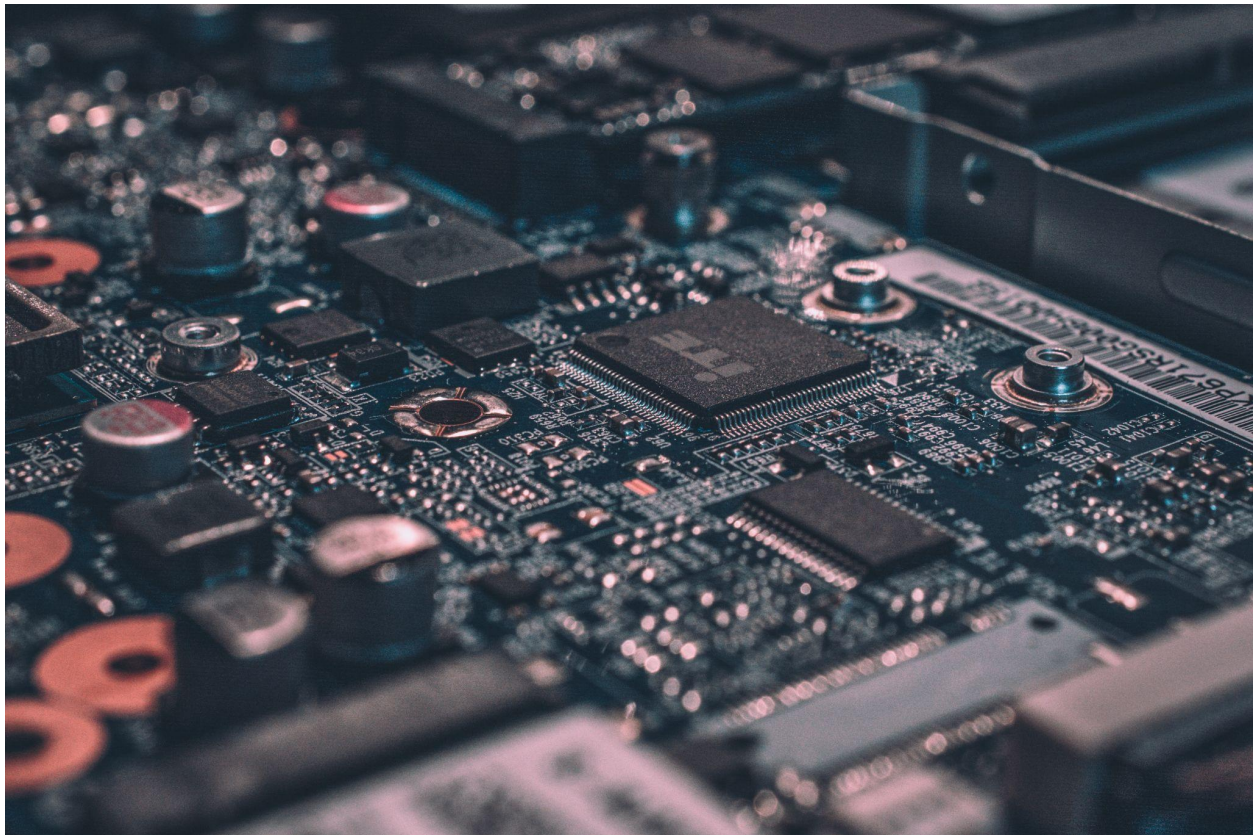


Game Scout #19: How To Price Your Game During Sales Periods

It's time to talk about sales periods, and how you can use them to your advantage as a developer. Because sales are a great opportunity for developers and publishers to promote their games. A sale is the time for that extra push, and for some gaming platforms it comes around regularly enough to make a go of it. But how should you price your game during those sales? As with all marketing and distribution decisions, there are a number of factors to consider before making the decision. This article will guide you through them so that you can make an informed decision, and throw in some tricks of the trade while at it.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/FO7JllwjOtU>

The Choice Is Yours - It Starts Here

We will start with a few facts that will alleviate some of your uncertainties. Firstly, when it comes to sales, the choice is yours. You are not obligated to partake in them, and whether you do or not is fundamentally your decision.

Secondly, there are many opportunities to take part in sales. While you can't knock off 20% off at a moment's notice or give it away for free if you decide that that is the strategy you wish to run with, [Steam allows you to put your game on sale every 8 weeks. So while there are some limitations, there are also many opportunities.](#)

Another thing to know is that sales operate differently from platform to platform. Steam, for instance, has their own system integrated into the infrastructure of their database. Because of this, the outcome of reducing the price of your game differs from case to case.

So the first decision to make here is whether discounting your game fits in with your aims, goals, and your business strategy. If you choose yes, does this plan purport to make profits, and this pays any advances back over time? Each developer makes a decision on this and it depends on their situation, which will be unique to them. In short, is it optimal for you to run sales on your product?

Your Options As A Developer

You're still reading, so presumably your thoughts on that are leaning towards the affirmative. So, let's dispense with a myth. Ready? Here we go. Discounts don't make or break game sales. In fact, many sources claim that a solid strategy and effective marketing efforts are more likely to get people to invest in your game. The discount is the cherry on the cake.

Valve's Tom Giardino once said that "[popular full-price games holding their own on the Top Sellers list during a big sale event. Price cutting isn't a prerequisite or guarantee of success. It's cliché but true that building and supporting a great game is going to be a lot more important than the decision to offer 20% versus 25% off during a sale.](#)" So, if you want it from the horse's mouth, there it is.

Also, many marketers claim that the game should be released with the inevitable discount worked into the strategy ahead of time. So, once the gold master is signed off and you begin working/consulting as to distribution and marketing endeavors, then is the time to factor this decision in. From one perspective, this makes the most sense. But that doesn't mean you can't change your mind.

The Gamers' Perspective

The perspective of the average gamer is always valuable, and guess what? You're in luck. Browse various forums and message boards and you will find that many gamers are more likely to pay full price for indie games on the regular, and generally will only purchase one full-priced AAA studio game every now and again. This is good news for indie developers because it is proof of a consistent and reliable customer-base. Once the season of sales arises, then many gamers will purchase many indie games in a short timeframe. It also means that if they didn't buy your game on its release date, they might be intending to do so during a sale-storm. This applies even if they haven't saved your game in their wishlists.

It was touched on to a degree, but let's go into more depth. Another factor is the variation from platform to platform. For instance, Switch sales seldom occur. This results in gamers being more likely to pay full price for their desired products, because the option for discounts is so rare. In contrast, PC sales periods happen persistently and consistently that one is never far from looming on the horizon. In both instances, you ought to remember that gamers have a lot of patience. If they miss one sales period on PC, they will be happy to wait for the next. The same can apply to Switch sales, but also could mean that Switch gamers are hyper aware of upcoming sales.

Finally, consider the multitudes of gamers who want to be included in the 'buzz' of a game's release. Yes, being in the first wave of gamers who have played the game. This potentially applies to AAA games more than it does to indie releases, but it is there and is certainly operating. Perhaps this applies to younger gamers, or maybe it applies to gamers of all ages, but factor it in. Especially if your research discovers that your target audience are likely to be caught up in such a buzz.

Overall, there are many different types of gamers out there. In fact, many aren't caught up in the 'release-hype'. But as a developer, it is good to cast your net widely. Every marketing decision you make needs to be refined to your target audience, but there is no reason why your target audience shouldn't be wide.

The Strategies

With all that said, let's get into the meat of it. There are a number of popular strategies that developers and publishers follow for the purpose of discounting their game during sales. We will go over each of them in turn. Many of these are popular practices, and the decision is ultimately yours to make, but they are good to use as guidelines.

1: Start High

If you like the idea of taking part in a sale, it is better to know this early in the stages of development. That way, you can factor it into purported net revenue and the like. However, you can make the decision as late as the launch of the gold master candidate. If you release your game at a low price, then it's going to be a steal during the sales. That's why it is good advice to start your pricing higher, so that when it comes down in the sales, the price will still be reasonable.

2: Focus On The Long-Term

Many industry professionals will claim that discounting your game lower for the purpose of gaining more units sold is a short term gain. By doing this, developers are sacrificing profit for sales. But let's build an argument in support of this strategy for a moment. If your main focus is the long-term community-building for your IP in development, it makes sense to sacrifice profits from your first game. Hell, even your first few games. That way, you will build a following that you can monetize later on.

So, aggressive discount pricing could make more sense for you from this perspective. There are many good examples of this. Take Left 4 Dead. The developers who created this game made three more games in the succeeding years and then released all four for \$20. This resulted in a boom of new L4D fans who are certain to have gone on to take an interest in Mike Booth.

But remember that this applies to discount pricing, not overall pricing. [That's a whole other story that we covered in a different article.](#)

3: Pay Attention To Your Competitors

As always, keep in mind what your competitors are up to. If your game is similar to theirs and is discounted differently, this could affect your discount sales. For instance, if you discount your product at a lower price than theirs you might get more sales, and less if you price it higher than

their products. Conversely, buyers who are unaware of both yours and your competitors' products might have the psychological trick where they pay higher prices for a better product.

Once again, [just like with your initial release date you should stand your ground](#) on your decision so that you don't surrender the market to your competitors. The trick is knowing when to do so and when not to.

4: What Kind Of Game Is It?

In the same way that [the initial price of your game should differ depending on whether it is an indie, AA, or AAA game](#), so should the discount price. For instance, the average price of an indie game released on console ranges from free to \$20. This means that if it is priced at its highest average price of \$20, that when it is discounted at 20% its average price will drop to around \$16. From this perspective, the expectation of customers paying for a discounted indie game will be about this.

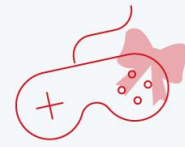
This being the case, you don't want to stray far from the market average for your game category. This cuts both ways, both in terms of going obscenely higher or pricing disproportionately lower. Either strategy can alienate customers from your product, and so should be avoided. There are different reasons for this - already discussed is how a lower price can affect a gamers' perception of the quality of that game. Equally, many games don't want to pay a lot higher than the average.

But try and discount your game in a similar fashion to how other games in your category are discounted.

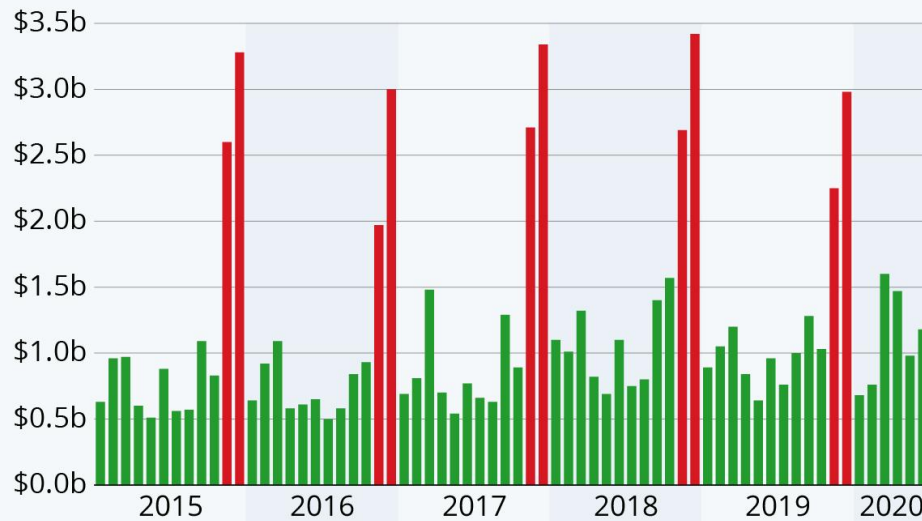
How Discounts Lead To Sales

It has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that sales periods cause a direct increase in the number of sold units. Look at the chart below, See how towards the end of each year, the bars almost reach \$3.5 billion? Yep, those are sales periods all right. Holy...

Video Game Sales Are Extremely Seasonal



Monthly video games industry sales in the United States*



* incl. video games hardware, PC & video games software, accessories and game cards

Source: NPD Group



statista

Take the case of *The Binding Of Isaac* - a terrific indie video game. A top down maze with impossible bosses and an intriguing storyline. Well, according to posts via [Game Developer](#), it sold 5x as many units with a 50% discount, and when it was discounted in the Flash Deal category, its sales multiplied by 60. That is pretty staggering. Yes, it was a reasonably popular game to begin with amongst indie legends. But why not aim high?

There is a trending debate out there that big discounts such as Flash Deal will hurt your bottom line, due entirely to the size of the discounts. But counterbalance that with the figures there, and factor in the exposure aspect. Also, not all developers releasing and promoting their first game are motivated by money. Many of them are in it for the long haul and will take the exposure as a good sign of sales to come down the line. Both mindsets are valid, but figure out which camp you are in (it's not one or the other, you can take a little from column A and a little from column B here) and plan your attack from there.

Lest We Forget...

When it comes to a sales push, it is impossible to know exactly what buyers are going to do ahead of time. All of the factors explored in the article and more are valid, and so a specific discount won't necessarily guarantee success or failure. Remember that your marketing efforts as a whole are what makes the big splash. So, a solid PR campaign, social media push, and of course, [great examples of your game including an amazing trailer and authentic screenshots, are what sell it.](#)

So, What's The Score?

How you discount your game for sales can improve the number of games you sell, which can increase exposure, and promote future products that you develop. It is true that once your game goes live, it doesn't end there. It requires maintenance and tending for the long haul. That is a good thing. It's like tending your garden, and this is one more rose you can grow there. Good luck in those sales. Make sure you support your scene and enjoy a few games as well as promote your own.

Level up! In the next article, [Game Scout covers How To Set Up, Design & Optimize Your Steam Page...](#)

Social Media

LinkedIn/Facebook

Video-game sales are a great time for developers and publishers to promote their games. It's an extra push, and one that comes around regularly enough to make a go of it.

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