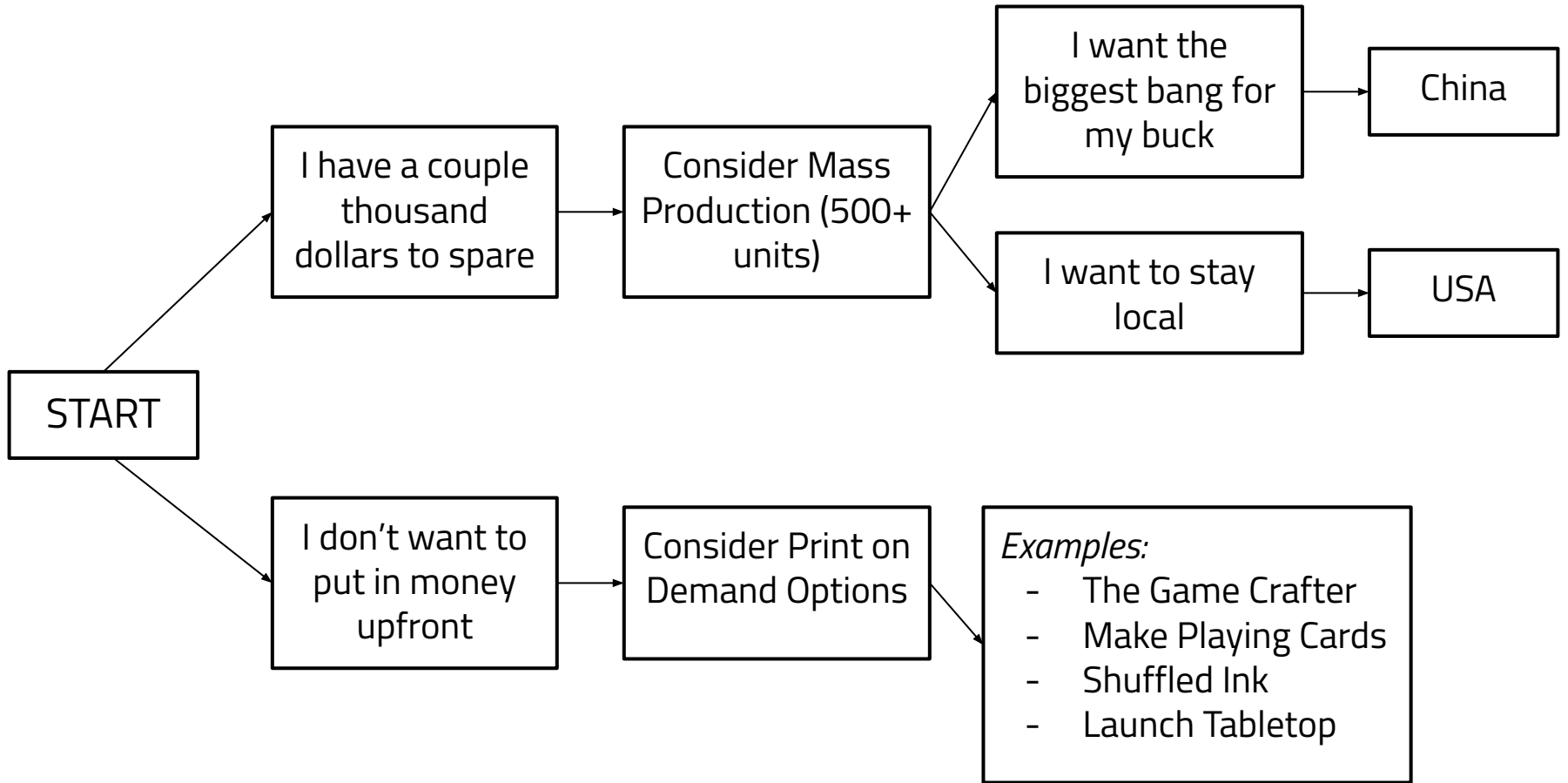# Case Study: Cake Auf!

First Handmade Prototype

First Print-on-Demand Prototype

Introduction to Game Manufacturing

The Slightly Challenging Part

```
START
 ├──> I have a couple thousand dollars to spare ──> Consider Mass Production (500+ units)
 │         ├──> I want the biggest bang for my buck ──> China
 │         └──> I want to stay local ──> USA
 │
 └──> I don't want to put in money upfront ──> Consider Print on Demand Options ──> Examples:
              - The Game Crafter
              - Make Playing Cards
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              - Launch Tabletop
```

START

I have a couple thousand dollars to spare

Consider Mass Production (500+ units)

I want the biggest bang for my buck → **China**

I want to stay local → **USA**

I don't want to put in money upfront

Consider Print on Demand Options

Examples:
- The Game Crafter
- Make Playing Cards
- Shuffled Ink
- Launch Tabletop

Intro to Game Manufacturing

1. Decide if you want to do a **Mass Order** or **Print on Demand**
2. Decide on Mass Order Quantity
   a. Most manufacturers have a minimum of 500 or 1000 copies (the more you order, the cheaper per unit)
3. Decide on a Manufacturer (Factory)
   a. Most manufacturers based in China
4. Work with Manufacturer to lock down components
   a. Custom die & meeples will require an extra one-time mold fee

Intro to Game Manufacturing

Pro Tips for Manufacturing:

- Cards & paper components are the cheapest to manufacture & to ship
- Games with a lot of meeples & small parts will drive up the prices
- Keep it simple for your first game
- Consider how many copies you want in one **case pack**: how many games in one box when being shipped

Intro to Game Manufacturing

Pro Tips for Designing:

- Consider where you plan to sell your game:
  - Retail stores: shelf presence is important - does the cover art grab your attention immediately?
- Have title of game on all 4 sides of the box
- Consider adding UPC code (for retail)
- Consider getting safety tested
  - To list game as under age 14, you must get safety testing (CE for Europe & global; CPSC for USA)

Case Study: Cake Auf!

Game Component Specs & Quotation Sheet

NO	Components	Qty	Dimension	Material	Printing	Varnish/Lamination	UV/Foil/Linen	Remarks	1000	2000	3,000
1	Magnet box	1	103*73*46 mm	128g glossy paper+1.8mm whiteboard	4c/0c	Matt lamination	/	/	US$0.53	US$0.40	US$0.36
2	Playing cards	88	63.5*88.9 mm R3	350g white core	4c/4c	Poker glossy varnish	Linen	Shrink wrap	US$0.73	US$0.59	US$0.52
3	Rulebook	1	62*88mm, 12p	128g glossy paper	4c/4c	Matt varnish	/	Saddle stitch	US$0.19	US$0.10	US$0.08
4	Sheet	1	215.9*279.4mm	128g glossy paper	4c/4c	Matt lamination	/	1/8 Folding	US$0.19	US$0.10	US$0.08

Intro to Game Manufacturing

Finding a Manufacturer

- A simple Google yields many results
- A good database:

  https://boardgamemanufacturers.info/
    - Ranks by reviews, location, certifications, etc.
- Popular manufacturers:
    - LongPack, Panda, Whatz, Boda, Meijia

Intro to Game Manufacturing

Ask Manufacturer upfront about:

- Turnaround times
  - How long does it take to give a quote, to provide sample, to fully manufacture?
- Payment terms
  - Usually publishers pay 30% before manufacturing starts, remaining when manufacturing is completed
- How many free samples they provide
- If they do certifications & which ones?
- Shipping
 - What freight do they use & how do they prefer to calculate prices and do payment?

Intro to Game Manufacturing

Working with Manufacturer:

- If company is overseas, decide on which currency your payment will proceed in
    - Most Chinese companies will give you prices in US, but you can ask for Chinese price
- Establish clear communications & expectations:
    - Some companies prefer to communicate in email, some using WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc.

Case Study: Cake Auf!

Printed Game
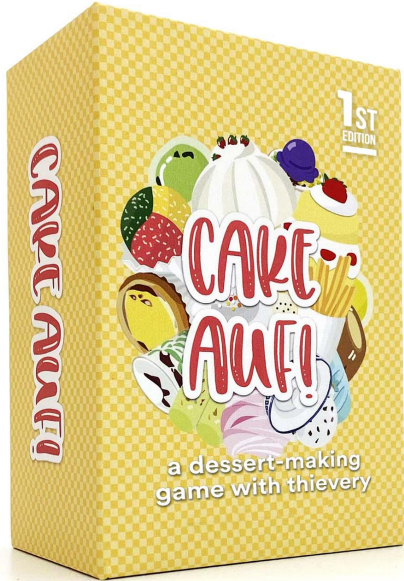
500 Units at $3.32 Each

Introduction to Game Logistics

The Pretty Challenging Part

Intro to Game Logistics

- **Definition of Logistics:** Logistics refers to the overall process of managing how resources are acquired, stored, and transported to their final destination
- **In terms of Board Games**: How to get your manufactured games from the factory to the end user
  - If manufacturer is overseas: must calculate shipping -> will you use air freight? Ocean freight? How will you pay for customs clearance?
  - Do you have a warehouse where you'll store the games? Or will you work with a distributor what has warehouses in several locations?

Intro to Game Logistics

- **Options for Logistics:**
  - **Partner with a Fulfillment Company:** Fulfillment companies will work with your manufacturer/factory to get the games from overseas to their warehouses -> they have connections, so they have access to cheaper shipping, as well as handle customs clearance for you
  - **Deliver to your own Warehouse/House:** Upfront is cheaper, but a lot more complicated -> you have to find your own ship and deal with customs on your own

Intro to Game Logistics

- **How to Decide on a Logistics Company:**
  - Where are the **warehouses**? Are they local to you or across the country? Do they have warehouses in other countries?
  - Some logistics companies also do **distribution to retail and Amazon** -> do you want them to handle this for you?
  - Warehousing (storage) fees
  - Removal fees (cost to send products back to you)
  - Distributors usually buy games at 60% off MSRP - does this fit into your business plan?

Case Study: Cake Auf!
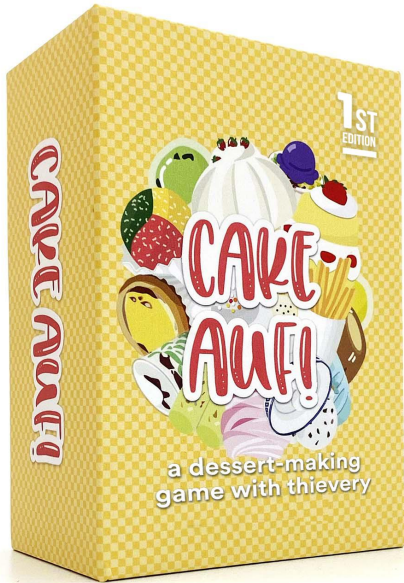
Game Specs:
- **Dimensions:** 4 in. x 3 in. x 2 in.
- **Weight:** 9 oz

Casepack: 15 units
- **Casepack Dimensions:** 12.5 in x 8.5 in x 4.5 in
- **Casepack Weight:** 8 lbs 5 oz

Total Bulk:
- 30 Casepacks (500 units)

Shipping Options:
- **Air freight** (more convenient & fast)
- **Ocean freight** (slow & need to pair with other items in a pallet)

Introduction to Game Marketing

The Most Challenging Part

Intro to Game Marketing

- **What is it?** The incredibly difficult art of convincing people to buy your game
- **What kinds of game marketing are there?**
  - Social Media ads: Facebook, Instagram
  - Social Media content: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok
  - Paid previews (YouTube, personal blogs)
  - Attending board game conventions (1 down, 100 to go)
  - Selling at holiday & street fairs
  - Selling to retail stores + demoing at stores
  - Talking to friends, family and anyone who will listen to you talk about your game

Intro to Game Marketing

- **You may have noticed I didn't say Kickstarter**
- That's because Kickstarter is less of a marketing platform, and more of the culmination of all your marketing efforts
- Should I go Kickstarter?
  - Consider the costs: KS takes 5% of all funds; Stripe takes 2.9%~ of funds; pledge manager also takes 1-3% of funds
  - Can I get a lot of "followers" on the preview page?
  - Am I willing to spend money to make a KS video, beautiful (vertical) graphics, write impeccable copy, and pay for preview videos?

Intro to Game Marketing

- **Game Plan for Kickstarter:**
  - **9 months - 1 year+ Before Launch:** Make KS Preview Page, start getting followers on Preview Page -> attend board game conventions, prototyping events, etc. (also collect emails for mailing list)
  - **6 months Before Launch:** Finalize graphics, contact a manufacturer to figure out manufacturing costs and logistics
  - **4-6 months Before Launch:** Start working on KS page, make a KS video that introduces it well -> have work proofread by at least 2 people (especially if English isn't your first language); make sure you have a pledge manager if you're going that route
  - **3 months Before Launch:**
    - Send prototypes to previewers (Board game reviewers who will make YT videos about your game)
    - Make ads and launch ads on Facebook, Instagram, BoardGameGeek, etc.
  - **1-2 months Before Launch:** Make sure all your family and friends will simultaneously post about the game launch on minute 1 of Launch Day
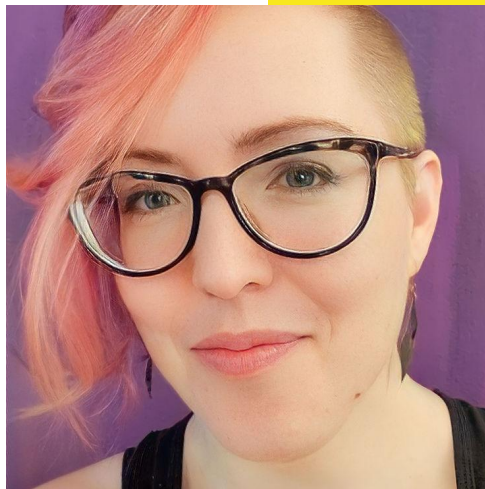
Q&A

Sorry we don't have a silver bullet, but we can try to help :)

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Anything relating to the above!

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Contact me about: anything from this talk, game design, UI/UX design, or all things cats and tea!

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Contact me if you have an idea for a game, but aren't sure how to get it going. Or contact me if you want to talk about games!