Gaming at the Library on a Shoestring Budget

Gaming on a Shoestring
An Infopeople Webinar
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Agenda
• Benefits of gaming
• Procedures
• Usual and new implementation techniques
• Game genres and how to get them
• Dealing with problems
• Successful gaming parties
• Marketing
• Best Practices
• Wrap-up

Gaming and the library world
• YALSA gaming night
• Games and Gaming Member Initiative Group
• New publications

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So, what can gaming do for me?

- Show patrons other uses for the library
- Attract large and diverse groups
- Bolster the sense of the library as a community place

So, what can gaming do for me?

- Attract new audiences
  - The “Google generation”
    - Tends to bypass libraries
    - Comfortable with technology and social networking tools
    - Has trouble distinguishing good sources of information from bad

But what can gaming do for our patrons?

- Fun!
- Launching pad for learning new technologies
- Can be a bridge across the “digital divide”
Libraries and games: The way it's usually done

- Games are not hard to find in libraries today
  - Dance Dance Revolution parties
  - Intergenerational Wii tournaments between teens and seniors

Above: The Akron Summit County (Ohio) Public Library hosts an annual Madden football tournament for teens. – Photo by Ken Love, Akron Beacon Journal.

Libraries and games: The way it's usually done

- Inter-library tournaments are beginning to take place

Above: Eli Neiburger of the Ann Arbor District Library has been active in a project (http://gtsystem.org) that will allow players at different libraries to compete with one another in a tournament atmosphere.

Libraries and games: The way it's usually done

- Equipment
  - Console (Microsoft Xbox, Nintendo Wii)
  - Easily implemented
  - Self-contained
  - Straightforward
  - Heavily marketed

- Drawbacks
  - Limited number of players
  - Multiple units for tournaments or large programs
  - Expensive!
Libraries and games: The way it's usually done

- Cost
  - Multiple copies of game for multiple consoles
  - Need a TV for each console

Above: The Nintendo Wii. At around $300 per unit, it's the cheapest of the major game consoles.

Another approach

Use existing equipment!

What you need

- Some networked computers
- A good Internet connection
- Some games
What you need

- Graphics cards

This $30 graphics card is capable of running some very popular games like Quake 3.

What you need

- System requirements

Wikipedia not only offers information about popular games and links to the publisher, but also shows their system requirements.

What you need

- Demos
  - “Engines”

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What you need

- Case study at Twinsburg

Valve software is the publisher of both Half-Life 2 and Team Fortress 2, so finding the information about how they were related was just a matter of hitting the company’s Web site.

Your mileage may vary

- Every library is different
- Network setup
  - Firewalls
  - Physical architecture

Game genres

- Types of games
  - Genres
  - Cultural differences

Lost Odyssey is an example of a Japanese RPG
Game genres

- First-person shooter (FPS)
  - Point of view of character
  - Most controversial
  - Play out in real time

Bioshock was an FPS that was known for its well-crafted story and art deco-influenced art style.

Game genres

- Role-playing Games (RPG)
  - Often turn-based
  - Slower pace
  - Highly customizable characters

Neverwinter Nights 2, based on Dungeons & Dragons

Game genres

- Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games (MMORPGs)

Above: With over 11 million active players, World of Warcraft boasts a larger population than some real-world countries.
With its quirky humor and ground-breaking gameplay, Portal was one of the most talked about games of 2007.

Starcraft is a popular RTS. Players have to think fast to avoid being overwhelmed!

Sam and Max is a humorous take on noir.
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Game genres

• Simulation Games
  • Varying degrees of realism

Some flight simulators pay meticulous attention to the details of the real-life machines portrayed.

How to obtain games

• Open Source
  • Sometimes made by hobbyists
  • Often from licenses freed from copyright

Sauerbraten is an open source FPS that's noted for its flexibility in letting users easily make their own maps.

How to obtain games

• Freeware games
  • Free to play
  • Copyrighted
  • Often played through Web browsers

Paper Pilot is a free-to-play browser-based game.
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How to obtain games

• Commercial titles
  • By far the most popular
  • New titles cost $20-$50
  • Older titles less expensive or free
  • Usually require one license per computer

Some publishers are starting to experiment with free, ad-supported games.

• Valve software makes some of today’s most popular games.

• Reduced rates!
  • Bulk licenses
  • Educator licenses
  • Case study: Twinsburg

Valve software makes some of today’s most popular games.

• Who to ask
  • Publisher
  • Developer

Developer Obsidian Entertainment was eager to help the library navigate publisher Atari’s corporate structure.

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Public perceptions of gaming in the library

- Gaming is a frequent target of advocacy groups and the media
- Concerns usually center on violence or sexual content
- A small number of games invite such controversy

“We have a nation of Manchurian Candidate video gamers out there who are ready, willing, and able to massacre, and some of them will.”
— Jack Thompson, news release, Feb. 2008

Public perceptions of gaming in the library

- Some concerns are less sensationalized
  - Heavy gaming has been linked to lower grades and poor social skills

- Most education groups and researchers take issue with the more sensationalist reports
  - Complaints about games compared to concerns over comic books and pulp fiction in previous generations

Anonymous public servers are often vulnerable to behavior like racism, sexism and homophobia

Public perceptions of gaming in the library

- There are serious dangers
  - Graphic violence in some games
  - Online element
    - Poor behavior is common on public servers

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How to deal with problems

- Make sure any minors have permission slips
- Take steps to ensure parents know what the games involve
- [Image of Twinsburg's permission slips on the reverse of game party promotional flyers]

Twinsburg's permission slips are on the reverse of game party promotional flyers.

How to deal with problems

- Make sure rules are clear and posted in the gaming area itself
- [Image of Twinsburg Public Library rules]

Players both in the library and at home see our rules when they start a game.

How to deal with problems

- Don’t allow anonymous online players
- [Image of Twinsburg’s game protected by a simple password]

Twinsburg’s game is protected by a simple password, so only players who see the flyer in the library or know who we are can participate.
How to deal with problems

- Monitor events
  - Physical moderators
  - In-game moderators

In-game moderators can head off potential problems.

The successful gaming party

- Keep things lively
  - Include games that benefit from a group atmosphere
  - Think about time allotted

Team Fortress 2 can support two teams of up to 16 players each.

The successful gaming party

- Think about different tastes

With its laid back gameplay and endearing art style, Peggle can make a great alternative for players who may be intimidated by the more competitive games.
The successful gaming party

• Pick an accessible game
  • Games that can be easily understood
  • Games that don’t require too much continuous attention from the players
  • Games that don’t need too much set-up

The successful gaming party

• Help players learn the games
  • Include simplified instructions
  • Allow players to do prep work beforehand

The successful gaming party

• Pick an audience
  • Choose games to appeal to players, not librarians
Marketing

- Traditional marketing
  - Flyers
  - Library announcements
- Other methods
  - Online
  - Youth hangouts

It wasn’t until the day of the game party that I learned one of our teens had created a Facebook announcement for it!

Marketing

- Use any marketing tools made possible by the games

Steam is the online component of Valve’s games. It works much like Facebook.

Wrap-up

- Finding great games
  - Ask teens!
  - Check magazines
  - Look around online

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Wrap-up

• Selected resources
  • Literature
    • Gamers in the Library? The What, Where and How of Videogame Tournaments for all Ages, by Eli Neiburger
    • Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth About Violent Video Games and What Parents Can Do, by Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl Olson

Wrap-up

• Web sites about games and gaming
  • http://www.game-central.org/
  • http://www.1up.com/do/platform?did=11
  • http://www.computerandvideogames.com/sites/pcgamer/

Wrap-up

• Twinsburg Public Library’s Steam Group page
  • http://steamcommunity.com/groups/twinsburg

• Links to video clips from games and news stories about games, examples of in-game behavior, and a checklist of things to consider when planning a gaming party
  • http://www.fredbaerkircher.com/webinar.html