

# How to Get Your Game Noticed

## Search Engine Optimization for Itch

or Don't Leave Bulls on the Table.

Version 1.0

by MinoAnon.



When a content producer is making a game or writing a story, he or she usually has a target audience in mind. This guide is about making sure that your audience will find and play your gay visual novel Itch.io, which as of lately has emerged as the central place for distributing them in the West. That means lots of people seeing and downloading your game. Good shit, right?

Through this document I will **assume** you are putting in the effort to make a good VN. I won't go in detail on how to do that, this here is all about search engine/platform optimization.

If that pitch wasn't enough, here's why you should care about this:

- It gets you more players.
- If your game is being sold, that's more money.
- If you are running a Patreon then that's more people who might start donating.
- Looking at the download statistics go up unleashes the good chemicals in your brain.
- It's why we create games, I guess, so people can enjoy them.
- I don't fucking know.

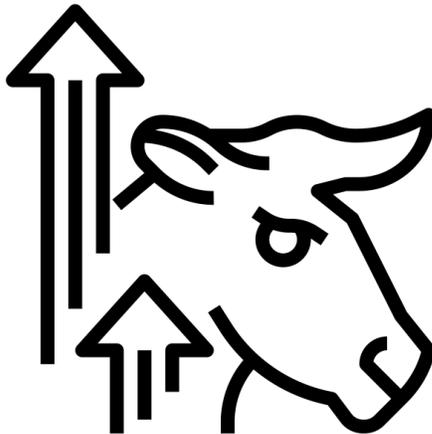
## About Minotaur Hotel

[Minotaur Hotel](#) is a visual novel being developed by a team of mostly anonymous collaborators collectively called Minoh Workshop. We are a non-commercial group and Minotaur Hotel itself is licensed under a Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution License, making it a Free Cultural Good.

We have a compromise with sharing the knowledge we acquired with other developers of all walks of life. In this sense we stick to a lot of open source principles — we are in favor of free access to knowledge.

Hopefully this guide will be valuable to you, developer or aspiring developer. It is our wish that others are given the tools to climb up and find a measure of success.

If you would like to retribute, please consider [checking out our game](#) and follow us on Itch. And if you appreciate our work, **we would be happy if you would help us with a 5-star review — each and every one helps.**



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Naming Your Game</b>	<b>4</b>
Picking Your Game's URL	5
<b>Classification</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Mac, Linux and Android Builds</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Cover Art</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Should my Game be Tagged as NSFW?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Tags</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Related Games</b>	<b>18</b>
The Nerus and Killigan's Treasure Cases	20
<b>Reading the Data About Your Game</b>	<b>21</b>
Impressions	22
CTR	23
The Tennis Ace Case	24
The Minotaur Hotel and Nerus Cases	25
<b>Ratings</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Followers</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>DevLogs</b>	<b>30</b>

## Introduction

Again, let me rephrase a thing I wrote on the first page: **I am assuming you are doing your part to make a good or great game.**

You see, I don't like seeing good projects going to waste, which sadly happens far too often. I've had too many of my own projects fail because of bad marketing work, so this made me aware of its importance. A decent marketing setup can boost a worthwhile game to a point of commercial feasibility.

This document, hopefully, will:

- help blossoming projects find an audience, so they can keep growing, and
- help established projects squeeze out a little bit more success by polishing their distribution/marketing.

For the purposes of this document, "the algorithm" is the shorthand for whatever technologies Itch uses to recommend content to the player base. What we as game developers want is for the algorithm to offer our games precisely to the audience that will enjoy it.

For that, we must play along and set up your game in a way that the algorithm will successfully recommend it to people. It's a 2-player game; we are trying to communicate with this machine which was designed to help us and the players.

Now that I said what we are gonna do, here is what we are *not* going to do in this document:

- Teach you how to make a good game.
- Teach you how to make a good-looking Itch.io page.

Why? Because I'm not particularly good with designing good-looking things and I have the decency not to label myself as an authority of good game development.

Are we good? Let's start.

## Naming Your Game

Ideally, a game's name should:

- Be memorable.
  - Most Western Gay visual novels are released early on as a 0.1 build and go through more than a dozen major updates before completion. This means your players should return to your game's page regularly -- so it's important they remember the game's name.
- Be somewhat unique.
  - After a few months you will start receiving page views from search engines (Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo). People who played your game will return to it via search engines, and those who learn from word of mouth will do the same. If your game's name is too common then you lose part of this source of page views.
- Convey relevant information about the game's content.
  - That is the tip most writers know by nature. You want a title that makes sense.
- Sound good.
  - Say your game's name out loud a dozen times. It should be easy to say it clearly. It shouldn't be a tongue-twister.

Not trying to toot our own horn, but Minotaur Hotel is a good name. It's memorable and somewhat unique (even if there's seemingly a Doctor Who episode with that name). It conveys the setting for the game (a hotel) and that there's a minotaur (our single dateable character.) It's easy to say out loud, too, and can be shortened to Mino Hotel, Minoh or MH.

Sometimes you can't get all those guidelines into a single name. A great example for this is Echo Team's *Adastra* -- it's memorable, sounds great, it conveys something about the mix of Roman and Sci-Fi setting, it's unique... Or, at least, it **was** unique until

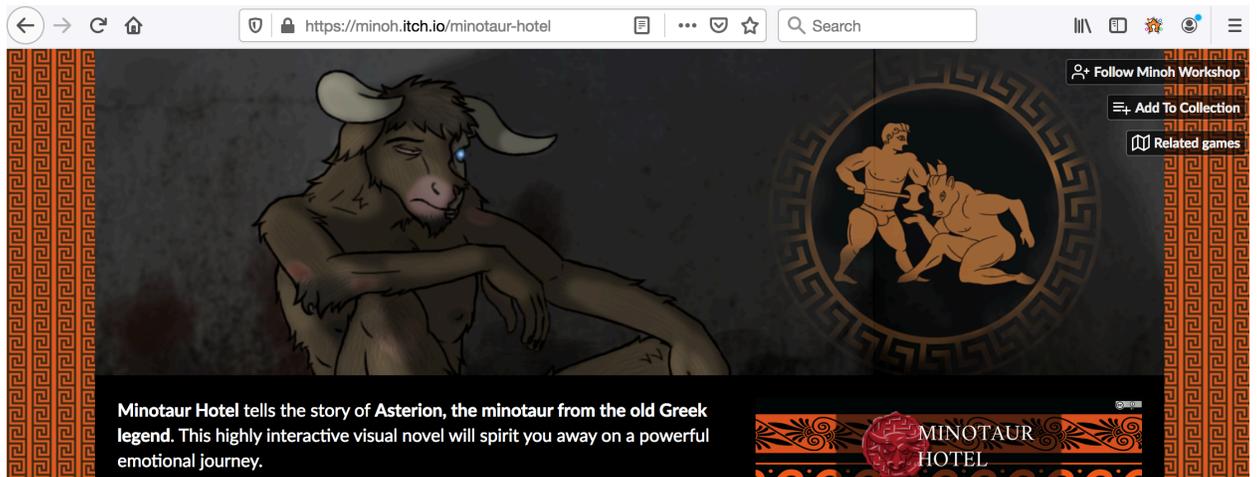
[Brad Pitt's Ad Astra movie](#) came along. That's a pity, it will make it harder for players to search for the game online, but certainly it won't be an obstacle for its success.

## Picking Your Game's URL

The URL is the web address which takes players to your game's page. People don't often care about it since no one has to remember it, but it doesn't hurt to give it some thought.

As a rule of thumb, you shouldn't make it anymore complicated than it has to be.

Let's take a look at how we do at on Minotaur Hotel, shall we?



Our URL is **<https://minoh.itch.io/minotaur-hotel>**

Let's break this thing down. These are the four "elements" here.

- **https://**
  - Ignore this one, it only means your connection is secure (it's using secure https)
- **minoh**
  - This is based on your username. This element should be your or your studio's/group's name. **Don't put your game's name here.**

- **.itch.io**
  - The platform's domain name. Nothing you can do about it.
- **/minotaur-hotel**
  - Your game's name.

You can pick your username and URL by going into Account settings.

**Account settings**

BASICS	
<b>Profile</b>	<b>Profile</b>
Password	<b>Username</b> – Used to log into your account and for your page URL Minoh <a href="#">Change my username/URL</a>
Email addresses	<b>URL</b> – The public URL for your account https://minoh.itch.io
Two factor auth	<b>Profile image</b> – Shown next to your name when you take an action on the site (square dimensions)  <a href="#">Replace image</a> <a href="#">Remove image</a>
PAYMENT	
Credit cards	
Billing address	
PUBLISHER	<b>Display name</b> – Name to be shown in place of your username, leave blank to default to username <input type="text" value="Minoh Workshop"/>
Get started	
Support email	

Again, make sure it's either a name that represents you or your group. Try to make it short and easy to remember. This defines what shows up before itch.io. Now, what if you want to change

When you are setting up a new game on Itch you can pick its name and URL. You can also change it if you feel so inclined, just click on Edit Game while on its dev page. Here's what it looks like:

Title

Minotaur Hotel

Project URL

<https://minoh.itch.io/minotaur-hotel>

Short description or tagline

Shown when we link to your project. Avoid duplicating your project's title

Meet the minotaur and manage a magical hotel in this 18+ visual novel.

The lessons you should carry from this topic are simple:

- Don't pick your game's name as your username, that's confusing. If you ever decide to publish a second game it will be even more so.
- Don't make it needlessly complicated. Avoid long, difficult to type and remember names. If your game has a long name then use a shortened version of it for the URL.

## Classification

### Classification

What are you uploading?

Games – A piece of software you can play | ▲

---

Games – A piece of software you can play

Game assets – Graphics, fonts, music, sounds one may combine into something else

Game mods – An alteration of the content of a game

Physical games – One you can play without devices (e.g. board game, print & play)

Soundtracks – A collection of music

Tools – A software utility

Comics – A story told through drawings

Books – A story told through words

Other

A project's classification refers to what it is. Is it a comic book, a pack of assets, a game, etc.

Now, you may think to yourself: is a visual novel a game? Does it have fail states, is it interactive? Are kinetic VNs not games by virtue of not having choices?

That is all very cool and all for academic debate, but I'll be straightforward here. For the purposes of publishing your game on Itch.io, visual novels are games. Why? Because if you pick anything else the algorithm will isolate your project and you won't get players. It's very simple. Picking anything but "Game" is suicide. **Just trust me on this one.**

## Mac, Linux and Android Builds

What's the main platform where people play visual novels? When we started work on Minotaur Hotel we thought it was Windows, but turns out Android is really up there too. By the time we figured that out we had already implemented tons of custom UI elements which made porting to Android a non-trivial task.

If you are using the standard ren'py UI, however, then porting to Android is a somewhat simple affair, and I recommend you do it if possible. Below you will find some of our own data.

File ▾	Platforms	Downloads ▾	Uploaded at ▾
MinotaurHotel0.2.5.apk		1,284	🕒 14 days ago
MinotaurHotel-0.2.5-pc.zip		1,253	🕒 14 days ago
MinotaurHotel-0.2.5-mac.zip		118	🕒 14 days ago
MinotaurHotel-0.2.5-linux.tar.bz2		38	🕒 14 days ago
MinotaurHotel-0.2-pc.zip		5,002	🕒 3 months ago
MinotaurHotel-0.2-mac.zip		390	🕒 3 months ago
MinotaurHotel-0.2-linux.tar.bz2		149	🕒 3 months ago
MinotaurHotel-0.1-pc.zip		3,517	🕒 6 months ago
MinotaurHotel-0.1-mac.zip		354	🕒 6 months ago
MinotaurHotel-0.1-linux.tar.bz2		303	🕒 6 months ago

Releasing the Android build also increased our exposure in the platform. Lots of people specifically look for Android games, visual novels in particular, because it's a nice distraction in public transport and during work breaks.

You probably noticed, however, that Mac and Linux numbers are really down there, at most in the 10% range of what the Windows numbers are. This might convey to you that it's not worth it releasing these builds, but I would argue that the extra effort associated with them is so small — why would you *not* do it? Don't stop your players

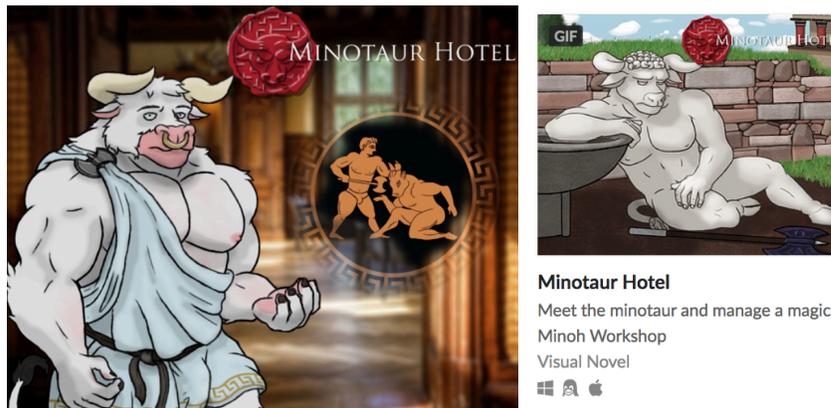
from enjoying your game. I also have a *hunch* that Itch might show a multi-platform game more often on the platform, and that's always good.

Another point here. It may be anecdotal, but I know for a fact of a handful of Mac and Linux players who were grateful enough **because we bothered to include them** that they went on to rate the game very highly. As you will see up ahead, ratings play an important role on Itch and **it's wise to make it as easy as possible for your players to enjoy your game**. As far as VNs go we are privileged in this regard because compiling Linux and Mac is trivial, it only takes a couple extra minutes. **Since it's so easy and quick, even if only 1 player downloads the Linux/Mac build it is arguably still worth it.**

## Cover Art

Quite often, VN devs leave the cover art to the last possible minute. It is common to see covers that amount to an in-game CG or a sprite + background + logo image.

It is understandable. We did it ourselves when we first published *Minotaur Hotel*. But it's very suboptimal. Here's our first cover art and current thumbnail side by side.



Keeping in mind this guide is tailored for devs making gay visual novels, here are a few pointers you should keep in mind while making your cover art.

- Itch supports gifs for covers. **It is extremely advantageous that you use a gif. I cannot overstate this. It is absolutely worth the trouble.** But it's understandable if you don't do it when you are just starting out, since you might not have an artist to do it. This can be chalked up as an improvement you can make later down the line (but keep in mind the earlier you do it, the better.)
- Make sure your cover art is eye-catching. Some devs choose to use sexy but not explicit images. I believe that is helpful, but not necessary. You can do well without them if you are savvy. **As a rule a of thumb I believe it's important to show your characters in a captivating way, aim for that.**

Here's an example:



### **Adastra**

To the Stars  
EchoProject  
Visual Novel



Adastra's cover art isn't explicit or even suggestive, but it clearly shows one of its main characters, Amicus, "looking directly at the player." It's captivating, eye-catching and when coupled with the font style and the roman column gives some valuable hints for what's the story is about. All of that without a background! This is a very good cover art.

- Building on the previous point, the cover allows you to convey a bit about the game's atmosphere. You can foreshadow an important plot point, convey a character trait, communicate the general atmosphere or genre you are going for. I would say that is a good, tasteful tool you should use if possible.

If you want a more in-depth breakdown of the importance of a good cover art, scroll down to the CTR topic and the associated case studies.

## Should my Game be Tagged as NSFW?

Short answer:

If your game **already** has adult content (nudity, sex, etc), then yes.

If your game **will have** adult content, but doesn't **yet**, then no. You should tag it as NSFW when you release a build with said NSFW content.

Why is that, you may ask?

It's because Itch hides adult content if you are not logged in. Less people will see your game.

On the other hand, if you do tag your game as NSFW that also brings its own bonus -- some people specifically search for NSFW content! That's why I gave that short answer. **If you can start off as SFW and only transition to NSFW later, that's probably the optimal scenario.**

### How can you tag your game as NSFW, you ask?

Go to your Dashboard, pick the game you want to tag and go on Metadata. That's to the right of the Devlog tab. Scroll down, it's at the bottom of the page.

### But what if you already tagged your game as NSFW?

If you can't go back and change, don't worry. It's not the end of the world. You'll get a good number of clicks from the NSFW pages. Your project won't go through any hardships because of it. In fact, let's take a look at some data.

Referrer	Visits
<a href="https://itch.io/games/nsfw/platform-android">https://itch.io/games/nsfw/platform-android</a>	1,450
<a href="https://itch.io/games/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	1,117
<a href="https://www.google.com/">https://www.google.com/</a>	842
<a href="https://itch.io/">https://itch.io/</a>	593
<a href="https://itch.io/games/nsfw">https://itch.io/games/nsfw</a>	524
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	496

Perhaps unsurprisingly a significant chunk of our pageviews come from people looking specifically for NSFW content. So if you prematurely tagged your game as NSFW that's not really an issue, don't worry about it.

As another final point on this matter, I would personally recommend you do not post explicit content on your game's page... Not because it doesn't help, mind you. It's a matter of **class**. Itch.io helps us a lot as a platform and doesn't charge for it, but keep in mind it's meant for people of all ages. So let's do our best to not show cock, tits and ass in it, yes? It's good to have a community-like spirit and act in favor of the platform which houses our games.

# Tags

Tags are perhaps one of the most crucial elements to making sure your game performs well on Itch. Nearly every single other way of improving its performance hinges on an adequate selection of tags.

Let's take a look at some numbers.

Incoming visits from other sites over the past 30 days

**By URL**    By website/domain    Graph by day...

Referrer	Visits
<a href="https://itch.io/games/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	1,132
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	618
<a href="https://itch.io/c/423258/bara-games">https://itch.io/c/423258/bara-games</a>	510
<a href="https://t.co/">https://t.co/</a> (Twitter)	471
<a href="https://itch.io/">https://itch.io/</a>	371
<a href="https://itch.io/queue/c/423258/bara-games?game_id=479103">https://itch.io/queue/c/423258/bara-games?game_id=479103</a>	279
<a href="https://itch.io/games/nsfw">https://itch.io/games/nsfw</a>	276
<a href="https://www.google.com/">https://www.google.com/</a>	205
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-lgbt">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-lgbt</a>	204
<a href="https://itch.io/c/176560/visual-novels">https://itch.io/c/176560/visual-novels</a>	138
<a href="https://itch.io/games-like/305620/lustful-desires">https://itch.io/games-like/305620/lustful-desires</a>	127
<a href="https://itch.io/games/newest/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/newest/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	123
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-interactive-fiction">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-interactive-fiction</a>	121
<a href="https://itch.io/games/genre-visual-novel/nsfw">https://itch.io/games/genre-visual-novel/nsfw</a>	98
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw</a>	96
<a href="https://itch.io/queue/c/176560/visual-novels?game_id=479103">https://itch.io/queue/c/176560/visual-novels?game_id=479103</a>	96
<a href="https://itch.io/games/new-and-popular/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/new-and-popular/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	86
<a href="https://hiddenwall.itch.io/kingsguard?download">https://hiddenwall.itch.io/kingsguard?download</a>	70
<a href="https://itch.io/my-feed">https://itch.io/my-feed</a>	68
<a href="https://itch.io/my-collections">https://itch.io/my-collections</a>	63

This is an old screencap of Minotaur Hotel's referrals. At that time we were having about 7.000 page views per month -- and nearly 2/7 of that came from the gay tag alone. It's a total game-changer.

As you can see, tags can make or break a project. I'll summarize a few of the main points.

- You can use up to 10 tags per game and you should use all of them.
- Itch has a list of recommended tags. As much as possible you should pick from those -- tags outside that list have little to no effect.
- Ask yourself what tags your target audience would search for.

For this document, I am assuming you are currently developing or aspiring to develop a game with gay content, more specifically a visual novel. Your game possibly fits the bill for "bara", "furry" or "yaoi" content. This is what you should do.

- The "Gay" tag is the single best tag for your game, and it will bring you hundreds of page views every month.
- "LGBT" and "Interactive Fiction" are decent tags.
- "Yaoi", "Furry" and "Bara" do not necessarily bring in hundreds of views but they are great to group your game with similar projects. Pick whichever one(s) apply to your project.
- "Romance" and "Dating Sim" are ok, assuming they are applicable to your project.
- You should probably add some tags relating to the game's genre/atmosphere (Mystery/Horror/Suspense/etc.)
- This isn't a definitive list. Pick what fits best for your project. You might want to tinker around with other tags to see what both fits your game and brings in players for your specific content. But do keep in mind you want to group your game with other projects with a similar target audience and you want tags which bring in people.

If you want a richer breakdown of this topic, check this devlog where we [describe the process of lobbying for the creation of a "Bara" and "Furry" tags](#) and this one where we [follow up on its impact by comparing traffic referrals from multiple projects](#).

If your game does not fit those handles, then... I recommend you check what tags are used by the games similar to yours.

The process of picking the right tags can take a while. You should keep watch over your traffic referrals, take note of which tags are bringing you views. The first few weeks from a project offer invaluable data -- only the top 20 referrers show up on your list, the first weeks will be the only moment where for sure you'll see if small referrers are working at all.

After a while, you'll know which are your best tags. Do know, however, that "silent tags" can play a pivotal role in making sure your game does well. That is the subject of the next topic.

## Related Games

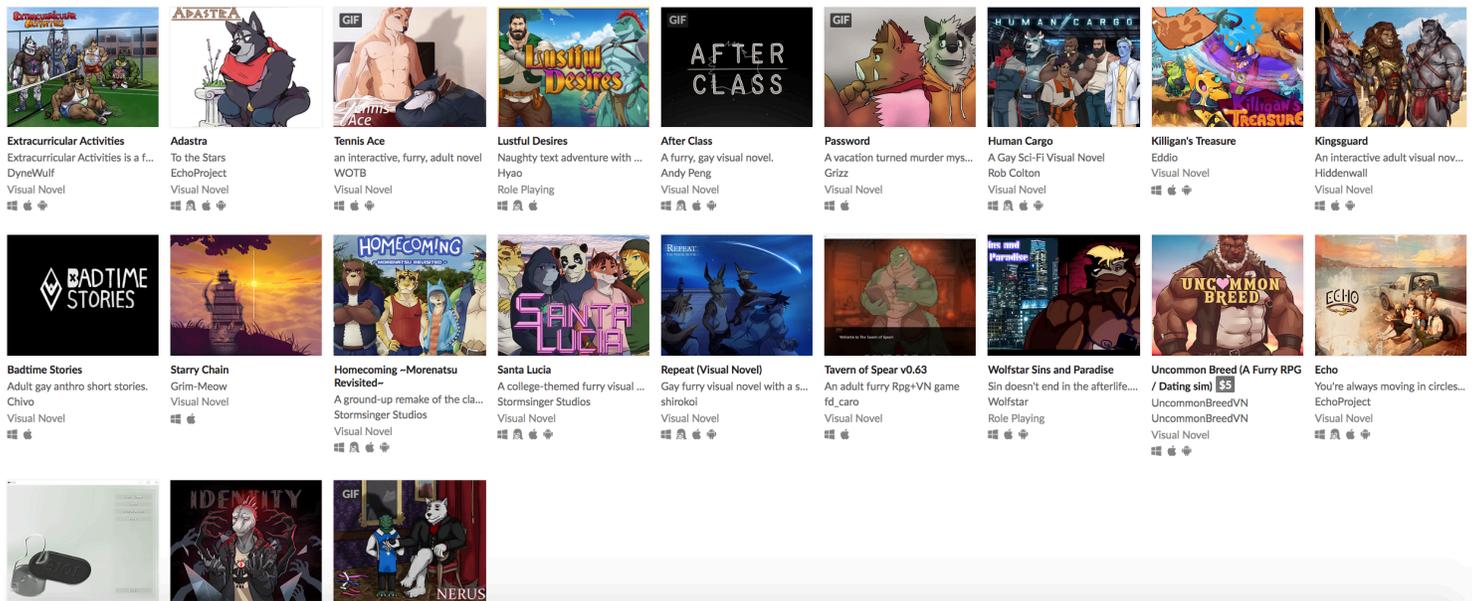
On the top right corner of a game's page you will a link to "Related Games."

This is Minotaur Hotel's Related Games page as of February 2020.

### Recommendations for **Minotaur Hotel**

Related tags: [Visual Novel](#) [Bara](#) [Dating Sim](#) [Furry](#) [Gay](#) [Interactive Fiction](#) [LGBT](#) [Mystery](#) [mythology](#) [Romance](#)

Related platforms: [Windows](#) [macOS](#) [Linux](#)



**Extracurricular Activities**  
Extracurricular Activities is a f...  
DyneWulf  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Adastra**  
To the Stars  
EchoProject  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Tennis Ace**  
an interactive, furry, adult novel  
WOTB  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Lustful Desires**  
Naughty text adventure with ...  
Hyao  
Role Playing  
Windows macOS Linux

**After Class**  
A furry, gay visual novel.  
Andy Peng  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Password**  
A vacation turned murder mys...  
Grizz  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Human Cargo**  
A Gay Sci-Fi Visual Novel  
Rob Colton  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Killigan's Treasure**  
Eddio  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Kingsguard**  
An interactive adult visual nov...  
Hiddenwall  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Badtime Stories**  
Adult gay anthro short stories.  
Chivo  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Starry Chain**  
Grim-Meow  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Homecoming - Morenatsu Revisited-**  
A ground-up remake of the cla...  
Stormsinger Studios  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Santa Lucia**  
A college-themed furry visual ...  
Stormsinger Studios  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Repeat (Visual Novel)**  
Gay furry visual novel with a s...  
shirokoi  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Tavern of Spear v0.63**  
An adult furry Rpg+VN game  
fd\_caro  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Wolfstar Sins and Paradise**  
Sin doesn't end in the afterlife...  
Wolfstar  
Role Playing  
Windows macOS Linux

**Uncommon Breed (A Furry RPG / Dating sim)** \$5  
UncommonBreedVN  
UncommonBreedVN  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

**Echo**  
You're always moving in circles...  
EchoProject  
Visual Novel  
Windows macOS Linux

How does Itch figure out which games are "similar" to Minotaur Hotel? I can't know for sure, but I believe it checks if they have tags in common, if they are grouped together in the same collections often, if a large number of users play both of them, if the same people rate two different games similarly, if two games' pages refer to each other, etc.

As you can see this works well enough. There's a lot of overlap between Mino Hotel and those games. But let's take a look at the numbers, shall we?

Referrer	Visits
<a href="https://www.google.com/">https://www.google.com/</a>	580
<a href="https://itch.io/games/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	500
<a href="https://itch.io/">https://itch.io/</a>	414
<a href="https://itch.io/games-like/305620/lustful-desires">https://itch.io/games-like/305620/lustful-desires</a>	301
<a href="https://dynewolf.itch.io/extracurricular-activities?download">https://dynewolf.itch.io/extracurricular-activities?download</a>	259
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-gay">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-gay</a>	252
<a href="https://echoproject.itch.io/adastra">https://echoproject.itch.io/adastra</a>	246
<a href="https://hyao.itch.io/lustful-desires">https://hyao.itch.io/lustful-desires</a>	216
<a href="https://itch.io/my-collections">https://itch.io/my-collections</a>	211
<a href="https://itch.io/games-like/62906/extracurricular-activities">https://itch.io/games-like/62906/extracurricular-activities</a>	191
<a href="https://eddio.itch.io/killigans-treasure">https://eddio.itch.io/killigans-treasure</a>	178
<a href="https://itch.io/c/423258/bara-games">https://itch.io/c/423258/bara-games</a>	171
<a href="https://itch.io/c/680571/bara-yaoi-essentials-gay-fiction-erotica">https://itch.io/c/680571/bara-yaoi-essentials-gay-fiction-erotica</a>	166
<a href="https://fd-caro.itch.io/tavern-of-spear?download">https://fd-caro.itch.io/tavern-of-spear?download</a>	157
<a href="https://itch.io/c/669967/gay-furry-visual-novels">https://itch.io/c/669967/gay-furry-visual-novels</a>	139
<a href="https://itch.io/queue/c/680571/bara-yaoi-essentials-gay-fiction-erotica?game_id=...">https://itch.io/queue/c/680571/bara-yaoi-essentials-gay-fiction-erotica?game_id=...</a>	131
<a href="https://andehp.itch.io/afterclass?download">https://andehp.itch.io/afterclass?download</a>	120
<a href="https://dynewolf.itch.io/extracurricular-activities/download">https://dynewolf.itch.io/extracurricular-activities/download</a>	102
<a href="https://itch.io/games-like/216386/killigans-treasure">https://itch.io/games-like/216386/killigans-treasure</a>	99
<a href="https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-lgbt">https://itch.io/games/free/nsfw/tag-lgbt</a>	96

These are Minotaur Hotel's traffic referrals for February 2020. It tells us that Lustful Desires, Extracurricular Activities, Adastra, Killigan's Treasure and Tavern of Spear referred a sizable number of visitors during the last 30 days. There is surely a number of smaller referrers below -- don't forget Itch only shows us the top 20 referrers for the last 30 days.

On the previous topic I mentioned "**silent tags.**" Those are the tags that don't bring a lot of traffic but have an impact in grouping games together. It's the case for "Furry" and "Bara" -- they don't bring traffic, but they cluster the games. They are important.

While looking for tags you should always keep in mind your target audience. Minotaur Hotel has Bara, Furry and Mystery, but we know we will catch a larger percentage of the Bara and Furry crowd than the Mystery game crowd. If we had to cut a silent tag, it would be Mystery rather than Furry or Bara.

## The Nerus and Killigan's Treasure Cases

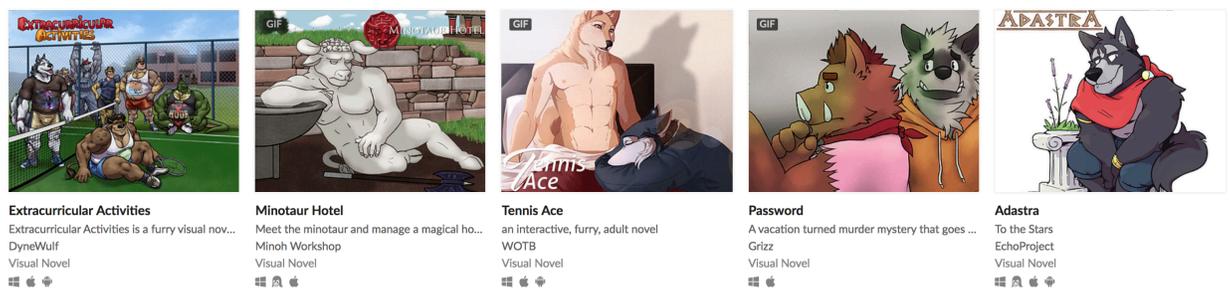
A few months ago I was given the chance to play [Nerus](#) before its release. I liked it a lot and I wanted it to succeed, so we posted a [DevLog reviewing and recommending it](#).

This had an unforeseen, but not undesirable effect.

### Recommendations for [Nerus](#)

Related tags: [Visual Novel](#) [Atmospheric](#) [Bara](#) [Furry](#) [Gay](#) [Horror](#) [Kinetic Novel](#) [LGBT](#) [Mystery](#) [Romance](#) [supernatural](#)

Related platforms: [Windows](#) [macOS](#) [Linux](#)



As you can see in the picture above, Minotaur Hotel became one of the top games in Nerus' Related Games page.

This may seem a small thing, but it points us towards an aspect of the algorithm which could be very healthy for a community of game developers. That is, if your game's page links people to other games this may increase your game's standing in their Related Games page.

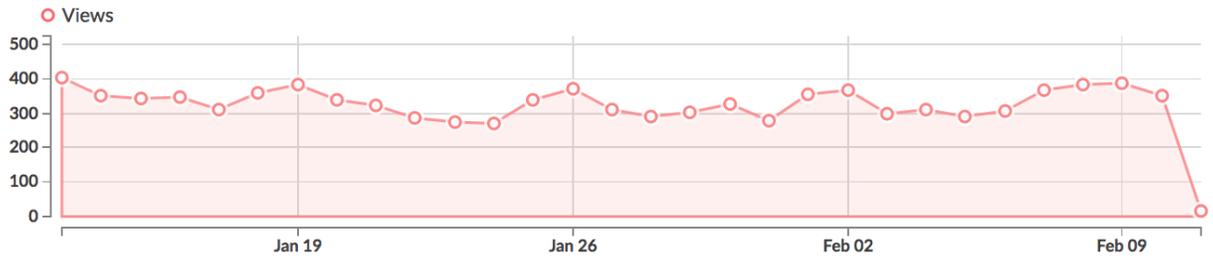
In other words, if you refer traffic to others you will get traffic referred back to you. If you help others, they will help you back.

Later on, while posting the [Walkthrough for our game](#) we mentioned and linked to Killigan's Treasure. While Minotaur Hotel right now stands on the 12th position in KT's Related Games page, scroll back up and you'll see that we get a few hundred clicks from it every month. Again: help others and you'll receive help in return.

## Reading the Data About Your Game

**57.7k** Views    **9,691** Downloads    **84** Ratings    **585** Collections    **33.7k** 7d Impressions    **2.43%** CTR

Daily ▾    From 2020-01-13    To 2020-02-11    Last 30 days ▾



The number of Views, Downloads, Rating and Collections are self-explanatory. People don't often know, however, what Impressions and CTR are.

Impressions is the number of people that were exposed to your game's thumbnail.



### Minotaur Hotel

Meet the minotaur and manage a magic...

Minoh Workshop

Visual Novel



This is our thumbnail. Every time someone is browsing and that is loaded on their page -- that's one impression. On an average week we will have around 35k

Impressions... but only about 2.2k actual pageviews. That's right -- only a comparably small number of people actually click on the thumbnail.

This means only a small percentage **clicks through**. And that's what CTR refers to: **click-through rate**. It's the percentage of times the thumbnail was clicked.

When I look at a project's data, CTR and Impressions are important diagnostics tools. It tells us what is going wrong, if anything at all.

## Impressions

When Impressions are low (below 15k), it usually means your game isn't enjoying a high standing in the algorithm. You probably need to improve how you use the platform, but also it may be a case that your game isn't engaging too many people.

There is a number of ways to increase the number of Impressions. We won't go into details, but here are a few options.

- Get more people to download your game.
- Increase the average rating of your game.
- Raise the number of ratings.
- Increase the number of people following your profile on Itch.
- Have lots of activity in your game's page -- people commenting, for instance.
- Post DevLogs.
- Post new builds.

## CTR

Realistically, CTR can vary from 0% to 4% or even 5%. It can go very high during your game's release or right after major updates. It will go down with time and reach a stable point.

Here's the standard I use while assessing gay VNs' performances.

- Lower than 1%: bad.
- Between 1% to 2%: acceptable, but hopefully it can be worked up to a better level.
- Between 2% and 3%: good if it's your stable point.
- Above 3%: very good/excellent if it's your stable point. You might temporarily get there after major releases.

Increasing CTR is all about making your thumbnail more attractive. Now, what's a thumbnail again? It's this thing:



### **Minotaur Hotel**

Meet the minotaur and manage a magic...

Minoh Workshop

Visual Novel



What are the pieces of information it conveys?

- Cover art.
- Game's name.
- Game's summary.

- Author's name.
- Genre.
- Operating systems.

If you want to improve your CTR your best bet is tinkering with your cover art. There's a topic about it up above, check it out. I should highlight using a gif for a cover is just straight-up better. But you may also benefit from tinkering with the game's summary.

### The Tennis Ace Case

In November Basket and I talked about this topic. For those of you unaware, Basket is responsible for [Tennis Ace](#), one of the highest rated Gay games on Itch. He shared with me some of the data from his project. A piece of information caught my attention.

<b>44.2k</b>	<b>1.16%</b>
7d Impressions	CTR

The number of impressions is good but a 1.16% CTR is way too low for a project which, in theory, is doing so well. There was something wrong.

I made a hunch: I liked Tennis Ace's cover art but I figured it wasn't eye-catching enough, plus Itch prioritizes gif covers. Basket went to work and spliced a few CGs together into a gif. He strategically picked eye-catching CGs and pushed out the new cover alongside an update. Here are the results.

<b>56.3k</b>	<b>2.31%</b>
7d Impressions	CTR

After only two days his CTR had doubled.

---

**83.3k**  
7d Impressions

**4.07%**  
CTR

---

One week afterward it hit its peak, and eventually it stabilized back in the 3% range.

Notice that releasing a new build and a cover art managed to drastically increase the number of impressions as well.

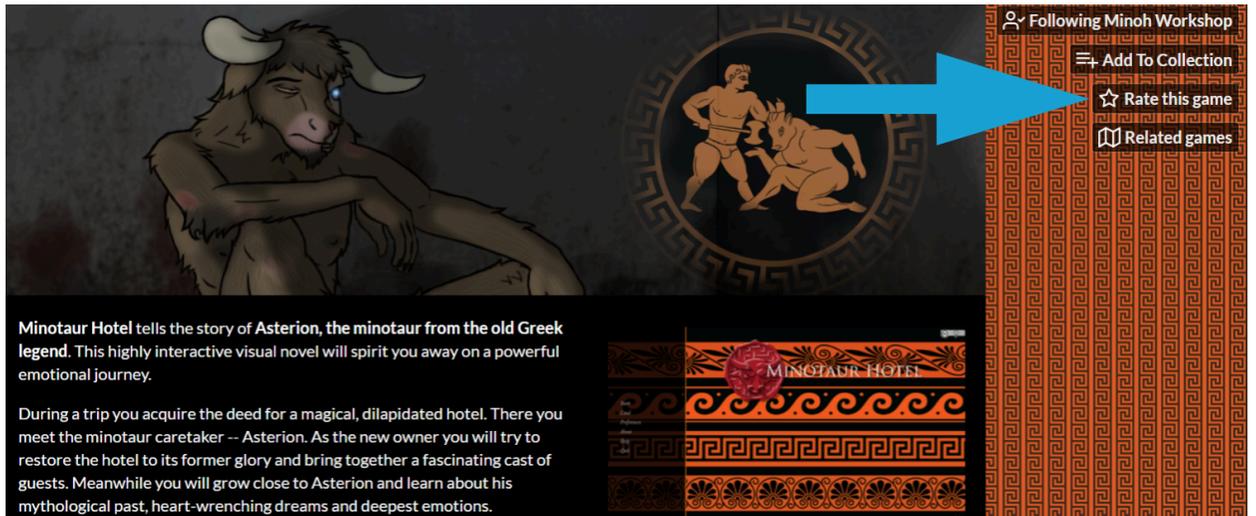
### The Minotaur Hotel and Nerus Cases

We repeated the same experiment with Minotaur Hotel and Nerus. A relevant point is that nanoff drew the covers for both games, so there's that factor in common.

The results were less dramatic than Tennis Ace's, but worthwhile nonetheless. Both projects experienced about a 0.5% to 1% increase in CTR over time. That may not sound like much but it really makes a difference when over a month.

## Ratings

Players can rate your game on a scale of 1 to 5 stars. This is kept somewhat hidden away — the player has to select the little bar I highlighted below.



After clicking on it a window will pop up where they can pick the rating and write a review.

### Rate game

Choose a rating from 1 to 5 stars.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Words about the game — optional

B / - : ≡ ≡ ☰ ≡ 📺 🗨

Save

A game's ratings are almost kept hidden away. If you want to know it, you either have to go to its page, scroll down and click on More Information...

Updated 32 days ago  
Published Sep 07, 2019  
Status **In development**  
Platforms **Windows, macOS, Linux**  
Rating ★★★★★ (84)  
Authors **Minoh Workshop, nanoff**  
Genre **Visual Novel, Interactive Fiction**  
Made with **Ren'Py**  
Tags **Bara, Dating Sim, Furry, Gay, LGBT, minotaur, Mystery, mythology, Romance**

...Or you can browse a tag and order it by Top Rated.

Top rated Games tagged Bara (71 results)

Sort by Popular New & Popular Top sellers **Top rated** Most Recent

Select a tag... Gay + LGBT + Furry + Dating Sim + Romance + Interactive Fiction + Erotic + Yaoi + Visual Novel + Slice Of Life + (View all tags)

Game Title	Developer	Rating	Reviews
Extracurricular Activities	DyneWulf	★★★★★	395
Adastra	EchoProject	★★★★★	212
Human Cargo	Rob Colton	★★★★★	234
Password	Grizz	★★★★★	89
Killigan's Treasure	Eddio	★★★★★	121
WORST DATING SIM	MRGRGR	★★★★★	170
Robin Morningwood Adventure	Grizzly Gamer Studio	★★★★★	186
Straight!?	aaryn.reese	★★★★★	67
Echo	EchoProject	★★★★★	89
Minotaur Hotel	Minoh Workshop	★★★★★	84
Kingsguard	Hiddenwall	★★★★★	70
After Class	Andy Peng	★★★★★	147

All of this might give you the impression that ratings play no significant role. If they did, they wouldn't be so hidden away, would they?

Well, you'd be wrong. Ratings seem to play a key role in increasing the number of times your game will be shown to the players.

Two factors play a role here.

First, it's the average rating for your game. That's a simple enough concept to grasp, it's your total score divided by the number of times it was rated.

This means, however, that you could get a perfect 5.0 average if only a small number of people rated your game. Would that mean your game is better than the juggernaut with 600 ratings at 4.9? Not really.

As you might have guessed, the second factor is the number of reviews. It seems that Itch.io clusters together the games with somewhat similar amounts of reviews. I don't know the details. What we do know is that you want to be rated highly and often.

There's a catch, however. A very big one.

If you check the [average ratings for games with the Gay tag](#) you will find that most of them are somewhere between 4 and 5 stars. Maybe because we are making games for such a loyal and small audience, very often they will rate games 5 stars, and rarely 4 or 3 stars.

Since almost everyone is in this 4 to 5 stars range, we have that

- If a player rates your game with a 5-star, your average will increase, and
- If the player rates it with anything else (4-star to 1-star) it will lower your average.

In other words, anything but a 5-star is bad.

This creates a dilemma. If you just ask people on Twitter to rate your game you'll get an uncomfortably high number of 4-stars and below ratings. Mind you, the people who send those ratings might be extremely well-intentioned — they might be thinking "your game is good but there's room for improvement, you can do it!" while not knowing their review makes things harder.

In summary, soliciting ratings is bad — it will get you mixed results — and it is arguably unethical too. There's no clear solution. Ultimately we have to focus on making good, engaging games that motivate people to rate it. It's harsh, but it's true.

## Followers

When someone follows you on Itch they will be notified of the stuff you do on the platform. Publish a game or an update, write a devlog, make a new collection, rate someone's game, the list goes on. This would perhaps give you the impression that having followers merely means they will be notified, that one follower ultimately equals to one download when you publish the next build.

Well... No. Followers seem to play a much larger role than that.

I do not know the details, but it seems that Follower count plays a similar role to ratings in how it relates to number of Impressions. That is, the more followers you have then the more often your game will be shown to users.

## DevLogs

DevLogs are the forgotten children of this game. Without fault, publishing them has increased Minotaur Hotel's performance on Itch. Most VN-makers only bother with making them when they release new builds of their games, and even then it's an afterthought.

Keep making high quality devlogs. I'm pretty sure they are reviewed one by one by Itch staff — don't even think of trying to abuse the system.

The big hurdle devs seem to face is finding topics to talk about.

- The process of writing for the game.
- Explaining the technical solutions you came up with so other devs can benefit from them.
- Dissecting the criticism you received and explaining how the project's trajectory might be adjusted.
- Showing concept art or assets.

Be creative. Ask yourself what kind of interesting things you are doing. You'd be surprised how often players will read your stuff. In fact, let's see some number, yes?

Status	Post	Published at	Views	Likes	Comments	
DRAFT	<a href="#">Modular Sprites</a>	n/a	5	0	0	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Build 0.2.5 + Android Release</a>	🕒 3 hours ago	264	7	1	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Android Build is in the Works</a>	🕒 33 days ago	604	8	3	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Walkthrough</a>	🕒 39 days ago	1,783	15	13	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Addressing Feedback: How We Are Improving Mino Hotel</a>	🕒 55 days ago	977	13	2	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Reviewing "Nerus"</a>	🕒 68 days ago	1,106	8	0	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Build 0.2 Release</a>	🕒 90 days ago	2,531	21	6	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Follow-up to Furry &amp; Bara: Let's Talk About Game Jams</a>	🕒 91 days ago	1,516	17	2	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Release Date &amp; Final Customization</a>	🕒 Nov 04, 2019	1,536	12	4	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Customization IV: A safe for work peek at Asterion's wardrobe</a>	🕒 Oct 18, 2019	1,535	14	18	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Customization the 3rd: Revengeance</a>	🕒 Oct 13, 2019	1,268	14	10	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">2nd Call for Input and Update on Customizing Asterion</a>	🕒 Oct 08, 2019	1,423	8	21	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Furry and Bara Content on Itch.io: A Story of Data, Algorithms, Reports and Traffic Referrals</a>	🕒 Sep 30, 2019	1,641	17	6	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Call for Input on Customizing Asterion</a>	🕒 Sep 26, 2019	1,280	11	17	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Self-Pruning Menu for Ren'Py VNs</a>	🕒 Sep 20, 2019	404	7	1	<a href="#">Edit</a>
PUBLISHED	<a href="#">Build 0.1: Where we came from and where we are going.</a>	🕒 Sep 08, 2019	793	6	0	<a href="#">Edit</a>

You are seeing that some devlogs are more visited than others. Generally, technical topics don't bring in too much viewership. But that doesn't mean they are any worse than the others, they still give bumps to the number of impressions just the same.

Do note that in this picture I was still working on a draft for a DevLog. It doesn't hurt to write one or two and keep them on hand to boost your stats every once in a while.

Overall, make an effort to write DevLogs, they really pay off, and do so in a way that is more reliable than ratings or follower count. Writing good devlogs relies

completely on you, not on the whims of your readers or the algorithm. Here's a few pointers I find useful:

- When you release a significant content update, **always** write an announcement for it and post as **MAJOR UPDATE**. If you edited old content, point it out in the changelog — **yes, you should make a changelog**. It helps to keep track of changes in the script by feeding them to a separate document as you edit the game (so you don't have to struggle to remember them all when you are about to release a build.)
- Is your artist struggling to get some assets look **just right**? Well, write a devlog about it! **Show what you got and ask people for pointers**. Maybe your players will really surprise you with out-of-the-box solutions you'd never think of.
- Did you stumble on a technical or production hurdle other devs surely will go through? Write about it! Show your solution or ask for input, too. (That's what we are doing here, by the way! Share the knowledge with your fellow devs!)
- Show some behind the scenes stuff! How was that chapter designed? How was the process to create characters or the setting for the game?
- Did you receive constructive criticism and decide to make changes to improve the game? Make a devlog out of it! Show the players you care about their input and that it doesn't go unheard.

## Conclusion

And that's it! This big breakdown should give you all the tools to help your game have a good performance on Itch. But don't get the wrong impression, all this search engine optimization is good for nothing if you aren't getting a product out there that connects with people.

If you would like to retribute, please consider [checking out our game](#) and follow us on Itch. And if you appreciate our work, **we would be happy if you would help us with a 5-star review — each and every one helps**. Now **that** would be a big help!

See you next time!

## Further Credits

[Bull Trend by Template from the Noun Project](#)