Introduction

Gaming and libraries. Two words you may never have thought to put together—except when discussing a policy to ban it. And yet, increasingly, those of us in the library field are seeing all types of libraries adding the phrase "gaming and libraries" to their repertoire of services, in many cases with an exclamation point at the end! In this issue of *Library Technology Reports*, I will examine the growing, and increasingly visible, intersections the library profession has with this phenomenon.

First though, it's important to mention that gaming and games have been central to leisure and learning activities in societies since ancient times. Sumerian games, ancient Egyptian games, medieval games, turn-of-the-century games, and contemporary games all have threads in common:

- Games test our problem-solving skills;
- Games are inclusive;
- Games create community;
- Games facilitate learning;
- Games provide fields for practice of leadership and team skills; and
- Games develop identity.

In our modern culture, in which video games are the dominant form of gaming, these threads remain as strong and valid today as they were thousands of years ago. There are now courses, departments, and entire academic fields devoted to studying video games, and educators are examining ways to incorporate these threads into our schools and universities.

As librarians, we need to assess the impact—recreational and educational—this growing activity will have on our profession and on library services. Indeed, we can already see some peripheral effects, many of which are incidental; we tend to react more to independent use of games by our patrons within our buildings, rather than proactively using them to weave libraries into the threads I have listed.

There is, however, a growing contingent of librarians who are modeling new intersections of services, where libraries can meet and serve gamers. As I will explore in this issue, this activity not only pertains to public libraries but also to academic, school, and even special libraries. As you will see, even special libraries will not be immune to the influence of games as the "gaming generation" matures and enters the workforce.

Definitions

In a more exhaustive exploration of gaming, I would consider card games, board games, electronic hand-held games, the emergence of cell-phone games, arcade games, and other related activities when discussing gaming in libraries; however, for the purposes of this publication, the term "games" (and in particular "video games") will collectively refer to games played on entertainment consoles, computers, and the Internet. For years, some public libraries have hosted Pokemon or Yu-Gi-Oh card tournaments for young children as well as Mahjong and Scrabble tournaments for seniors. Building on these services to include video games is not only a natural extension of gaming, but, as you will see in the next chapter, gaming also lends to learning and even literacy.

This learning stretches across all platforms for gaming. "Console" gaming refers to dedicated devices that you connect to a television to play games on cartridges or discs. Examples of console systems include

the Microsoft Xbox 360, Nintendo's GameCube, and the Sony PlayStation series. These are the most popular consoles, and each has hundreds of games available for play. Unfortunately, each system is proprietary, which means Xbox games won't play on a GameCube or PlayStation and vice versa; therefore, it is important to realize when gamers (or librarians) evaluate a console system (or systems) to purchase, they need to take into account the games they may want to play or offer to patrons, given that many games are unique to a particular brand.

For example, the popular games that feature the character Mario are available only on the Nintendo platform. *Halo 2,* the fastest-selling video game in history, only runs on Microsoft's Xbox system. Even the controllers and other accessories are different from platform to platform, which means libraries must take care to purchase the correct equipment to work with the console they have chosen to use.

Computer-based games are individual titles that can be downloaded from the Internet or purchased on a disc and installed on a personal computer (there are games for all types of operating systems—Windows, Macintosh, UNIX, Linux, and so on). Although the user will need to make sure that he or she purchases the correct version of a game for his or her operating system, all other peripherals and accessories already available for the computer should work with the game. For example, a mouse, keyboard, or steering wheel that plugs into a Windows- or Mac-based computer via a standard USB cable should work on any racing game that runs on the user's operating system. Examples of popular computer-based games include *Myst, The Sims,* and *Civilization IV*.

Increasingly, computer and console-based games contain an online component, which enables users with (ideally high-speed) Internet connections to play with or against other users across the world. Gameplay takes place within the game itself, but users are connected to one another and can chat, interact virtually, and play the game together.

We tend to think of Internet-based games as those played on the Web, but there has also been a rich tradition of online games—ones that were played via e-mail in the early days of BITNET and ARPANET (precursors to what we now call the "Internet"). For the purpose of this issue of *Library Technology Reports*, however, the definition of *Internet* or *online games* will refer exclusively to those played on the World Wide Web.

There are millions of free and for-fee online games available for all ages and gaming types. Sites such as Yahoo! Games, PopCap (see figure 1), and Unlimited Web Games offer popular titles including *Bejeweled, Bookworm, Shapeshifter, Tetris,* and what seems like thousands of variations of *Solitaire*.

In addition, there is a subculture of online games in which thousands of users from around the world log in to a Web site in order to play in virtual worlds. This often involves going on "quests" to perform a task or achieve a goal. Other games allow players to openly roam and interact with other players in whatever manner they choose. These games are called "MMPOGs," which stands for "Massive Multiplayer Online Games." Many of them, especially the more sophisticated and expansive ones, are commercial products that require a credit card to pay a monthly or annual fee. Examples of these types of commercial MMPOGs include *EverQuest, Star Wars Galaxies,* and *World of Warcraft.*

Yahoo Games
http://games.yahoo.com

Unlimited Web Games
http://unlimitedwebgames.com

Although the most popular of these sites can rival the largest online communities on the Web, not all MMPOGs are fee based. A few are completely free, and others have free "worlds" in which gamers can play in addition to commercial worlds that require membership to access. The most well-known and popular example of this type of mixed MMPOG is *Runescape*. If you work at or have visited a public library at the end of the school day, you are probably familiar with the rush of gamers likely to flood the public computers in order to log in to *Runescape* to play with each other "in world" (meaning "in the game").

The Gaming Generation

When many people hear the term "gamers," they think of fifteen-year-old boys playing video games in the dark, alone, in their parents' basement, but recent research

Figure 1:
PopCap games can be accessed via the Web at http://popcap.com.

(and even just casual observation) has proven this to be untrue. It turns out that gaming is a very social activity that crosses all socioeconomic and demographic lines.

In fact, even those people that don't consider themselves gamers often are. When I'm talking about gaming in a room full of librarians, I always ask those in the audience to raise their hands if they consider themselves to be gamers. Depending on the venue, anywhere from a quarter to one-third of the hands go up; however, if I then ask how many people in the room play *Solitaire* or *Tetris* on their computers, at least half of the hands in the room go up (and often more). Technically, these people are gamers—they just don't think of themselves that way. Yet, they may share an interesting set of characteristics with the gaming generation without even realizing it.

Many librarians are shocked to learn the largest demographic group of online gamers is not teenage boys. Based on a 2004 study of AOL users, it appears that women over the age of forty, who play online word and puzzle games such as *Bookworm* and *Super Collapse*, are the largest contingent of online players.[1] Furthermore, gaming of any type is no longer the stereotypical "boys club" it used to be. Women now make up thirty-eight percent of *all* gamers, and this number continues to increase. In fact, the Entertainment Software Association notes, "women over the age of 18 represent a greater portion of the game-playing population (30 percent) than boys from age 17 or younger (23 percent)."[2]

It is difficult to talk about gamers as a monolithic group anymore—the demographics are now so diverse that multiple generations have grown up with gaming. The average game player is now thirty-three years old and has been playing games for twelve years.[3]

The average age of the gaming population shouldn't be a surprise; after all, the generation that invented the Internet and created the first computer games is eligible for Social Security. My point is that gaming now cuts across age, race, income, and even technical know-how. In addition, there are always exceptions to the stereotypes. There are older people who like to game regularly and younger people that don't. What is clear, however, is that the face of gaming has literally changed, and it is *us*.

As you will see in subsequent chapters, gaming provides libraries with new and unique connections to this full spectrum of library users, the most elusive of which has typically been the teenage male. Is there any place more uncool than the library for a young boy? What if we, as librarians and those working in libraries, could change that perception? What if this population suddenly had a reason to come to the library that didn't involve forced research? What if these traditionally apathetic library users were instead motivated to get up early on a Saturday morning and plead for library staff members to open the doors so they could come in? Within these pages, you will read about just such happenings, along with library users' changing views about how their libraries connect with their lives (not just their homework assignments).

"Study: Women over 40 Biggest Online Gamers"
http://edition.cnn.com/2004/TECH/fun.games/02/11/video.games.women.reut

Entertainment Software Association's "Top 10 Industry Facts"
http://theesa.com/facts/top_10_facts.php

For More Information . . . (Or, What I Won't Cover in This Issue)

The video game industry has a rich history, and like any industry or field, it has its dominant companies, interesting characters, and a fascinating history. For those interested in more background and historical information (books, magazine articles, and online resources) about the video game industry, see the Bibliography & Resources section (chapter 9) of this issue.

In addition, there are many different gaming-related services libraries can offer patrons. The most obvious one is to collect and circulate games to patrons. There is an increasing number of resources to help those librarians who want to offer this type of service. One of the first and, in my opinion, still one of the best resources for collection development of video games is John Scalzo's Video Game Librarian series for the Gaming Target Web site (see figure 2).[4] Scalzo works at a public library, and in these columns he discusses his approach to collection development, his process for implementation, as well as tips, suggestions, and explanations. A list of libraries that circulate

Figure 2:
John Scalzo's Video Game Librarian series is a resource that can help librarians consider their collection-development methods for video games. Scalzo's Gaming Target profile is available at http://gamingtarget.com/staffprofile.php?staffid=3.

games is available at libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Gaming#Libraries_Circulating_Games.

John Scalzo, Gaming Target
http://gamingtarget.com/staffprofile.php?staffid=3

List of Libraries Circulating Games on "Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki"
http://libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Gaming#Libraries_Circulating_Games

Also relevant to libraries is the recent emergence of mobile games (both on dedicated gaming devices and cell phones), location-based gaming (using the Global Positioning System [GPS] that the government and hikers use), and the imminent world of ubiquitous, always-on, high-speed, wireless, Internet access. Although these will open up new opportunities for intersectional services for libraries, they are beyond the scope of this specific publication.

Circulating games is certainly the easiest service a library can offer to gamers; however it is merely an extension of a traditional service with which we are already more than familiar. It is not difficult to imagine how a library would implement such a service, nor is it difficult to justify—given our inclusion of other multimedia formats in our collections. Although it is most definitely a valid library service, it does not fulfill the true potential that libraries can use to connect with gamers.

Therefore, in this issue, I will be concentrating on other gaming services libraries can implement, specifically offering gaming events within the library for positive gains using limited investments. The return on investment for such services turns out to be one of the most engaging and popular services libraries can immediately begin to offer. I will also briefly discuss services that stretch our notions of what a library is and does, thereby allowing librarians to be more creative and innovative in implementation.

Talking Points

At the end of each chapter, there is a brief list of talking points designed to help the reader think through possible issues, or for use in persuading others to try gaming services in the libraries.

Future Readings

Although there is a bibliography of further resources at the end of this issue, the very nature of print publications means that relevant materials will continue to be published but cannot be included here. Beth Gallaway, librarian/consultant at the Metrowest Massachussetts Regional Library System, leads a team of bloggers who constantly post links and citations to new items about gaming at the Game On: Gaming in Libraries blog (see figure 3). In addition, you can view a much smaller subset of materials I am personally tracking for future reading about gaming at del.icio.us/jayhawk/ToRead-VideoGames.

Game On: Gaming in Libraries Blog
http://libgaming.blogspot.com

Jenny Levine's Future Reading for Gaming in Libraries on del.icio.us
http://del.icio.us/jayhawk/ToRead-VideoGames

One Final Note

Although the case studies in this issue are divided by type of library, I encourage you to read all of them, as the contributors provide tips and suggestions that might be of value to you, regardless of the type of library in which you work. I have yet to hear about a library of any type offering gaming that has received negative feedback from patrons, so learn from all of your colleagues and steal what you can. They are all more than happy to help, share, and encourage!

Figure 3:
The Game On: Gaming in the Library blog (http://libgaming.blogspot.com), founded and administered by Beth Gallaway, features frequent contributions from Gallaway, Kelly Czarnecki, and Jami Schwarzwalder. Occasional contributors include Matt Gullett, Chad Haefele, and John Scalzo. Gallaway is also writing a book on gaming and libraries (*Game On: Gaming at the Library*, available 2007 from Neal-Schuman).

Notes

1. Reuters News Service, "Study: Women over 40 Biggest Online Gamers," CNN.com International (February 11, 2004), http://edition.cnn.com/2004/TECH/fun.games/02/11/video.games.women.reut (accessed August 16, 2006).
2. Entertainment Software Association, "Top 10 Industry Facts," Facts & Research (2006), http://theesa.com/facts/top_10_facts.php (accessed August 16, 2006).
3. Ibid.
4. John Scalzo, Gaming Target profile and listing of/access to gaming-related articles (including the Video Game Librarian series), http://gamingtarget.com/staffprofile.php?staffid=3 (accessed August 16, 2006).