

Exploring Effective Marketing Training for Video Game Developers

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Keywords

Industry, training, marketing, production, development

INTRODUCTION

Most video game studios in Australia have few employees, and are thus classified as micro and small businesses (Burgess et al., 2024), although many studios do not view themselves as businesses (Keogh, 2021). It is well established that marketing knowledge and skills offer small businesses market value, innovation and ultimately increased competitive advantage (Ren et al. 2015). However, it is also well established that small businesses often lack marketing knowledge and skills and the resources to obtain them due to numerous challenges such as a lack of easy access to training (Curado & Sousa, 2021), which includes the small businesses operating as video game studios in Australia and New Zealand (Burgess et al., 2024). Adding to this challenge is the fact that creative-focused business owners can feel a conflict between their commercial and creative identities (de Klerk, 2015) and find it particularly difficult to undertake marketing activities, or to understand them.

There has been limited research into the most effective ways for small businesses to be trained and access training given that their contexts, resources and abilities are fundamentally different to larger enterprises (Mustafa & Elliot, 2019). There has also been limited research into the marketing activities within the Australian video game industry (Burgess et al., 2024). Our study aimed to understand if workshops for video game developers are an effective way to enhance their marketing knowledge and skills.

Four workshops around Australia, organised with the support of industry partners, took place throughout 2024. The workshops involved an active learning focus with

Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2025

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hands-on activities (Stegemann & Sutton-Brady, 2013) and aimed to introduce four key areas of marketing knowledge: value propositions, identifying a target market, market research and consumer behaviour. These topics were determined in consultation between the first author, a multi award winning lecturer and teacher of marketing, and industry partners. Participants were invited to complete research surveys before and after the workshops.

The surveys measured participants' attitudes towards marketing (Gardner, 1985), involvement with marketing (Novak et al. 2000), and self-reported confidence in various marketing activities such as identifying a target market. Across the four workshops we received 39 usable surveys completed prior to the workshop and 41 usable surveys completed post-workshop. Approximately 70% of the participants were male, 24% were female and 6% were non-binary or preferred not to say. Ages ranged from 20 to 48 years with the median age being 28 years. Participants varied in video game experience with 53% having released no games, 23% having released one and 24% having released two or more.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of the variables. We compared the difference in means across four groups: [1] Zero games released, and more than one game released. [2] Pre-workshop responses, and post-workshop responses. [3] Gender, male compared to female. [4] Those who indicated they had prior experience running a business outside of video games compared with those who did not.

The independent samples t-test comparing the mean scores across these groups only found a statistically significant difference on one occasion. This occurred in the second group where we found a significant difference in mean scores for their confidence in marketing. Prior to the workshop ($M = 3.1, SD = .79$) confidence was statistically different to confidence post-workshop ($M = 3.8, SD = .74; t(78) = -4.34, p < .001$, two tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = $.74$, 95% CI: -1.08 to $-.402$) was very large (eta squared = $.195$). Thus, participants appeared to gain confidence in their marketing knowledge as a result of taking part in the workshop and this confidence was not impacted by factors such as gender or prior business or video game development experience. Participants' attitude towards marketing or involvement in marketing did not significantly differ pre and post the workshop.

Table 1:

COMPONENT	PRE-WORKSHOP		POST-WORKSHOP	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Confidence in Marketing	3.1	.79	3.8	.74
Attitude Towards Marketing Importance	4.5	.68	4.6	.35
Involvement In Marketing	3.8	.73	4.2	.58

Participants reported increased confidence in marketing activities in post-workshop surveys compared to pre-workshop surveys. Our research indicates that workshops, facilitated by experienced educators and designed with industry partners, can have a positive impact on video game creator participant perceptions of their confidence. Thus, these workshops appear to be an effective educational intervention to upskill developers in marketing knowledge and skills. Our research has started to address knowledge gaps concerning video game small business marketing training and upskilling in a creative industry. Further research could examine if specific topics, activities, modes or teaching styles could be more or less effective in other areas of small business. The results of this research could impact and inform industry associations, groups and stakeholders of appropriate upskilling activities they could facilitate and organise.

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BIOS

Dr. Jacqueline Burgess is a multi-award-winning educator and researcher based at the University of the Sunshine Coast as a Lecturer in International Business. She is the leading business and game studies researcher in Australia and has published multiple papers in the top 10% of worldwide academic journals. She has worked with various creative practitioners from international companies, including Ubisoft, to local businesses and has taught numerous industry workshops. As a result of Jacqueline's expertise, she has been asked to provide commentary for news organisations including the BBC, Sky News, WIN, Inside Retail, The Conversation and more.

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