

The Indie Launch Playbook

Your 7-Step Checklist to a Launch That Sells

A free guide to turn years of hard work into a day-one success.

You've built a brilliant game. Now, let's make sure it doesn't die in silence.



You've poured thousands of hours and a piece of your soul into this project. The code is solid, the art is coming together, and the gameplay *feels right*.

But a cold feeling is creeping in. You check your Steam page: [112 wishlists](#). You post a GIF on X: [three likes](#) (and one is your mom).

You've heard the most dangerous lie in indie development: "**A good game markets itself.**"

It's a fantasy. A comforting myth that leads to heartbreak. In a market where over 400 games launch on Steam *every week*, **potential is not enough**.

❏ **Hope is not a strategy.** Great games fail every single day because their launch wasn't engineered. They were pushed out into the void, hoping for a miracle.

This playbook is your strategy. It's a distilled, battle-tested checklist of the 7 most critical things you **MUST** get right to give your game the launch it deserves.

My name is Alan Vranić, and this is the system I use to build **unforgettable launch campaigns** with my clients.

Let's get to work.

STEP 1: Nail the Hook

Before You Do Anything Else

Most developers describe their game by listing features. "It's a crafting game with RPG elements and a skill tree."

That is a description. **It is not a hook.**

A player's brain is lazy. It wants a simple, compelling concept it can grasp in seconds. Your hook isn't a list of nouns; it's the core fantasy sold with a powerful **verb**.



BAD

"A survival game with base-building."

Boring and forgettable



GOOD

"**Outsmart** cosmic horrors and **build** a base from the wreckage of your ship."

An instant mental movie



BAD

"A deckbuilder with poker mechanics."

Just a feature



GOOD

"**Master** poker hands to **unleash** game-breaking combos in this hypnotic deckbuilder."

A fantasy

The Formula: Sell the Verb, Not the Noun

Focus on the primary **action** the player performs.



Pro-Tip from Game Catapult

A powerful brand stands *against* something. Is the "enemy" of your game mindless grinding? Your message becomes "meaningful progression." This simple shift creates a tribe of players who feel like you "get" them.

Your Action Item

Write down your game's hook. Start it with a verb. Sell the fantasy in one sentence. **This single sentence is the DNA of your entire launch.** Get it right first.

STEP 2: Weaponize Your Capsule

Your Game's Billboard

Your game's capsule (its thumbnail on Steam) is the **single most important image** in your entire marketing campaign. Period.

Steam uses its Click-Through Rate (CTR) to decide if it should show your game to more people. A bad capsule kills your visibility before you even start.

01

It **MUST** be professionally illustrated

No in-game screenshots. No pixel art. A high-quality illustration signals a high-quality game.

02

It must show the mood & genre

A glance should scream "Sci-Fi," "Horror," or "Cozy."

03

The logo must be crystal clear

It must be readable at thumbnail size.



The Squint Test

Pull up your capsule on your monitor. Now, stand up and walk 1-2 meters from your screen. Can you still tell what it is? Does it resolve into a clear, high-contrast shape?

If it looks like a muddy blob, it's failing.

Every day it's live, the Steam algorithm is learning that players aren't interested, burying your game deeper. This is costing you thousands of wishlists.

STEP 3: Speak the Algorithm's Language

Tags are Free Traffic

Tags are how Steam's discovery algorithm understands your game. Getting them right is like having a free, full-time marketing employee working for you 24/7.

Don't guess. Don't be "creative." **Do this instead:**



Identify Your Competitors

Find your top 3 most successful direct competitors on Steam.



Copy Their Tags

Go to their Steam pages and write down every single tag they use.



Find the Overlap

Identify tags that **all three** of them have in common. These are your golden tags.



Apply to Your Game

Make these common tags your top 5-7 tags on your own page.

The Goal

You want Steam to think:

"Oh, players who love *Game X* will definitely love this new game." You want to appear in their "More Like This" section. In the beginning, your goal isn't to be unique - it's to be correctly categorized next to the giants.

Your Action Item

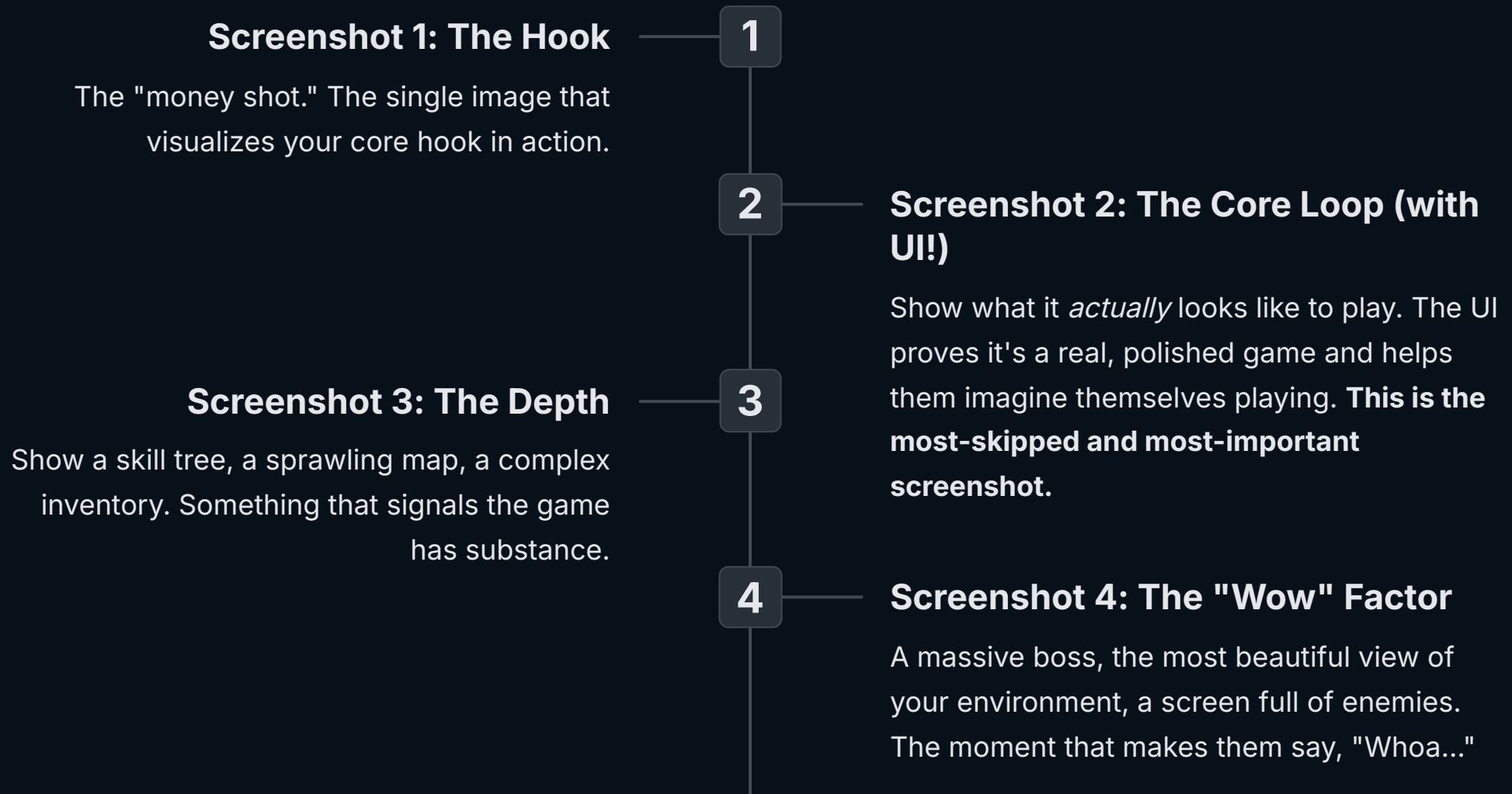
Perform this competitor analysis today. How do your current tags stack up? Are you telling Steam exactly where you belong?

STEP 4: Craft the Narrative

Your Screenshots Tell a Story

Most players will look at your first 4 screenshots and make a decision before ever watching your trailer. **These screenshots must tell a story.**

Don't just upload random, cool-looking images. They must follow a specific **narrative arc** that answers a player's questions in order:



Your Action Item

Look at your first four screenshots on Steam. Do they follow this arc? Or are they just a random collection of images?

STEP 5: Engineer the Satisfying Loop

Your Social Media Secret Weapon

The key to social media isn't just showing off your game. It is creating content that stops them from scrolling. The most powerful tool for this is the **"Satisfying Loop."**

This is a short, 5-10 second GIF or video of a perfectly executed, satisfying action in your game.

Here are some examples:



Perfect Combat

A perfectly timed parry followed by a devastating counter-attack.



System Success

Placing the final piece of a complex factory line and watching it work.



Order from Chaos

Organizing a messy inventory into a clean, color-coded grid.



Juicy Feedback

A headshot with a juicy, explosive particle effect.

These micro-moments are pure dopamine. They communicate quality, skill, and the "feel" of your game better than any paragraph of text.



Pro-Tip from Game Catapult: The "Silent Movie" Test

Could you understand and enjoy your GIF with the sound completely off? If not, the visuals aren't strong enough. Juice, particle effects, and clear animations are king.

Your Action Item

Identify 3 "satisfying loops" in your game right now. Record them as short, high-quality GIFs. You now have a week's worth of high-impact social media content.

STEP 6: Unleash the Demo

Your Conversion Engine

For games that need to be played in order to be understood, a demo is your single greatest weapon. It's a permanent, free marketing tool. But, it has one job: **get wishlists**.

Your demo must have unmissable calls to action to wishlist the game:



On the title menu

Make it prominent and impossible to miss.



In the pause menu

Catch them during natural breaks in gameplay.



At the end of the demo

End on a cliffhanger and prompt them immediately!



When the player quits

Offer two buttons: "No, I'm done" / "**YES, WISHLIST!**"

Your Action Item

Plan your demo. When can you release it? A polished 30-minute demo launched 3-6 months before release can be a game-changer.

STEP 7: Secure the First 10 Reviews

The Critical Threshold

Once your game gets 10 positive user reviews, Steam's algorithm begins showing it to more people. This is a non-negotiable launch day goal.

Crucial Rules:

- Reviews from free press keys **do not count** toward this total.
- The players **must buy the game** themselves.
- They should play for at least an hour before reviewing.

Build a thriving city on the back of a colossal, roaming giant. Steer your living world through treacherous biomes, balance the needs of your people with the beast's survival, and uncover the secrets of a forgotten land where the sky itself is your enemy.

RECENT REVIEWS:	Overwhelmingly Positive (52)
ENGLISH REVIEWS:	Overwhelmingly Positive (452)
RELEASE DATE:	16 Nov, 2025
DEVELOPER:	Your Own Awesome Studio
PUBLISHER:	Powered By Game Catapult



1. Identify Your Launch Crew

Before launch, create a private "Launch Crew" of your 10-15 most dedicated fans from Discord or your mailing list.



2. Explain the System

Be transparent about how the review system works and why it matters.



3. Get Commitments

Ask them to pledge to buy the game and leave an honest review on day one.



4. Launch Day Activation

Message them the moment you go live with a direct link to your Steam page.

Your Action Item

Who are your 10 most hardcore fans? Start building that relationship now.

This playbook is your map. But the journey is still yours to walk.

Executing this checklist is a huge step forward. It puts you ahead of 90% of other developers.

But it also reveals a truth: each of these steps is a deep discipline in itself.

Strategic Analysis

Nailing the hook is a process of deep strategic analysis.

Expert Direction

Directing a high-CTR capsule requires an expert eye.

Storytelling Science

Crafting a launch trailer that converts is a storytelling science.

You can spend the next 6 months becoming a marketing expert... or you can spend it making your game even better, while a specialist handles the launch.

If you're serious about giving your game the commercial success it deserves, let's talk.



100% Free Strategy Call

The first 30-minute strategy call is **completely free**, and it's **all value**.



Personal Review

I'll **personally do a live teardown** of your game's current marketing **with you on our call**.



Immediate Tactics

You'll walk away with **your first two high-impact action items**. You'll leave our call with a clear mission, not just ideas.

You have **nothing to lose** and a **successful launch** to gain.

[CLAIM MY FREE LAUNCH STRATEGY CALL](#)

[Explore the Arsenal](#)

