Introduction

Participating in National Gaming Day brought our community into a new world they didn't realize would be available to them locally. They connected with the library staff, thanked me and expressed their amazement with our library collection. One person ordered Sci Fi books, another picked up Sci Fi books, one requested Civil War materials and one requested a tour of our Virtual services. We also had two requests for new library cards. Basically this event opened eyes, created interest for people and gave the library great exposure. We will be adding a monthly gaming day to our program.

—Diane Mello, Branch Head, Wawona Bassett (CA) Memorial Library[1]

Abstract

2008 may be remembered as the year in which gaming became just like any other service in libraries, with librarians implementing gaming initiatives that look very much like those we already offer for books, movies, music, and computers for as varied an audience as other library services are offered. In this third issue of z devoted to the topic of gaming in libraries, "Gaming in Libraries: Learning Lessons from the Intersections," we will examine some of the most common themes being noted and shared by librarians and illustrate them with five case studies.

For some librarians, offering games in the library feels like a new world, as it must for those patrons who think about the library only in terms of books. Reporters in particular often seem shocked at the idea, and as we'll discuss in chapter 5, government officials may need to be educated about the long history of gaming in libraries. However, as I noted in *Gaming and Libraries Update: Broadening the Intersections,* when we take a more holistic view of gaming that includes board games, puzzles, computer games, and even outdoor games, that world suddenly seems less strange and more manageable.[2]

In fact, 2008 may be remembered as the year in which gaming became just like any other service in libraries, with librarians implementing gaming initiatives that look very much like those we already offer for books, movies, music, and computers for as varied an audience as other library services are offered. As gaming in libraries has become more of a mainstream service, rather than a curious exception, anecdotal evidence has appeared on mailing lists, in newspaper articles, in conference presentations, and on blog posts, and general themes have begun to emerge. Overall, it's clear that there are some common lessons libraries are learning from implementing gaming, and as with everything else in our profession, librarians want to share those lessons with their colleagues.

So in this third issue of *Library Technology Reports* devoted to the topic of gaming in libraries, we will examine some of the most common themes being noted and shared by librarians and illustrate them with five case studies. Covered in this issue are

- The benefits of social gaming
- Gaming that transforms libraries and communities
- The links between videogames and civic engagement
- Using gaming to reconnect with twenty- and thirty-somethings
- Political preparedness and communication for library gaming programs
- Games for fundraising

Since the previous *LTR* on this subject was published, the American Library Association presented the second TechSource Gaming, Learning, and Libraries Symposium (held in November 2008) and implemented ALA's first ever National Gaming Day (held on November 15, 2008). Working with librarians on both of these events and tracking individual initiatives to highlight on my personal blog (The Shifted Librarian) has given me the opportunity to identify patterns and trends appearing around this topic. In chapter 2, we will examine two published reports on gaming in general that have specific implications for libraries. While I will highlight the lessons these types of studies teach us from the "forest" view, the case studies will show us the more local, practical "trees" view from

which individual librarians can draw their own parallels in order to make decisions about gaming in their own institutions.

> *The Shifted Librarian*
> theshiftedlibrarian.com

The lessons in the following chapters come directly from practitioners implementing gaming in their libraries and are not based on theory but on firsthand interactions. The more I talk to librarians implementing gaming, the more I realize that these case studies are illustrative and not unique. Gaming continues to grow as a format and is being integrated into circulation, programming, reference, instruction, and other traditional library services. As it grows, these models lead the way, but the outcomes are often the same across gaming programs—increased connections between staff and underserved audiences, increased circulation of materials, increased engagement with library services, unique social interactions that happen only at the library, and positive interactions with the library where none may have existed before. As you read through to the conclusion, you will notice that the most consistent theme across these case studies (indeed, in general) is that gaming is relatively easy to implement at any scale and the return on investment for even the most basic setup provides a wealth of new opportunities for both libraries and patrons. As model after model shows, libraries that don't feel they have the expertise or resources to offer gaming services can do so and realize these same benefits.

Whether a library has started offering gaming services or not, readers should pay particular attention to the bulleted summaries of lessons learned at the end of chapters 2 through 6. While gaming is not a perfect fit for every library, these lessons can help librarians determine if the type of service described meets their goals for a gaming program. As with previous volumes, most of the initiatives highlighted in this issue require very few resources to implement, allowing libraries to experiment with different models. All that is needed is a goal, a plan, and the desire to achieve the outcome.

One of the lessons I have learned in my own life is that most people enjoy some form of gaming, even if they don't call themselves "gamers." While there are those people who do enjoy gaming alone, many prefer to game with others for the social experience it provides. I've learned a lot from my parents over the years, but respecting others and working with them to make the world a better place have been at the top of that list. I've found that games of all types and the social interactions that happen around them provide a venue for doing exactly those things, and I'm grateful to my parents for guiding me to a path in life that allows me to help others, just as they have in their own lives.

Games are not merely trivial play, although they surely provide opportunities for escape from life's daily struggles. If you look around you, you'll see that games offer players of all ages the opportunity to teach, learn, help, and interact with others, a participatory process that libraries can embrace and facilitate in our communities. In the next chapter, we'll look at what two major reports tell us about games and social experiences.

Notes

1. Diane Mello, e-mail to the author, March 22, 2009.
2. Jenny Levine, "Gaming & Libraries Update: Broadening the Intersections," *Library Technology Reports* 44, no. 3 (April 2008).