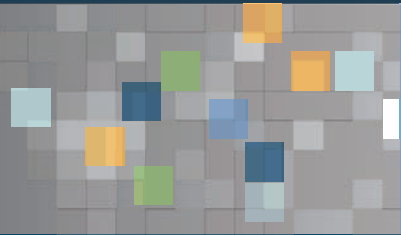# video games
AND SOCIAL ISSUES

esa

entertainment software association

Nonprofit organizations and issue advocates now view video games as an effective medium for communicating ideas and generating support among young tech savvy consumers. Computer and video games have become successful vehicles to teach important values, engage a new generation of voters and bring the problems facing other countries to the front door of new audiences. Able to unite and inspire, social issue games bring a holistic element to the entertainment software industry and provide public education campaigns with a 21st century way to spread their messages.

GLOBALIZATION

Traveling to other countries, especially those stricken with poverty and war, can make a powerful impact that affects a person long after they've returned home. But many people, especially children and young adults, do not have that opportunity. As a result, organizations have developed video games that provide a window into these worlds with the goal of revealing to new audiences the hardships and perseverance of other cultures.

To reach young Americans and raise awareness of difficult issues such as hunger, disease and war, groups are turning to the popular medium of video games. University of Southern California students created "Darfur is Dying" to raise awareness about genocide in Sudan. High school students participating in a Global Kids of New York after-school project created "Ayiti: The Cost of Life," a video game that focuses on poverty in Haiti.

"Food Force," created by the United Nations World Food Programme is another example. Designed by U.N. officials to educate children about world hunger, players to become humanitarian workers stationed on a fictional famine-stricken island. One year after its launch, the game had more than four million players worldwide. It was so popular that Suzanne Seggerman, president and co-founder of NGO Games for Change, participated in the Daesung Global Contents Forum to persuade entertainment software firms to make more games like "Food Force."

Impact Games' "Peacemaker" allows players to act as the Israeli prime minister or Palestinian president in simulated negotiations between the two nations. Inspired by the real events of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the game challenges players to assume leader positions and bring peace to their territories before their term in office ends. Players choose from three difficulty levels: calm, tense or violent, and face the consequences of their actions through opinion polls and indicators that signal progress towards peace.

ISSUE ADVOCACY

Video games are being used to educate young people on a variety of issues including Internet safety, bullying and protecting the environment. For these efforts, the games adopt the "moral of the story" approach that popular television programs have used for decades. By teaching a lesson through an entertaining avenue, these video games help tackle the social issues facing many of today's adolescents.

Web Wise Kids is a unique organization that teaches kids about essential safety and privacy issues – such as social networking, blogging, online romances, bullying, cyber stalking, and identify theft – through video games that are based on actual criminal cases. Three out of four teens say their parents have talked to them in the past year about the potential dangers of posting personal information on the Internet; however one in four indicate that their parents know "little" or "nothing" about what they actually do online, according to a report by Teen Research Unlimited. Web Wise Kids' game "Missing" recruits players to rescue a boy who mistakenly agreed to meet a predator after he misrepresented himself in an online chat room. The game has educated millions of children in all 50 states. The organization has also created two other games, "Mirror Image" and "AirDogs." In "Mirror Image," players work with a detective to catch a criminal who stalked two girls after promising modeling contracts. "AirDogs" teaches players the repercussions of illegally downloading software and explains the lifelong legal and social consequences that can result from online crimes. In early 2008 the organization released a new effort, "Wired with Wisdom," which is an online, interactive safety program designed for parents.

Protecting the environment and practicing a "green" lifestyle is a value many of today's parents are trying to teach their children. Nintendo is now facilitating in that effort through the creation of "Super Mario Sunshine" and "Chibi-Robo: Park Patrol." These games challenge players to improve the environment around them by revamping a rundown park and cleaning up a vandalized island.

In May 2007, the Independent Television Service released an online game called "World Without Oil," which invited players to participate in a collaborative simulation of a global oil shortage. The game was designed to utilize the collective intelligence of gamers and apply it to the serious problem of a global oil shortage. Players participated in a six week oil shortage simulation investigated an online mystery explaining the reasons for the shortage. In the end, the gamers developed real-world solutions to the oil crisis and hypothesized how it could affect their regional economies, society and quality of life.

A new game called "Glupod," set to debut in May, 2008 will give gamers a variety of real world causes to support such as ending world hunger, saving endangered species, or reversing global warming by converting their in-game winnings into actual help for that cause. "Glupod" is the first video game to foster human fulfillment by enabling players to support social and environmental causes.

20 years

The jail sentence given to an online predator, identified by a 15-year old girl named Katie who realized after playing "Missing" that a man she met online could be dangerous. Katie is now the Ambassador to Youth for Web Wise Kids and shares her story with parents and teens to educate youth on internet safety.

POLITICS

Organizations and individuals have begun utilizing entertainment software for political purposes, either by creating games that highlight a divisive political topic or by harnessing a successful game to bring increased attention a political cause.

The issue of immigration has been debated by the U.S. Congress, reported on by the media, scrutinized by political pundits and now is the subject of video games. The personal lives of immigrants, along with their reasons for leaving their home countries, are dealt with in several games. For example, Breakthrough, a New York-based human rights organization, developed "ICED!" to shed light on the challenges that immigrants face. Additionally, a PBS Web site maintains a collection of games dealing with immigration, including "The Maria Sisters," a game about conditions faced by immigrants in chip manufacturing plants in Silicon Valley.

TheorySpark, a developer specializing in political games, released "President Forever 2008 + Primaries" which creates field managers out of players who must manage all aspects of their candidates' campaigns. The company created the game to package the political and cultural process in a way that was creative and stimulating to provide an educational resource for students.

650,000
The amount of people who have played the "Ayiti: The Cost of Life," a video game that focuses on poverty in Haiti

Over 240
The number of supporters of presidential hopeful Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) that took part in a January 1, 2008, virtually political rally in "World of Warcraft" a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) published by Vivendi Universal