

1. Intro & Background

Global creative markets are massive. In 2021:

- Film Industry: \$235BN
- Video Game Industry: \$175BN
- Music Industry: \$26BN

Despite lacking comparable funding and support, independent creators competing in these industries have the aptitude to rival projects put out by AAA studios and Hollywood. Without the resources of their well-funded competitors, creators are motivated primarily by their passion for their craft, and succeed often by working with novel or original tactics to set their work apart.

The creators work as solo actors or on small teams, with each contributor taking on responsibility for multiple, sometimes interdisciplinary roles to bring a project to market.

Due to the reduced capacity of these smaller teams, supporting responsibilities outside of a creators' core competency can drive them away from their craft. As Deep Rock Galactic Developer Soren Lundgaard puts it, "in order to [make games], you need to also spend time on building a company and a team, find funding and do PR and tons of other non-game-dev issues. Deciding on how to spend team resources between the actual game development and everything else is super hard." Thus, with our research project, our group endeavors to uncover the nuances (like pain points, additional contributors, and helpful tools) of creators' relationships with those supporting tasks, in an effort to maximize their time working on what matters most—their creation.

2. Research Objective

How do independent creators (specifically game developers, music producers, and filmmakers) working solo or on small teams manage supporting responsibilities?

3. Research Questions

1. What are the tasks that have little to do with their core creative work that they must engage in to support their work?
2. How did these tasks arise?
 - a. How do they navigate these tasks when they arise?
3. What are the barriers to accomplishing these tasks?
4. What supports them in accomplishing these tasks?

4. In-Depth Interview Participant Profile

- People who have been independent creators for at least two years, but less than eight years
- People who freelance, do contract work, work with small independent studios, or otherwise identify as "independent" creators

- People who are currently working on a creative project
- People who self-identify as a filmmaker, music producer, or game developer.

4.1 Subject Matter Expert Interview Participant Profile

- Experts who have over 5 years of experience working as or working to support independent creators.
- Experts who self-identify as directors of relevant nonprofits, executives of relevant companies, or academics or analysts conducting research within the independent creator space.

4.2 In-Depth Interview Participant Screener Survey ([LINK](#))

1. What is your name? (*open-ended*)
2. What creative industry do you work in? (*multiple-choice*)
3. What is your job title? (*open-ended*)
4. Are you an independent creator? This could mean you freelance, work within a small independently-owned studio, do contract work, or otherwise identify as "independent." (*multiple-choice*)
5. How long have you been working in your field? (*multiple-choice*)
6. Are you currently working on a creative project? (*multiple choice*)
7. What are the tasks that have little to do with your core creative work that you must engage in to support your work? (*open-ended*)
8. Would you be willing to participate in a 60 follow-up minute interview? If so, please leave your preferred contact details (email or mobile number). (*open-ended*)

4.3 Subject Matter Expert Interview Participant Screener Survey ([LINK](#))

1. What is your name? (*short answer*)
2. What is your job title? (*short answer*)
3. Please describe what you do for work. (*long answer*)
4. How long have you been working in your field? (*multiple choice*)
5. What areas do you consider to be your expertise? (*checkboxes*)
6. Would you be willing to participate in a 60 minute interview? If so, please leave your preferred contact details (email or mobile number). (*short answer*)

5. Study Objectives

Our team will be conducting hour-long **semi-structured interviews** with 6–8 participants who fit the above-outlined criteria. From these sessions we hope to glean the low-level experiences creators have, accompanied by specific examples they provide, which will allow us to recognize

patterns (e.g. shared struggles and shared solution strategies) felt among multiple creators. This will allow us to pinpoint a narrow problem space to design for.

Our team will also be conducting 2–4 **subject matter expert interviews** with participants who fit the above-outlined criteria. From these sessions we hope to glean some of the overarching problems creators face when balancing their core work with supporting tasks, as well as popular solution strategies. Subject matter experts will be able to uncover trends from their time working directly with creators, or as a creator themselves. The interviews will allow us to tailor our in-depth interview questions to more accurately reflect the landscape creators face.

Lastly, our team will be conducting a **photo diary study** with a subset of our interview participants. Our ideal target is 6, but this number is subject to change depending on participant availability. From these sessions we hope to get more context around our participants' workflows, specifically a concrete visual representation around what their pain points may be. This study will be especially helpful for us as we are not able to employ a more direct observational method, but will still be able to derive similar benefits without needing to be directly involved in the participants' workday.

6. Study Guides

Subject Matter Expert Interview Questions [1 hour]

Intro [2 mins]

Hi! My name is _____. We're conducting research to better understand independent creators and how they operate. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

Before we start, I wanted to run you through some logistics.

First, this is a university run study, and your identity will not be shared outside of my team. All personal data will be deleted once the project finishes.

We are here to understand your experiences and perceptions, so there are no right or wrong answers to our questions. You can stop at any time. Does that sound okay to you?

We discussed this in advance, but I wanted to confirm again, are you comfortable with me recording our conversation? My teammate _____ will also be taking some brief notes throughout.

We just sent you a consent form in the Zoom chat. Please take the time to give it a read and then type your name below if you agree to the terms provided.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Ok! Let's get started.

Interview [58 mins]

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? [5 mins]

- a. [If they are content creators] who is the target audience of your content?
 - b. What do you hope to achieve with the work that you do?
2. What are some of the tasks that are outside of creators' core responsibilities that they have to do to support their work? [15 mins]
 - a. How do they know which supporting tasks they have to be doing?
 - b. What are some of the more interesting or engaging supporting tasks?
 - c. What are some tedious ones?
3. How do creators overcome their supporting tasks? [15 mins]
 - a. What are the most popular tools used to manage and complete these tasks?
 - b. Who do creators engage with to complete these tasks? Teammates? Third party groups?
 - c. How does a creator measure success after completing one of these tasks?
4. What kinds of obstacles get in the way of a creator accomplishing a supporting task? [10 mins]
 - a. What are the big outside factors that take creators away from their creative work? (e.g. full-time job, children)
 - b. What is a creators' course of action when obstacles appear to be out of their expertise, or not immediately outsourceable?
5. What's the biggest mistake a creator can make when handling supporting tasks? [8 mins]
 - a. What's the consequence of failure in this industry?
6. How do you think creators' would restructure their team and workflow if given unlimited resources to do so? [5 mins]
 - a. Do you think the industry as-is allows creators to reach their full potential?

Conclusion [0 Mins]

Thank you for your participation in the study! [If they are selected for the photo study: We will contact you shortly after with an email detailing a photo study we would like for you to participate in for the course of the following week]. We will also compensate you shortly with a \$20 amazon gift card. We'd like to verify the preferred email address you'd like the virtual card to be sent to. [Verify] Thank you and take care!

In-Depth Interview Questions [1 hour]

Intro [2 mins]

Hi! My name is _____. We're conducting research to better understand the work surrounding your creative project. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

Before we start, I wanted to run you through some logistics.

First, this is a university run study, and your identity will not be shared outside of my team. All personal data will be deleted once the project finishes.

We are here to understand your experiences and perceptions, so there are no right or wrong answers to our questions. You can stop at any time. Does that sound okay to you?

We discussed this in advance, but I wanted to confirm again, are you comfortable with me recording our conversation? My teammate _____ will also be taking some brief notes throughout.

We just sent you a consent form in the Zoom chat. Please take the time to give it a read and then type your name below if you agree to the terms provided.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Ok! Let's get started.

Interview [58 mins]

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? What project are you working on right now? [5 mins]
 - a. What kind of work do you do on this project that you consider to be core creative work?
 - b. What's your team size?
 - c. How much time per week do you get to work on your project?
2. What are some of the tasks that are outside of your core responsibilities that you have to do to support your work? [8 min]
 - a. How did you know that you had to do those supporting tasks?
 - b. Which supporting tasks do you enjoy doing?
 - c. Which supporting tasks frustrate you the most?
3. ACTIVITY [20 mins]
 - a. https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVO5c2klE=
 - b. We'll now ask you to think back on some of the tasks that I just asked you about. We would like you to do an activity where you write the top supporting tasks you manage on the teal stickies of the miro board we've sent over to you, and then answer the questions asked in the black stickies of the table. Don't worry about filling up all the stickies, and feel free to copy and paste more if you have more to say. We'll do a 3-minute timer for each row of questions. As you work, we'd like you to provide some commentary to your answers to give us a better idea of what you're providing. Feel free to ask clarifying questions along the way. Are we good to begin?
 - c. Who or what else provides additional support for your creative work? Family or friends, for example? [2 mins]
4. What kinds of obstacles got in the way of you accomplishing those supporting tasks? [10 mins]
 - a. Do you have any outside responsibilities, like a full time job, or children?
 - b. What is your course of action when obstacles appear to be out of your expertise to overcome?
5. In a perfect world, what would the ideal balance be between core creative work and supporting tasks? [8 mins]
 - a. If you had the opportunity to, would you remove supporting tasks from your project altogether if they were handled successfully?
6. How does being an independent creator impact your work? [versus being part of a larger corporation as a in-house creator] [5 mins]
 - a. Overall, is the impact positive or negative?
 - b. What changes would you make to your team size or make-up, if any?

Conclusion [0 Mins]

Thank you for your participation in the study! [If they are selected for the photo study: We will contact you shortly after with an email detailing a photo study we would like for you to participate in for the course of the following week]. We will also compensate you shortly with a \$20 amazon gift card. We'd like to verify the preferred email address you'd like the virtual card to be sent to. [Verify] Thank you and take care!

6.1 Consent Form

What this study is about

The purpose of this study is to understand how independent creatives tackle supporting work they have to take care of. Your participation in this study will help us make improvements to the overall work experience of independent creatives.

Your participation in this study is voluntary

You can take a break at any time; just tell the researcher if you need a break. You can also decline to answer any question, and you can leave at any time without giving a reason.

Information we want to collect

We will ask you some questions about your day to day work, steps you need to do for each task, and your other responsibilities, and we will ask you to show us the tools and methods that you use to tackle those tasks. We will record the session and we will take notes to record your comments and actions.

How we ensure your privacy

Other people involved in the design of the product may watch the recording of your session in the future. These recordings will be treated as confidential and will not be shared outside our team. We may publish research reports that include your comments and actions, but your data will be anonymized. This means your name and identity will not be linked in our research reports to anything you say or do.

How we compensate you

You will be provided with a **\$20 Amazon Gift Card** for your participation in this research. It will be sent to the email address you provided in the original survey.

Your consent

Please sign this form showing that you consent to us collecting these data.

I give my consent (please tick all that apply):

- ☐ For people to observe me during the research.
- ☐ For the session to be recorded.
- ☐ For people on the design team to watch the recording in the future.

Full name

Signature

Date

If you want to withdraw your consent in the future, contact the person named below who will destroy any personal data we hold about you (such as the recordings).

6.2 Photo Diary

Background

Thank you for your participation in our research study. The next stage involves a photo diary, in which we will ask you to take a photo of something and send us a text message describing it. The specific instructions are listed below. This study will take place over the course of a work week: from Monday, May 9 – Friday, May 13. We will send you a friendly reminder text in the afternoon of each study day. Our team is looking forward to your participation!

Instructions

The next time you begin working on your project:

1. Send us a photo of a supporting task that is keeping you from tackling your core creative work.
2. Send us a text message describing how you feel about doing that task, and why you took that particular photo.

Please text this number: (978) 885–6441 (or (508) 918-5855 *[if Dominic emailing]*)

There is no expectation that you provide daily contributions to this study. Please feel free to work on your project at your natural cadence.

Privacy

Your images and responses will be collected and analyzed by our internal team members. We may quote your responses in our study, but they will be anonymized and no part of your identity will be shared with anyone outside of our immediate team.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, feel free to contact:

Audrey
(978) 885–6441
aferna11@uw.edu

7. Checklist

For each **In-Depth Interview** and **Subject Matter Expert Interview**:

- ☐ Introductory email to schedule a time and inform the participant of our
- ☐ Signed **Consent Form**
- ☐ 2 x In-Depth **Interview Guide** (appears above)

- ☐ 1 copy for the interviewer's reference
- ☐ 1 copy for the note-taker to take notes
- ☐ Interviews scheduled using **Google Calendar**
- ☐ The interviews will be held virtually on **Zoom**
- ☐ A **notetaker** will be present for the interviews
- ☐ **Otter.ai** for transcripts
- ☐ Compensation
- ☐ **Thank you messages** for after the interview

For each **Photo Study**:

- ☐ Instruction Guide
- ☐ Google Drive folder for compiling artifacts
- ☐ Device to send text reminders and receive study submissions