

Getting Started

Possible obstacles to getting video games into your library and how to overcome them

Gaming has become a popular mode of entertainment and socialising in today's society. Librarians have recognised the potential videogames have as a way to draw in more patrons. The decision to include videogames requires careful thought and planning as there are many concerns that need to be researched and choices that must be discussed. Videogame collections are new avenues of information to be explored. However, since the idea is a fairly new one, not much has been written on it and librarians are still working out how best to include videogames in their libraries. The questions that librarians are faced with is, should videogames be included in the library? What kinds of video games should be part of the collection? Where and how should game centres set up? I'll be exploring some of the arguments for and against their inclusion in collections.

Videogames are a new frontier that libraries appear eager to explore. There are several areas which need proper thought and research in order to form good models for systems of execution. These include educational use, violence in videogames, and outreach, all of which are dependent on collection policy and event coordination.



Violence in videogames is an area of great conversation among experts and has a wide range of opinion. Anderson argues that when combining "all relevant empirical studies using meta-analytic techniques, five separate effects emerge with considerable consistency." (Anderson, 2003). He also argues that all forms of violence generate high levels of aggression which are exhibited in college students after playing videogames, even if they are E-rated games (suitable for everyone), which tend to have more comical violence than realistic.

There is the other side of the argument with Jenkins, who points out that youth violence is at an all time low, "The overwhelming majority of kids who play do NOT commit antisocial acts. According to a 2001 U.S. Surgeon General's report, the strongest risk factors for school shootings centered on mental stability and the quality of home life, not media exposure." (2007). If these factors are not being considered when doing these studies, then they are flawed. Each person's background forms how they will approach violence.

Libraries should be aware of these divergent views when considering their collections, but should not let them severely impact their choices for their collections. Like with popular novels, they should take into account what people are interested in, in order to draw in users. However, libraries need to remain aware of what is considered appropriate according to their own personal policies and communities to make sure their collections are relevant.

Another area to consider when looking at videogame collection development is the potential for outreach. There isn't really an argument as to whether this should happen, but it is new territory and there is, as always, doubt with new territory. It also works as an incentive for libraries to begin their videogame collections, since collections will theoretically draw in youth.



The Ottawa Public Library was recently given a donation by a development company, and is using that money to attract teens with the introduction of videogames and gaming stations in their libraries. Jane Venus, manager of children and teen services for the Ottawa Public Library "has noticed that some

teenagers who come into the library to play video games stick around and read books, surf the Internet or take part in workshops" (Pilienci, 2008). The introduction of gaming terminals and tournaments has encouraged other library interests that may not have been there before, just as they were intended to. The systems have also proven to be popular with senior citizens, "who regularly block off time to come into the library and use the Nintendo Wii" (Pilienci, 2008). This unforeseen but welcomed increase in another age bracket is also an important point in the debate for having videogames in the library.

That argument may be made even stronger in the near future. According to an article written by Gaudiosi, "the ALA received a \$1 million grant from the Verizon Foundation to study how library gaming activities improve children's problem-solving and literacy skills." This would help libraries argue the relevancy of videogames in the library and would possibly help them with deciding which to include in their collection, depending on the nature of the research.

Console programming aside, you may want to supply access to computer games for your patrons. There is a variety of ways to do this, you could have a few computers designated as gaming computers mixed in among the other computers, or they could be separated from the others and placed in an area that does not interfere with other patrons. Since gamers can often play for hours on end, it would be best to enforce a time limit, perhaps two to three hours, so that other patrons get a chance to play as well. Headphones would also be an asset for those who don't have their own. Patrons could sign them out at the desk and return them when they are done.

Based on what I have read, the argument for videogames having a place in the library is stronger than any argument against. That does not mean, however, that libraries will be without obstacles in developing their collections. Cost is always a factor and the relevancy of games changes very quickly. I do not, however, believe that the violence in a videogame should discount it from a collection, though that should be considered depending on the community the library belongs to. Ratings are supplied on the covers of games, and a clear policy can protect any library from the potential anger of a parent who is not happy with the games available for their children.

