

Video Games & Virtual Worlds are part of God's Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Video games, as an industry, is changing and growing so rapidly, that developers struggle to not ruin the successful franchises that keep them going. Unless there is an understanding of what is happening, we risk being uneducated consumers or, worse, miss out on how interactive technology is about to transform America. This paper has three major points: to describe the current state of video games, identify the communities around game development, and identify future directions of interactive media. Often, video games are stigmatized for their negative impacts, and although there are many fallen areas of video games and its industry, the purpose of this paper is to reclaim this beautiful technology for, not what we've made of it, but the beneficial potential of interactive experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gamasutra reports: "24 percent of U.S. households spend a minimum of one dollar a month on video games," and "5 percent Of U.S. consumer entertainment spending goes to video games [1]." Joystiq projects: "game industry to 65 billion by 2013" , in light of how the "industry just recently reached a value of 46.5 billion in 2009[2]." The 3 billion dollar company [3], Zynga, According to John Davison, Zynga, makers of Farmville and MafiaWars for Facebook, makes about 1 million a day in our declining economy [4]. Despite the popularity of games today, it would be a great overgeneralization to assume that the entire game industry is thriving. As the charts in Figure 1 show, there are many distinct communities and consumers for a variety of games.

2. GAME DEVELOPER COMMUNITIES

A major event that captures the communities behind game development is the annual Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Francisco [6]. In particular, there are distinct communities organized into summits prior to the main conference. One way to understand the communities within the industry is to acknowledge the communities at GDC. Four notably relevant communities are developers of serious games, independent games, social & online games, and, of course, major triple-A title games. Serious games, indie games, and social games are developed on budgets significantly lower than their AAA counterparts. Modern Warfare 2, for instance, cost 40 to 50 million dollars to produce and had a launch budget of 200 million [9].

2.1 Serious Games

Serious games are usually funded by grants or the spare time of independent developers to create interactive experiences with the intention of a greater impact in a specific area. From the GDC Serious Games Summit, these areas included "projects using game

resources or games for training, health, education, national defense, science, advertising, and general productivity [7]."

2.2 Independent Games

AAA title games are the blockbusters of the video game world and impossible for independent developers to compete with the resources of the big game publishers. As a result, an emergent community around more casual and smaller games is growing. As people become more comfortable with technology and programming, there will be an increased diversity of interactive media as products of expression just like books and movies have become. In games, we currently have this amazing canvas for: music, art, interaction, and story.

2.3 Social & Online Games

As the summit explains: "Few areas of our industry have moved as fast as the rise of socially connected gaming. Today we see that many of the most popular games in the world are played on social networking services such as Facebook, MySpace, and hi5. These games are capturing tens of millions of mainstream users, people who do not consider themselves gamers [7]." Gamasutra reports the claims from social game developers at the 2010 Game Developers Conference in saying, "The era where profitability on a packaged goods item was the main goal is over, they say. Today's environment has number of users and playtime as the ultimate metric -- and given that many of them will never spend money to play with the product, user acquisition must be the ultimate and primary goal for game developers." Social gaming companies can apparently get up to 20 million players within nine days on games of far lower quality [8].

2.4 AAA Title Games

On current generation consoles, Gamasutra reports that it costs three times as much to produce games as it'd been in 2005 [8]. A current problem is that the big, AAA-title games are extremely expensive to make. More than anything, these games seem to be driven by their branding and marketing more than the less observable aspects of content. Modern Warfare 2, for instance, sold 4.7 million units within the first 24 hours of release. Not all titles are that lucky, and the risks are far more devastating for failed products than in most other industries. Still, AAA title developers have the advantage of life-like games on cutting edge technology that smaller scale developers do not have resources to match, and there will always be a market for such blockbuster games [5].

PASSION TALKS EXTENDED ABSTRACT EXAMPLE

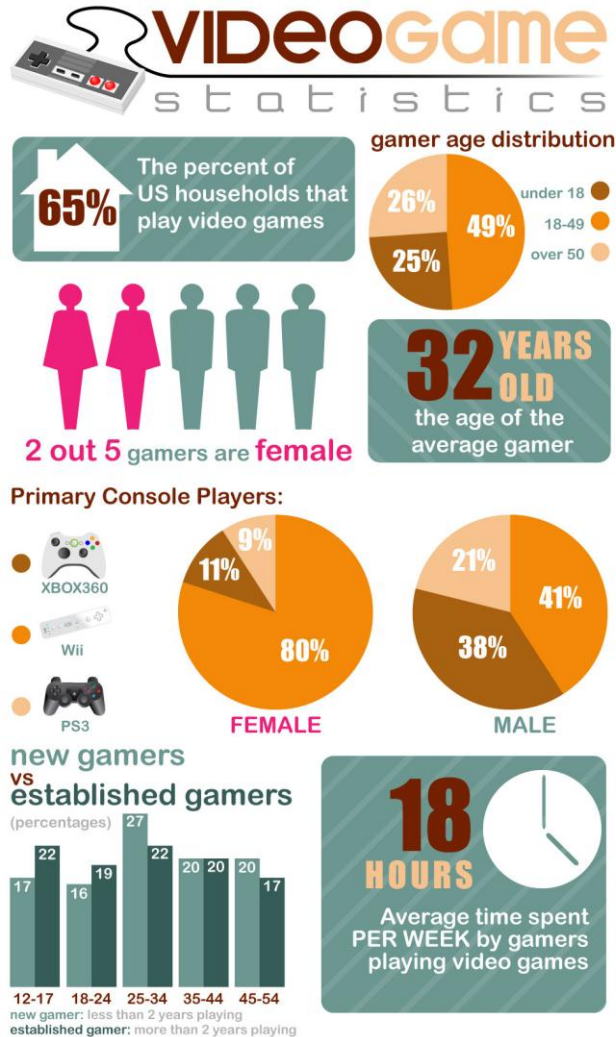


Figure 1. Statistics from <http://onlineeducation.net>

3. Conclusion

Games have come a long way in the past couple decades, and only those who understand this technology have the ability to control what these products ultimately become. Fortunately, in the midst of over sexualized women, too much violence, and game addiction, there is an art form and a powerfully expressive canvas emerging. In a talk at UC Santa Cruz, GamePro's John Davison mentions that making games for "kids" is not something to brag about anymore; rather, complex emotions, dramatic content, and compelling, immersive experiences, are in the works of being integrated while walking the balance of still giving people what they want or expect and so much more (that they didn't know they could have). The truth is, Davison explains, game developers are getting older, they have families now, and they're trying to produce things that matter to them. Those 25 year old male developers are now 45 years old

So, with your rated M title, you will find gore, violence, strong language, and 5 seconds of that topless girl, but as Davison describes it, "rated M games are a lot less on violence and a lot more on emotion," giving insight on what to expect from video games to come. I suggest that we embrace this inevitably magnificent technology, learn as much as we can about it, so we can use it appropriately [6].

4. REFERENCES

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