

Conclusion

Finding More Lessons

Abstract

The idea of gaming in libraries is no longer new or strange. The case studies described in “Gaming in Libraries: Learning Lessons from the Intersections” are just a few of the success stories we have seen during the last twelve to eighteen months highlighting the potential of gaming as a library service. There is no demographic left untouched by gaming in today’s world. Whether your goal is to offer recreation around content (similar to book discussion groups and craft programs), social communal space (adult programming, rooms for knitters), literacy programs (storytime), interactions between different demographics (family events, multigenerational programming), or something else altogether, gaming may be a good opportunity to try something new with a low barrier to entry in terms of cost and resources. Ask yourself what outcomes you want to achieve at your library, and reflect on these case studies to see how gaming can help you achieve them.

The case studies described in this *LTR* are just a few of the success stories we have seen during the last twelve to eighteen months highlighting the promise of gaming in libraries. The concept is no longer new, and while gaming has been a part of libraries as far back as 1880s England, we still tend to think of this as a “new” service. The resurging spirit of social gaming (including the adoption of social videogame play) has begun to permeate our culture, with Web 2.0 acting as other catalysts for playful and engaging communal spaces, both online and offline.

A glance at other popular media (music, movies, television, books) highlights escapism and a connection to our local community as dominant themes in a world hit

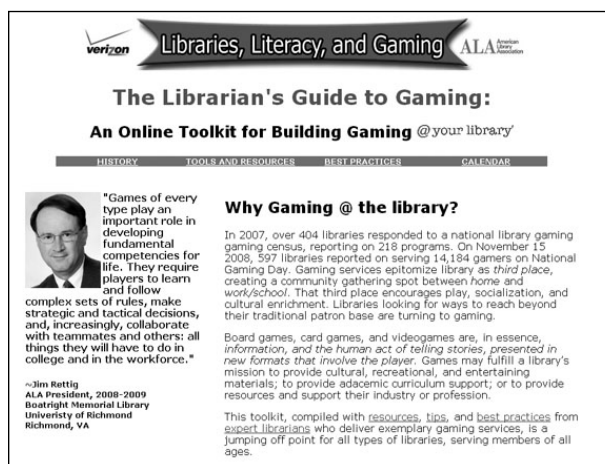


Figure 10

The Librarian's Guide to Gaming website with tools, best practices, talking points, tips, and more.

hard by a global recession. Gaming is just one more way that libraries can continue to offer a mix of recreation, social, and communal activities in a safe, noncommercial space. The case studies in this issue show there are benefits, unintended consequences, and valuable interactions that don't happen anywhere else in the community when libraries provide communal gaming spaces.

To help you evaluate various types of gaming services for your library, find more stories at The Librarian's Guide to Gaming: An Online Toolkit for Building Gaming @ Your Library, a free website provided by the American Library Association. Many of the models found in the toolkit focus solely on gaming and literacy. They were not included here because of their availability online, and there are many more to come.

The Librarian's Guide to Gaming

<http://librarygamingtoolkit.org>

In 2008, the ALA received a two-year \$800,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation to explore the links between libraries, literacy, and gaming. In year one of the project, twelve experts from across the United States assembled this toolkit as a comprehensive resource for any librarian who wants to implement any form of gaming, small or large.

In 2009, ten libraries have been awarded mini-grants through the ALA Verizon Foundation grant to implement new gaming services that explore the specific links between literacy and gaming. These libraries will test the toolkit and provide further lessons for all of us about gaming in general, and gaming and literacy in particular. As these libraries report back on their projects, the gaming toolkit will continue to grow, and I'm confident you will find the lessons we have seen in this issue highlighted in story after story in the toolkit.

Whether your goal is to offer recreation around content (similar to book discussion groups and craft programs), social communal space (adult programming, rooms for knitters), literacy programs (storytime), interactions between different demographics (family events, multigenerational programming), or something else altogether, gaming may be a good opportunity to try something new with a low barrier to entry in terms of cost and resources. Ask yourself what outcomes you want to achieve at your library, and reflect on these case studies to see how gaming can help you achieve them.

Clearly, there is no demographic left untouched by gaming in today's world. It is difficult to imagine libraries not offering a current format that is as popular as games, but be sure to match your goals to the program you implement, because the leading lesson from these case studies is that the right experience can create community and bring people together in the unique ways that only libraries have traditionally offered.

If you're not sure what to try when, plan to join in ALA's annual National Gaming Day @ Your Library every November (check News about Games and Gaming online for dates and details). It's a great opportunity to use the national publicity generated for the event to experiment with a gaming program, whether you're new to gaming or want to try something new with a different group or goal. Watch what happens, debrief afterwards, and join the ALA Games and Gaming group on ALA Connect to share your own lessons learned. Every month, there are new avenues to explore and new lessons to learn and build upon in order to harness this new format to continue transforming our communities.

News about Games and Gaming

<http://gaming.ala.org/news>

ALA Connect: Games and Gaming

<http://connect.ala.org/gaming>