Original 2D Board Game
Proposal Worksheet

Instructions: You must submit and gain approval from your instructor before beginning the final production of your original 2D board game. The purpose of this proposal is to guide you through creative process of game development. A well thought-out and prepared proposal will make your game creating process much simpler. In general, you don't "discover" your game while you are building it. The time for thinking and planning the details is during the creation of this proposal.

You proposal must contain the information described below and be place inside a project folder:

1. A Cover Letter
2. A Game Overview
3. The Game Treatment
4. A Competitive Analysis
5. A Design Document
6. A Budget and Schedule
7. A Game Demo

Let us look at each part in more detail.

The Cover Letter:

Probably the most important thing you will write will be the cover letter. This document will most likely be the first and possibly the only document read before your game demo is played. The cover letter has to tell the "publisher" (*instructor*) everything about you, your team, and your proposed game. A cover letter is typically a one page document with an introduction, a body and a conclusion, usually about four <u>solid</u> paragraphs that sum up the <u>entire game proposal</u>.

The main points you want to get across in the cover letter are that you have a great game idea (marketable) and that you are able to make that idea a reality. The letter sums up all that is contained in the proposal briefly and only mentions the specifics if you have a hot selling point such as a cutting edge technology, license, or top name talent on board. <u>And this is not just a document that sells the game, but you and your team as well</u>. The reader of this letter will notice bad formatting, spelling errors, and how well your thoughts are organized, among other details that will speak of the letters' author.

When writing the cover letter remember to consider your audience and state why you want to be published by this particular publisher (Weaver Game Development Company). If possible, include a reason why you are fit for this publisher. If, for instance, you have read an article where the publisher has been quoted as saying that they are looking your type of game, mention it here. And remember to conclude your letter with a request for action. Don't just say thanks and goodbye, ask the reader to follow up or better yet, tell them you will be following up.

The Game Overview

The game overview should contain the basic information about your game. This generally includes the following:

Game Title: Be sure to indicate that your game's name is a "working title", as this means that you are aware that the title may change. Clinging to the name you have planned for your game is a sign of inexperience, and publishers may have legitimate reasons for changing the name such as copyright issues, marketing reasons, and (believe it or not) the possibility that the title you came up with is simply not the best. This doesn't mean you shouldn't give any thought to the title, though. You should have a title that speaks to the publishers and <u>connotes the essence of your game</u>.

Category or Genre: Usually publishers want <u>innovation</u> & <u>invention</u>. That means that the preference is not for a new, untried idea that nobody can <u>define in traditional market terms</u>. Games based on proven genres (action games or RPG games, for example) are easier to market and easier for retailers and gamers to understand. Try to place your game into an accepted game genre (A race game or a strategy game)

When discussing your game, keep the genre in mind, as it is a foundation for communicating your vision to others. Once you have a clear idea of your game, you can proceed to describe it in visual terms on paper, eventually breaking it down into the elements that will comprise the design document.

Development Stage: Each publisher has its own definition of the development stages, and you should understand these stages when you work a company. You need to indicate to the publisher what stage your game is at. You may want to stay away from labels and simply describe how far along your game is and how much farther it needs to go. If you indicate that you are at beta stage out of ignorance or misunderstanding when the publisher judges the demo to be at alpha, you could inadvertently give the publisher the impression that you have a half-functioning game when you consider it almost finished.

Here are the generally accepted definitions of game development stages:

- **Work in Progress:** This is pretty self explanatory. You have something done, maybe some art and a little code. Nothing is expected at this stage but a firm understanding of where you are headed and the demonstration that you can get there.

- **Alpha:** *(This is the point where most of you will be when you finish building your games.)* The game is running to some degree at this stage. User interface or board design is defined, the general layout of the game is set, and the look and feel has been achieved. At the alpha stage you should be able to demonstrate the game play and the look and feel.

- **Interim Beta or Second Alpha:** This comes before the final beta stages. Some bugs and errors have been found and fixed. Your game is essentially running or playable and mostly done. Some tweaking is taking place and initial beta testing is starting. This is the stage publishers most want your title to be at when they look at it in a proposal.

- **Final Beta (ON MIDTERM DAY):** All features are functional and complete. The game has been tested by the development team and all of the bugs found during that testing have been corrected.

The Game Treatment

The game treatment is your primary selling tool which quickly orients the publisher to your game (genre, platform, story and other elements should be mentioned). <u>The treatment is your opportunity to convince the publisher that your idea is as complete and crystal clear as you believe it to be</u>. If you can't briefly explain your game idea, then the following might be true of your game:

- It is too big and complex. Your game idea may be too ambitious.
- The game is not as good as you think.
- You need help crystallizing the core aspects of the game. If you think this is the case, get help from an objective source who knows something about games.

One approach to writing the game treatment is to cite your game's "unique selling points" UPC's. USP's are the aspects that <u>differentiate your game from the competition</u>, <u>offer gameplay value</u>, and <u>ultimately make consumers want to buy the product</u>. If yours is truly a good idea, the publisher may even read your design document all the way through.

The game treatment should also grab the publisher's attention by focusing on the <u>bottom line</u>. You can do this by citing sales projections based on solid market and sales information relevant to your game. (Try to use authentic data if possible or make realistic projections. Graphs and charts are useful in illustrating projections.)

When you have distilled your game into a single game treatment page, <u>have others proofread</u> it for you to see if they understand what you are trying to say and find the game idea compelling. Have it edited and reviewed by as many qualified people as possible.

Competitive Analysis

The competitive analysis illustrates to the publisher how you stack up against your competition. It must explain <u>why your title will outsell the competition</u>, **yet how it will be similar enough to be sold right next to the competition on store shelves**. A simple way to graphically illustrate how your game stacks up against the competition is a table that lists <u>functions and features down the X axis</u>, with your game and <u>its competitors across the Y axis</u>, checking off the features that each game has. You can also list other competitive differentiators here too, such as licenses, technology, development costs -- anything that will make your title perform better in the retail channel.

Be prepared to discuss each point of your analysis that relate to the competition. For example, if you list a great technology you developed as a selling point (i.e. a special type of dice or game spinner), be prepared to discuss why it will give you an edge over the competition. Will it save development time or money? Will it make the game noticeably better? Or is it just a source of personal pride that doesn't <u>translate into publisher benefit</u>?

The competitive analysis should contain at least five products (in today's marketplace you shouldn't have a problem listing ten or more) and at least five features of those products with a <u>few paragraphs</u> discussing the competitive analysis in terms of how you drew your conclusions. The most important determinant of what your competitive analysis contains is your game idea. You need to include your real competition and <u>not leave out a top selling game hoping the publisher won't notice your omission</u>. The same goes for features, you can't leave a feature out of your analysis because your competition has it and you don'<u>t. Most importantly make sure the features you include have a selling point to them</u>. And be honest too – there will be games that simply have features going for it that yours won't.

The competitive analysis requires you to market your game -- and yourself. <u>You are being given the chance to tell the business guys that your game will perform in the marketplace better than titles X, Y, and Z for reasons that you state as persuasively as possible in their language.</u>

Done correctly, the competitive analysis can help you jump ahead of other developers by demonstrating to the publisher that you understand its goals. And once you've written it, you'll be able to rattle it off in conversations – and that helps convince others that your title stands a strong chance of performing well in the marketplace.

The Design Document

The design document is a long, in-depth document that shows the publisher your game in detail. What you place into your design document may vary, but the purpose of this document is to illustrate what the game will look like and how it will play. These are not merely rough sketches or doodles. These drawings should be to scale and clearly illustrate your concept. It is fine to include hand-drawn illustrations, but they should be professionally done (make everything look nice). You should include at <u>least</u> the following:

- The board design and layout
- The design of any special game elements (money, tokens, etc.)
- Rules of the game – clearly written and illustrated, preferably in storyboard format

Team Introduction

Convincing the publisher that you are a good risk is critical, so it's imperative that you build your credibility as a developer. Your "team introduction" (or "team bios") section lets you convey your experience via resumes, portfolios, and press clippings.

<u>Most developers who submit games to publishers have little or no real industry experience or published games under their belt.</u> This is why a substantial demo is required for publishers – it's the only way to prove to a publisher that you have the <u>team skills,</u> <u>technical skills</u> and <u>personal ability</u> to produce the title you propose. Even if the proposed title is a good idea, <u>you still have to prove you can produce that good idea</u>.

But make no mistake, just because you haven't had any game industry experience and you have a great proposal doesn't mean the team won't be discussed at length by the publisher. They will want to know if you have any serious work experience (this will be looked upon favorably) or if you are just another gamer wanting to make a game. If you can demonstrate real world experience that relates to your job description in the proposal and you have a solid employment history, you will have achieved some level of credibility. <u>Proving you can hold a job, deal with people and deadlines, and can communicate is a huge plus in the eyes of the publisher</u>.

Budget and Schedule

The budget and schedule are the amount of time and money it will take to make the game. Use Microsoft Excel to prepare spreadsheets to clearly set deadlines for the production of your game. For the purposes of this class, your spreadsheet must clearly show the plan of work and how each team member is responsible for a part of the project. The other spreadsheet must clearly site development costs related to producing your game.

The Game Demo

I mention the game demo last because it is most likely the most important part of your submission, especially if you are a not a top hit producer, and also most likely the part most of you are already familiar with -– actually creating the game. For the purpose of this class, you must get everything else approved BEFORE producing your game demo or final product. <u>Your final product submission should contain a final game proposal along with a working model of your game</u>.

Putting it all together

Working through all the aspects of your game proposal takes time, and it may feel like a real chore to a developer who would rather create a game. But a well-formed proposal is the best tool to convince a publisher you can make the game you propose and that the game will sell.

Remember that although publishers are inundated with game submissions you can make yours really stand out by putting your best foot forward and you do that by giving the publishers what they want – a game that will sell and a development team that can make that game.