

THE ROYALTIES PROBLEM GAMING CAN'T SPREADSHEET ITS WAY OUT OF



As game catalogues grow and revenue models multiply, the tools many studios rely on for royalty management are quietly becoming a liability. Ingenta's Sr. Technical Product Director, **Carl Sherlock**, explains...

A modern game release is rarely a single product. It is a commercial ecosystem - generating income through ad impressions, microtransactions, OEM activation deals, subscription bundles, and DLC sales, often simultaneously, and each governed by different contractual terms. Behind every revenue stream sits an obligation: money owed to a developer, an artist, a composer, a writer, or a rights holder, under terms that may differ title by title, territory by territory, and deal by deal.

For many studios, managing these obligations still comes down to spreadsheets. And for a long time, that worked. When a catalogue contained a handful of titles and a small number of payees, a well-maintained spreadsheet was a reasonable solution. The problem is that game publishing has changed faster than the tools used to administer it.

WHEN THE PATCHWORK STARTS TO FRAY

The structural weaknesses of spreadsheet-based royalty management are well understood, even if they are rarely discussed openly. Manual data entry is error prone. Version conflicts are endemic. There is rarely a meaningful audit trail when something goes wrong. And because royalty data is highly sensitive — detailing individual earnings, contract terms, and payment histories — sharing it via email attachments or storing it across personal drives creates real security exposure.

Bespoke in-house systems often fare little better. Built to solve a specific problem at a specific moment in a studio's growth, they tend to become brittle over time — dependent on institutional knowledge, expensive to maintain, and resistant to the commercial complexity that success inevitably brings. A system that handled ten titles and fifty payees rarely scales gracefully to a hundred titles and several hundred contributors.

The consequences of getting it wrong are significant. Miscalculations lead to underpayment disputes. Damaged relationships with key creative talent can affect a studio's ability to attract collaborators on future projects. And as regulatory requirements around international rights, tax withholding, and data protection continue to grow, the compliance burden on manual systems increases accordingly.

A GROWING MARKET FOR PURPOSE-BUILT SOLUTIONS

It is against this backdrop that purpose-built royalty management platforms have begun to gain serious traction in the games industry.



The argument for dedicated tooling is straightforward: generic finance software was not designed with gaming's commercial structures in mind, and adapting it is rarely clean or cost-effective.

Ingenta, a company with over four decades of experience in rights and royalty management across publishing and media, entered the games market with Ingenta Gambit — a platform built specifically around the commercial realities of modern game publishing. Where legacy tools require studios to adapt their workflows to the software, Gambit is designed to accommodate gaming's actual revenue structures: ad revenue splits, microtransaction tiers, OEM deal terms, and subscription royalty calculations handled through automated rules rather than manual calculation.

Alongside the core platform, Ingenta's optional Aperture portal addresses one of the more time-consuming aspects of rights administration: contributor queries. Rather than routing every royalty question through an internal team, Aperture gives rights holders direct, controlled access to their own data — reducing inbound requests and, studios report, improving relationships with creative talent in the process.

THE CASE FOR ACTING EARLY

One pattern that emerges consistently in conversations about royalty infrastructure is timing. Studios that address the problem early — before catalogue complexity forces the issue — tend to have a significantly smoother experience than those who attempt a migration under pressure. The painful, expensive system overhauls that often accompany a studio's commercial growth are rarely inevitable; they are frequently the result of decisions deferred too long.

For an industry that has become exceptionally good at building complex, scalable systems for everything from multiplayer infrastructure to live service economies, the administrative back end has sometimes been an afterthought. That is beginning to change — and for studios weighing their options, the question is less whether to modernise than when.

