

Gaming Setups Common in Libraries

In this chapter, I will briefly look at the newest gaming consoles and present three possible setups for offering open play or tournaments in any type of library (see p. 28). These diagrams are intended to give you a very broad overview of what a configuration could look like. For detailed implementation plans, you will need to consult your IT staff, as networks, resources, and capabilities vary from library to library.

In addition, a brief list of games that have already proven successful within libraries will give you a starting point for thinking about which games you might want to offer your patrons. I suggest you show the list to your gaming community, and ask them which games they would most like to play at the library. Ask them to help with setting up the equipment, too, if need be. Don't worry if you've never seen local gamers before; I guarantee you that you have teens in your community who game—find them and ask for their help! You can also talk to staff at a local gaming store (Gamestop, Game Crazy, or Best Buy). While you're at it, talk to them about sponsoring your events or providing prizes for the winners!

Although this chapter does not even begin to cover the range of possibilities for video-game configurations in libraries, it should provide enough of an overview for nongamers (and will provide readers with a better understanding of the mechanics presented in the upcoming case studies). While reading a case study (see chapters 4 and 5), if you are having trouble visualizing the type of configuration the library used, return to this section to view the diagrams and games.

Video Game Consoles

Microsoft Xbox 360

The Microsoft Xbox 360 (see figure 6) was the first “next-generation” or “next-gen” console to make it to market in

November 2005, offering a detachable 20GB hard drive (replacing the current practice of using much smaller memory cards), two USB ports for plugging in digital cameras (to upload photos) or MP3 players (to stream music), advanced graphics capabilities, a wireless controller, a more powerful processor, a newly designed internal water-cooling system to reduce fan noise and heat, and a DVD player with a progressive scan for a more optimal picture. The premium package, which comes with the detachable hard drive, costs \$399; the more basic version costs \$299. The Xbox 360's late 2005 launch means there is no set date for the next version. If your library is going to purchase an Xbox at this time, this is the one to consider and try to invest in (although an older one can be purchased if price is an issue). Just make sure the games you want to play will work on whichever one you purchase (talk to technical staff at retail outlets or your community's teens to find out).

Nintendo GameCube

The Nintendo GameCube (see figure 7) was launched in November 2001, and it is due for an update. The next-gen version is on the horizon. Called the “Wii” (pronounced *wee*), it is slated for launch in late November 2006, although Nintendo has been cryptic about a specific date. Even pricing has not been announced, although a figure of \$229 has supposedly been leaked to game sites. New features for the Wii supposedly include an SD memory card slot, built-in 802.11g WiFi, parental controls, support for connecting wirelessly to Nintendo DS hand-held gaming devices, and a wireless motion-sensitive controller that players can use to navigate games. This means that a player could hold the controller and swing it like a bat, aim it like a gun, or wave it in the air to open a door. Gamers are anxiously awaiting this new system to

see if it works as promised. For libraries that can afford the slightly higher price tag, the good news is that the Wii will be able to play all GameCube games.

Sony PlayStation 2

The Sony PlayStation 2 (see figure 8) has been the most popular and best-selling of the three platforms. It has the most games as well as some of the most interesting accessories available for it. Released in October 2000, it will finally get an update in November 2006. Like the Xbox, the predictably named PS3 will come in two versions—a regular one and a more expensive premium one. The premium version will cost a whopping \$599 and will have an internal 60GB hard drive, a next-generation Blu-Ray DVD player, built-in 802.11g WiFi, high-definition output to TVs, and slots for reading multiple types of memory cards. The basic version *will not* include the built-in memory card reader, built-in WiFi, and high-definition connection. It will retail for a still seemingly high \$499. For libraries that can afford it, this option will provide great audio and video for gameplay in the library, especially since all PS1 and PS2 games will play on the new system.

Less Expensive Options

One thing to keep in mind as you look at consoles is that with the latest and greatest versions hitting shelves, the previous generation's equipment can be purchased on eBay for very reasonable prices (sometimes under a hun-

dred dollars for the console alone). If your library Friends group or administration provides enough money, you are better off purchasing the newest equipment possible in order to get long-term use. It is quite feasible, however, for strapped-for-cash libraries to start small with one system and one console.

If you already have an LCD projector, you can also add it to your setup in order to display gameplay at a life-size setting (see picture of *Dance Dance Revolution [DDR]* “dancers” in figure 10). Because many gamers don't own projectors (yet), this is sure to impress players and is another aspect of gaming (in-person, group gameplay, and interaction) that a player can't get at home as easily.



Figure 6: Microsoft Xbox 360. Image courtesy of Benjamin Hollis (<http://brh.numbera.com>).



Figure 7: Nintendo GameCube. Image from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:NGC_Gamecube.jpg (August 2006).



Figure 8: Sony PlayStation (www.playstation.com) will be upgraded this fall with the latest version of the platform, PlayStation 3.

Games

Xbox 360

Halo 2 is the sequel to a wildly popular first-person shooter (FPS) game in which “Master Chief” and his forces wage battles against the enemy, an alien covenant army. The player takes on the role of Master Chief and must stop the aliens from taking over Earth. Due to the violent nature of the fighting, the game is rated “M” for mature audiences. Gamers can play in single-player, offline mode but most often choose to play online against other players and in teams. Alternatively, players can network their own Xboxes and play in a cooperative, team-based mode offline, which makes this a good choice for libraries; however, because of the game’s M rating, many libraries require signed permission slips from parents or limit participation to older teens and adults.

GameCube

Mario Kart: Double Dash is one of the most popular racing games for the GameCube system (see figure 9). Players can choose which characters they want to represent them in the game, the karts they want to use, and the tracks they want to race on. As the player races around the track, trying to come in first, the player’s character can pick objects up off the track; the objects can then be used strategically as weapons against other opponents. Gamers can play in single-player mode against computer opponents, or up to eight GameCubes can be networked together to let up to eight users play each other. The game is deceptively complex, which gives it a near universal appeal to children, teens, and adults. The game’s “E” rating makes it an ideal choice for libraries.



Figure 9: *Mario Kart: Double Dash* is rated “E” for everyone, making it an ideal choice for libraries (<http://mariokart.com/doubledash>).

Super Smash Brothers is a fighting game, which automatically gives it a “T” rating, although the violence is depicted via animation. In the game, players can choose to be one of any number of Nintendo’s most popular characters from past games (Mario, etc.). Gameplay consists of the characters battling each other, although the way to win is not just to inflict damage but to also fling your opponent outside of the fighting area. Items that can be used as weapons randomly appear around the arena, and up to four characters can play at once.

Microsoft’s Halo 2 for Xbox 360 Platform

www.xbox.com/en-US/games/h/halo2

Mario Kart: Double Dash

<http://mariokart.com/doubledash>

Official Web Site for Nintendo’s Super Smash Brothers

www.smashbros.com

Dance Dance Revolution and Guitar Hero

www.ddrgame.com

PlayStation 2

Dance Dance Revolution, commonly referred to as *DDR*, is an extremely popular game that negates the stereotype of all video games being sedentary (see figure 10). Each *DDR* game (there are several different ones) comes with a collection of songs. It works like this: arrows appear at the bottom of the screen and scroll upwards; when they align with (or lay on top of) the stationary, transparent arrows at the top of the screen, the player must step on the corresponding arrow on the dance pad. There are varying levels of difficulty, and two players can dance against each other if two pads are plugged into the console. The game is very popular with all ages and has even been used by some people as a weight-loss program.

PlayStation: EyeToy

EyeToy is a small camera made just for the PlayStation system. When you plug it into the console and play games designed for it, the camera projects your image into the game. Any move you make affects the gameplay—in essence making your body the controller. In the image of the girl in the soccer game (see figure 11), the player would have to physically move to her left and use her hands to prevent the ball from going in the goal. It’s like the most primitive version of the *Star Trek* Holodeck, but it is



Figure 10: Left: Attendees of the Gaming Symposium (December 2005, Chicago, IL) playing *DDR*. Right: *DDR* dance pads and common floor configuration of *DDR* network.

very popular, especially with young children. More and more games are appearing on the market with EyeToy capability.

Guitar Hero

Guitar Hero is a relatively new game that uses a fake guitar as the controller. Just as players have to step on arrows on a dance pad in *DDR* to match the pattern on the screen, players must hit the correct combination of colored buttons on the guitar. The goal is to press the fret buttons at the appropriate time (when they appear on the screen) in order to finish the song and move on to the next one (and unlock new songs). There are forty-seven different songs you can play, and there are four levels of difficulty. If you have two guitar controllers, two people

can play against each other. Information about purchasing the *Guitar Hero* game is available at www.ddrgame.com/guitarhero.html.

Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki—Libraries Hosting Gaming
http://libsucces.org/index.php?title=Gaming#Libraries_Hosting_Gaming



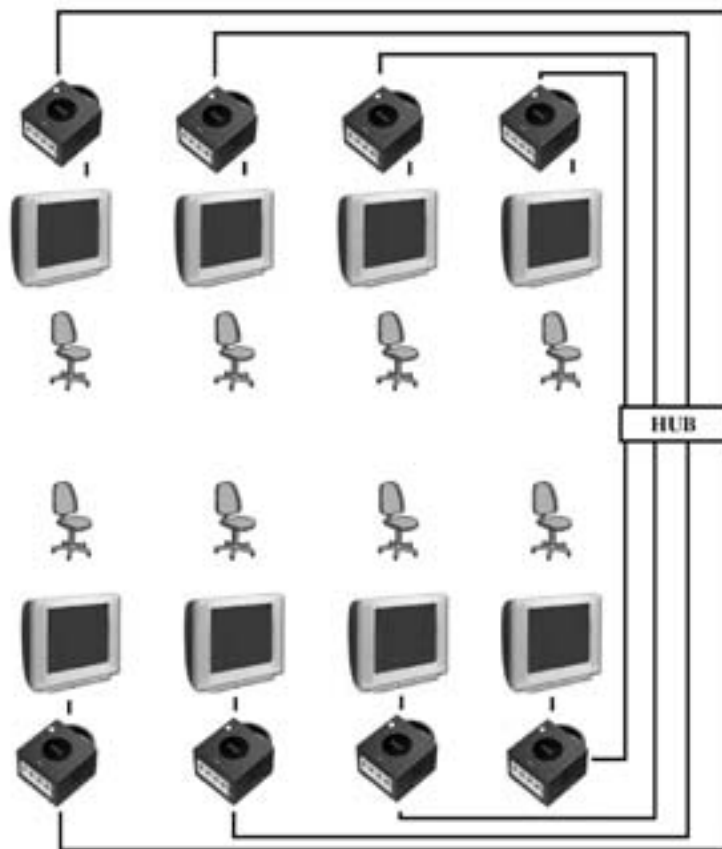
Figure 11: EyeToy is a small camera designed for Sony's PlayStation. The camera enables the player to insert his or her image into the game. (www.eyetoy.com)

Talking Points

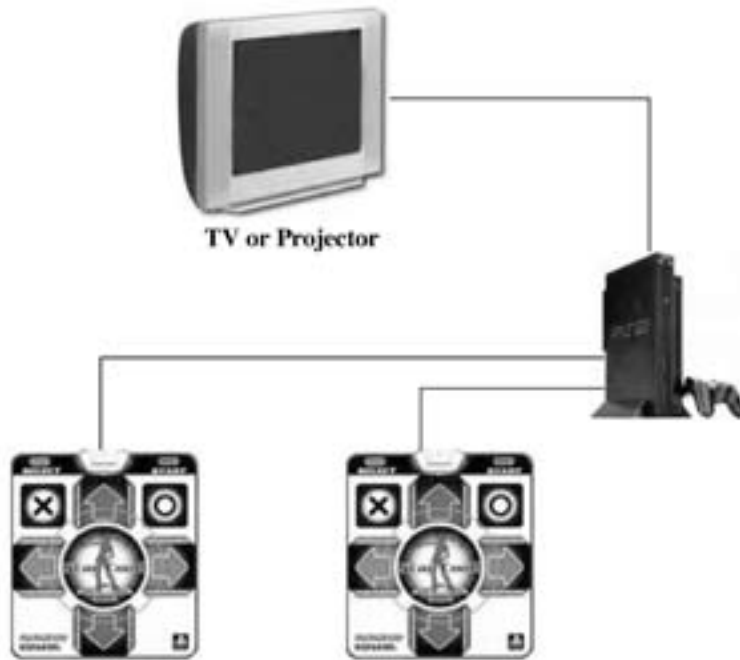
- It is possible for a library to offer gaming completely for free (other than devoting staff time and space) by letting gamers bring in the necessary equipment. If a library already has a TV, the most inexpensive setup it can purchase is a PlayStation 2, one *DDR* game, and two dance pads, all of which can be purchased on eBay for less than \$200.
- If your setup is mobile enough (i.e., if the televisions are portable enough), you can take gaming outside of your four walls, into your community.
- Some setups can be tricky, and much will depend on what resources you have available. If you don't know where to start, high school and college-age patrons can answer some of your questions, and they may even be able to help you design and implement your setup. Don't be scared to contact other libraries already hosting gaming events; most are happy to share their experiences and provide advice. A list of potential contacts can be found on Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki (http://libsucces.org/index.php?title=Gaming#Libraries_Hosting_Gaming).

- Some libraries let patrons play a small selection of M-rated games (usually *Halo* or *Halo 2*) by requiring a parental permission slip or limiting participation to those who are certain age and older. The overwhelming number of game titles on the market are rated “E” for “Everyone” or “T” for “Teen” and are appropriate for a wide range of library users.
- Nintendo games tend to offer the widest appeal for families and younger users, *and* the depth of Nintendo’s best games make them good choices even for Generation X and baby boomer gamers. The Nintendo game *Mario Kart: Double Dash* is an excellent starting point because it’s fun to play, of the depth it provides for serious gamers, and its lack of non-cartoon violence. Another excellent choice is *Dance Dance Revolution (DDR)*, a very physically active game suited to any age group. There are even online communities devoted to helping *DDR* players use the game to lose weight and get in shape.
- And here’s some advice from Ann Arbor District Library gaming expert Eli Neiburger: “Decide what games you want to play first. This will determine which console/platform you will use. For example, *Halo* and *Halo 2* are only available on the Xbox console, *Mario* games are only available for the Nintendo platform, and *Guitar Hero* is made for the PlayStation system.”

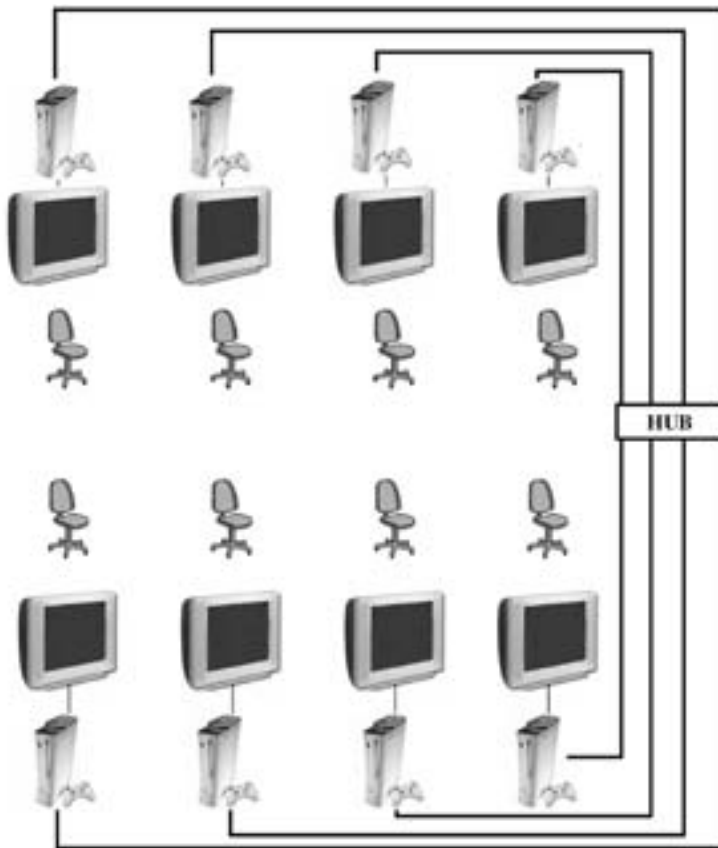
Potential Configurations



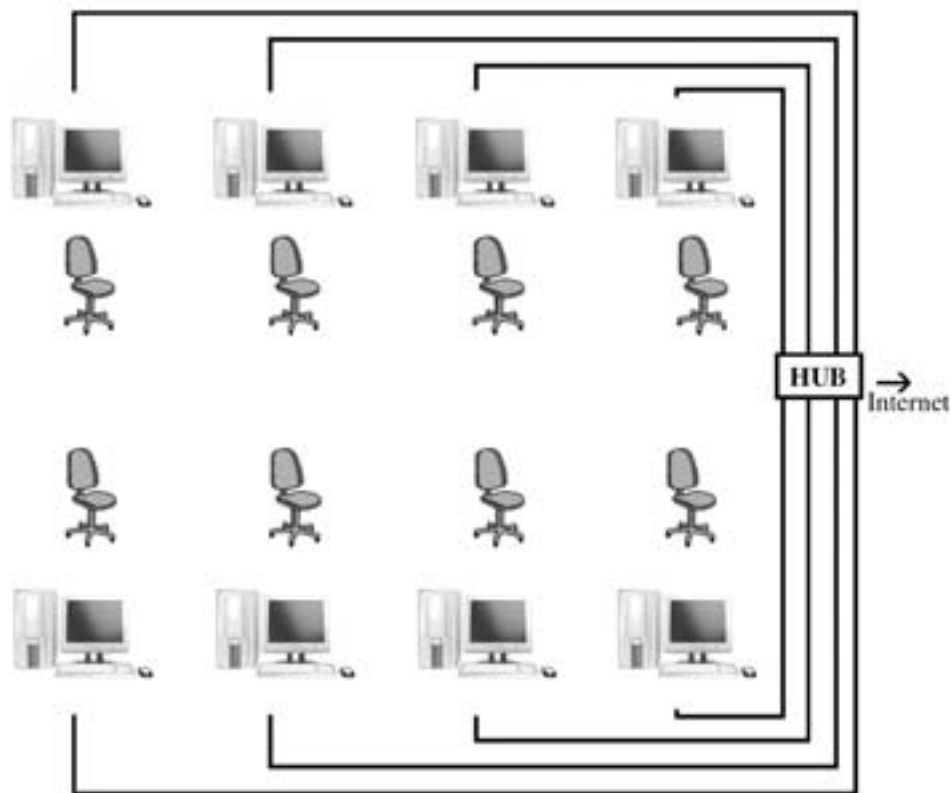
Common network setup for *Mario Kart: Double Dash* on the Nintendo GameCube. Up to eight Nintendo GameCubes can be networked together for gameplay.



Common network setup for *Dance Dance Revolution* for PlayStation 2.



Up to sixteen Xbox 360s can be networked together for gameplay. This is a common network setup for *Halo 2* for Xbox.



Common network setup for LAN party. The network can be comprised of the library's computers or computers that users bring in; there is no limit to the number of computers that can be networked, although you will probably want to limit your setup to sixteen computers at most, primarily for logistical reasons. You also might be limited by the number of players supported by the games you choose to play, so check the game's box or instruction booklet for the maximum number of simultaneous players.