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## Who Gets To Be On The Steam Store?

Recently there's been a bunch of community discussion around what kind of games we're allowing onto the Steam Store. As is often the case, the discussion caused us to spend some time examining what we're doing, why we're doing it, and how we could be doing it better. Decision making in this space is particularly challenging, and one that we've really struggled with. Contrary to many assumptions, this isn't a space we've automated - humans at Valve are very involved, with groups of people looking at the contents of every controversial title submitted to us. Similarly, people have falsely assumed these decisions are heavily affected by our payment processors, or outside interest groups. Nope, it's just us grappling with a really hard problem.

Unfortunately, our struggling has resulted in a bunch of confusion among our customers, developer partners, and even our own employees. So we've spent some time thinking about where we want to be on this, and we'd like to talk about it now. But we also think it's critical to talk about how we've arrived at our position, so you can understand the trade-offs we're making.

The challenge is that this problem is not simply about whether or not the Steam Store should contain games with adult or violent content. Instead, it's about whether the Store contains games within an entire range of controversial topics - politics, sexuality, racism, gender, violence, identity, and so on. In addition, there are controversial topics that are particular to games - like what even constitutes a "game", or what level of quality is appropriate before something can be released.

Common questions we ask ourselves when trying to make decisions didn't help in this space. What do players wish we would do? What would make them most happy? What's considered acceptable discussion / behavior / imagery varies significantly around the world, socially and legally. Even when we pick a single country or state, the legal definitions around these topics can be too broad or vague to allow us to avoid making subjective and interpretive decisions. The harsh reality of this space, that lies at the root of our dilemma, is that there is absolutely no way we can navigate it without making some of our players really mad.

In addition, Valve is not a small company - we're not a homogeneous group. The online debates around these topics play out inside Valve as well. We don't all agree on what deserves to be on the Store. So when we say there's no way to avoid making a bunch of people mad when making decisions in this space, we're including our own employees, their families and their communities in that.

So we ended up going back to one of the principles in the forefront of our minds when we started Steam, and more recently as we worked on Steam Direct to open up the Store to many more developers: Valve shouldn't be the ones deciding this. If you're a player, we shouldn't be choosing for you what content you can or can't buy. If you're a developer, we shouldn't be

BLOG

PUBLIÉ

mer. 6 juin 2018 @ 14:24 EDT

TYPE

**ACTUALITÉS** 

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choosing what content you're allowed to create. Those choices should be yours to make. Our role should be to provide systems and tools to support your efforts to make these choices for yourself, and to help you do it in a way that makes you feel comfortable.

With that principle in mind, we've decided that the right approach is to allow everything onto the Steam Store, except for things that we decide are illegal, or straight up trolling. Taking this approach allows us to focus less on trying to police what should be on Steam, and more on building those tools to give people control over what kinds of content they see. We already have some tools, but they're too hidden and not nearly comprehensive enough. We are going to enable you to override our recommendation algorithms and hide games containing the topics you're not interested in. So if you don't want to see anime games on your Store, you'll be able to make that choice. If you want more options to control exactly what kinds of games your kids see when they browse the Store, you'll be able to do that. And it's not just players that need better tools either - developers who build controversial content shouldn't have to deal with harassment because their game exists, and we'll be building tools and options to support them too.

As we mentioned earlier, laws vary around the world, so we're going to need to handle this on a case-by-case basis. As a result, we will almost certainly continue to struggle with this one for a while. Our current thinking is that we're going to push developers to further disclose any potentially problematic content in their games during the submission process, and cease doing business with any of them that refuse to do so honestly. We'll still continue to perform technical evaluations of submissions, rejecting games that don't pass until their issues have been resolved.

So what does this mean? It means that the Steam Store is going to contain something that you hate, and don't think should exist. Unless you don't have any opinions, that's guaranteed to happen. But you're also going to see something on the Store that you believe should be there, and some other people will hate it and want it not to exist.

It also means that the games we allow onto the Store will not be a reflection of Valve's values, beyond a simple belief that you all have the right to create & consume the content you choose. The two points above apply to all of us at Valve as well. If you see something on Steam that you think should not exist, it's almost certain that someone at Valve is right there with you.

To be explicit about that - if we allow your game onto the Store, it does not mean we approve or agree with anything you're trying to say with it. If you're a developer of offensive games, this isn't us siding with you against all the people you're offending. There will be people throughout the Steam community who hate your games, and hope you fail to find an audience, and there will be people here at Valve who feel exactly the same way. However, offending someone shouldn't take away your game's voice. We believe you should be able to express yourself like everyone else, and to find others who want to play your game. But that's it.

In the short term, we won't be making significant changes to what's arriving on Steam until we've finished some of the tools we've described in this post. As we've hopefully managed to convey, navigating these issues is messy and complicated. Countries and societies change their laws and cultural norms over time. We'll be working on this for the foreseeable future, both in terms of what products we're allowing, what guidelines we communicate, and the tools we're providing to developers and players.

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