The Evolution of Video Games

Chris Pruett
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When the Nintendo Entertainment System hit the American market in 1986, most investors familiar with the video game industry were convinced that the product would be a commercial failure. The late 1970s and early 1980s had seen the rise and fall of Atari, one of the first developers of TV-based entertainment systems, but by 1984 most analysts had pronounced the industry dead.

When the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) finally went on sale nationwide, it took America by storm. The new system and its flagship title, Super Mario Bros. [1], simultaneously rejuvenated the video games industry and placed Nintendo at its helm. Almost twenty years later, the game industry has grown to gigantic proportions and the complexity of the games themselves has increased at an exponential rate. While a successful NES game could be completed by a few talented individuals in a matter of months, the average Playstation 2 title takes teams of twenty to sixty several years to develop. It is not uncommon for game publishers to spend between five and fifteen million dollars on production alone, and revenues from games have made the industry strong even during the recent economic downturn.

Part of the driving force behind the game industry is innovation in computer technology. As video game systems have become increasingly high tech, fans have demanded games that push the technical envelope. In particular, real time three dimensional graphics generation has become a prime selling point for game hardware makers. As a result, modern day game systems are powerful computers, and the creation of game content has become far more difficult.

The audience for games has also changed over time. Children who grew up playing games have now become game-playing adults, and the games themselves have matured to meet their audience. While children continue to occupy a large percentage of the market (as the success of franchises like Pokémon [2] attest), developers have found that young adults, particularly males between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five, are also a highly profitable audience.
The proliferation of adult game enthusiasts ("gamers") has lead to a sharp rise in games with mature themes, a trend which has sparked some controversy. Games like Rockstar’s Grand Theft Auto III [3] have been criticized for being overly violent, while games such as Tecmo’s DOA: Extreme Beach Volleyball [4] have drawn protest for the use of hyper sexualized depictions of women. While there is little conclusive evidence that games can significantly influence behavior [5], the affect of video games on children remains a controversial topic. [6]

However, R-Rated games are not the only titles to take advantage of the increase of older gamers: the industry has also seen a surge of highly literate games hit the market over the past several years. Games like Sega’s Shenmue [7] and Ion Storm’s Deus Ex [8] have successfully combined storytelling with interactivity, and have received critical acclaim for their innovative designs. Rather than reinvent the wheel, some developers have found that strong characters and story lines can breath new life into classic video game mechanics. Konami’s Metal Gear Solid [9], for example, successfully revived the NES-era Metal Gear [10] series by applying an intricate Tom Clancy-inspired plot to the series’ well-known game mechanics.

Despite the rise of literate video games, quality of writing remains fairly low on most consumers’ list of important game elements. Most games initially sell based on the strength of the graphic system they employ, and a game will be torn to shreds by reviewers if it is not easy to understand and control. The market has made it clear that gamers have little patience for poorly-executed game designs, and the top-selling games are typically exceptionally well-implemented. [11] The games mentioned thus far contain all of the core requisites for a hit: they all have high-quality graphics, simple and responsive controls, entertaining game mechanics, and are free of bugs and glitches.

However, it is obvious that most games are not financially successful based on production quality alone. Grand Theft Auto III has sold more than eight million units worldwide, making it one of the best selling games of all time. The game was popularized both by the unprecedented freedom granted to players and by the controversial story line, which follows the protagonist’s violent accent through the ranks of the criminal underworld. In contrast, Shenmue, which offers players similar freedom through the lens of a linear (and law-abiding) story line, sold a paltry 500,000 copies in the US, making it a financial failure.

This kind of disparity scares game developers. While many studios are interested in pursuing new and original game designs, some are not willing to take the requisite financial risk. As games like Sony Computer Entertainment’s Ico [12] prove, even titles of unprecedented quality can still be financial disappointments. On the other hand, a game with a highly recognizable license is almost guaranteed to sell regardless of its actual quality. A game staring James Bond or Harry Potter is much less of a financial risk than a wholly original series. And though using a license usually requires game designs to be restricted to certain parameters, trading innovation in game design for financial security is often a foregone conclusion.

While many factors contributed to the video game industry crash of 1983, most historians agree
that the saturation of the market with mediocre games was one of the major causes. When Nintendo revived the market in 1986, it did so with original and well-executed games rather than highly advanced technology.

While the video game industry is presently healthy and profitable, the market is not one that encourages innovation. In 2002, only about 4% of the games released over the course of the entire year received very high praise from game reviewers. This may indicate that the current game industry is something of a bubble economy, and that its stability is a factor of how many consumers are willing to pay for mediocre products. If the industry does not actively pursue innovative game designs that appeal to a wide audience, the bubble may very well burst.

Notes


[5] Though many studies into the subject have been performed, the results conflict to the degree as to be inconclusive. Dr. Anne Walling concisely summarizes her findings in her article Do Video Games Lead to Violent Behavior in Children?, available at http://aafp.org/afp/20020401/tips/1.html.

[6] Such concerns prompted Senator Joseph Lieberman (Democrat; Connecticut) to call for a Senate inquiry into the marketing of violent games to children in 1993. The subsequent hearings resulted in the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (http://www.esrb.org), a group dedicated to supporting a voluntary ratings system for all video games sold in the US.


[11] There are a few exceptions to this trend. Recent titles like Enter the Matrix and Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness have been market successes despite being panned by critics. In these cases the general consensus is that such titles sell on the strength of the license they
employ, rather than on the actual execution of the game.


Note that these links (www.gamers.com/…) go to a site that has fairly good descriptions of the games in question. The official sites are typically web-based advertisements, and have little useful information about the games themselves. This site provides enough information to give the reader a pretty good idea what the game is about and how good it is.

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11 THOUGHTS ON “THE EVOLUTION OF VIDEO GAMES”

vpn
on January 24, 2014 at 3:06 AM said:

For example, looking for film, you are able to select files by limiting their size - employing this option you’ll except low-quality films (SAT-Rip, CAM-Rip, Telesync).

For example: open with your browser and check for anything (Twilight as an example). Marc Cuban has developed a whole new movie theatre model like those that are springing up throughout the country.

HCG recipes phase 2
on January 29, 2014 at 10:19 PM said:

The HCG diet foods when along with HCG therapy help individuals produce a healthy lifestyle that enables them to lose weight and keep it off. Seeing is believing, in the event you possess a taste of Hcg diet recipes, you’ll take satisfaction in a very quick and splendid suggests to retain slim and healthy.

But to HCG diet, absolutely the aspect is abundant college than abrogating aspect.
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on January 30, 2014 at 1:29 AM said:

Fantastic website you have here but I was curious if you knew of any forums that cover the same topics discussed here? I’d really like to be a part of online community where I can get suggestions from other knowledgeable individuals that share the same interest. If you have any recommendations, please let me know. Bless you!

Coleman

on January 30, 2014 at 8:36 AM said:

Wedding rings from the hcg weight loss diet has our throw choose akin to dieter those a lot Health calorie-restricted diet regime. The recipes for these dishes are widely available because of websites and books committed to HCG diet plans. This is exactly why dieters who continue with the HCG Diet work to load in on fatty foods before they start the diet, because this will help them control hunger.

Spybubble software reviews

on January 30, 2014 at 10:06 AM said:

The reasons for using this device are infinite, do not miss out. Certainly, this key fact software system has the most important capacity to discover a new active whereabouts of a new phone through its GPS tracking. 

THE BAD: Spy Bubble very new to the intelligence of the phone industry, so they definitely have a history.

spybubble

on January 30, 2014 at 4:11 PM said:
The application could be installed on a lot more than one system at the time. My son used to become a little shy, but after he got his phone he soon began acting very different. People make use of this kind of software for a variety of reasons.

youtube.com
on January 30, 2014 at 6:05 PM said:

What’s up, the whole thing is going nicely here and of course every one is sharing facts, that’s truly excellent, keep up writing.

online litecoin casino
on January 31, 2014 at 5:55 AM said:

Hello friends, its impressive paragraph regarding teaching and completely explained, keep it up all the time.

tpb,
on February 2, 2014 at 3:26 AM said:

No matter where in the world you travel using a little part of home can certainly make being away easier and now with the top Torrent VPN that little part of home may be on your laptop or mobile device.

As daylight broke following a miserable night a helicopter flew in, dropping a line to pull the man to safety. Marc Cuban is rolling out a whole new movie theatre model like those that are springing up over the country.

nigeria entertainment news
on February 4, 2014 at 10:40 AM said:

Thank you for sharing good information. Your website is really cool. I am impressed by the data that you have on this site. It reveals how nicely you realize this subject. Bookmarked this web site page, will arrive back for a lot more articles.

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**pirate bay**  
on February 4, 2014 at 10:14 PM said:

It started with i – Phone and has now transferred to i – Pad 2; the reason- insufficient availability.  

It’s no secret that illegal file sharing remains rampant in lots of countries, like the US, however, it may not be government interference that eventually leads for the end of the age of illegal downloads. 

Typically, the My Documents folder will be the best one to use.