

# video games AND FAMILIES



entertainment  
software  
association



Video games are a source of family entertainment, with parents, children and grandparents all vying for the controls. Today's parents increasingly view video games as a positive and often educational way to interact with their children. In fact, games in the "family entertainment" category are one of the most popular segments of the video game market. Parents now have a variety of resources available to help them monitor and evaluate games, so they can ensure that only appropriate materials make it into their children's hands.



## FUN FOR EVERY GENERATION

The generation that grew up playing the Atari and humming the tune of Nintendo's *Super Mario Brothers* is now in adulthood, many with children of their own. As this generation and the video game industry mature, these men and women are continuing to play video games and are joined by their children and their parents. The introduction of new games such as Harmonix's *Rock Band* and consoles such as the Nintendo Wii further broaden the identity of a gamer to now embrace every demographic, from grandparents to toddlers.

According to a 2010 report by the Entertainment Software Association, 67 percent of American households now play video games. The average gamer is 34 years old and has been playing for 12 years. Industry research reveals some other interesting demographic facts about gamers:

- **Heads of Households** - 67 percent of heads of households play computer and video games. Half the parents in America play video games with their children at least once weekly.
- **Women** - 40 percent of all players are women and women over 18 years of age are one of the industry's fastest growing demographics. Research by Nintendo has also shown that women represent 51 percent of Wii users and 53 percent of DS users.
- **Seniors** - 26 percent of people over the age of 50 play games, a figure sure to rise in coming years with nursing homes and senior centers across the nation now incorporating video games into their activities.



## PARENTS AND VIDEO GAMES

Parents are a growing segment of the gaming population. According to a study conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, more than a third (35 percent) of parents play computer and video games and 93 percent of these parents have children who also play them. These parent gamers report spending just over nine hours a month playing games with their kids, and 49 percent of parents say they play games with children at least once per month. Nearly half (47 percent) of the computer and video game-playing parents are women and more than a third (37 percent) play games with their children at least once a week.

Sixty-four percent of parents with children under the age of 18 consider computer and video games a positive addition to their children's lives. Among parents who play computer and video games, 86 percent play with their children and 48 percent of gamer parents feel that playing games has brought their families closer together. When asked why they play with their children, these parents responded:

- Because it's fun for the entire family (87 percent);
- Because their children ask them to (83 percent); and,
- Because it's a good opportunity to socialize with the child or to monitor game content (75 percent and 60 percent, respectively).

# 60.3 percent

Of the 273.5 million video games sold last year, 60.3 percent were rated "Early Childhood (EC)," "Everyone (E)" and "Everyone 10+ (E10+)."



## FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT GAMES

According to research compiled by the NPD Group, on average, an astonishing nine games were sold every second of every day of 2009. Games in the "family entertainment" genre accounted for more than 15 percent of all games sold in 2009. This figure means more than one out of every eight games sold was a family game.

Many family video games reprise characters from popular family movies like DreamWorks Animation's "Shrek." The video game *Shrek Treasure Hunt*, by TDK Mediactive, enables players to take on the role of Shrek through ten related games. Other family video games capitalize on sports. 3DO's *Sammy Sosa's Softball Slam* appeals to baseball and softball fans by featuring a virtual softball diamond where players run bases and tweak pitching skills. Traditional family games are even getting into the mix with titles like *Hasbro Family Game Night*, published by Electronic Arts, where parents play classic board games such as *Sorry!*, *Yahtzee* and *Battleship* with their children on the Nintendo Wii console.

Many parents and teachers take advantage of the educational value that the "edutainment" genre of video games provides. Edutainment games embed typical core studies into video games for kids, so they can hone in on math, science and other skills while playing. One example of an edutainment video game is *The Oregon Trail*, developed by Brøderbund and The Learning Company. The game teaches players about American History and 19th century pioneer life on the Oregon Trail by allowing them to assume the role of a wagon chief who leads settlers from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon's Willamette Valley by way of the Oregon Trail.

# 12

The number of years the average game player has been playing computer and video games.



## MONITORING VIDEO GAME CONTENT

Parents take an active role in reviewing the computer and video games their children play. According to ESA's research, the vast majority of parents either monitors games' content (97 percent) or is involved in their purchase (93 percent). In addition, 85 percent of all parents (gamer and non-gamer alike) who vote say that they, not government, retailers or game publishers, should take the most responsibility for monitoring children's exposure to games that may have content inappropriate for minors. Moreover, by a nearly two-to-one margin (60 percent vs. 36 percent), parents agree that it is not the role of government to regulate game sales in an attempt to protect children from exposure to violent and/or sexual video game content.

Parents use the Entertainment Software Rating Board's (ESRB) rating system when making game choices. ESRB is a non-profit self-regulatory body, that assigns age and content ratings to computer and video games, enforces industry-adopted advertising guidelines and helps ensure responsible online privacy practices. The ratings provided by the ESRB enable parents to make informed decisions about the computer and video games they choose for their families, based both on age-appropriateness and concise, impartial descriptions of content that may have triggered the rating or that may otherwise be of interest. In 2008, the ESRB introduced expanded game rating summaries, which are brief descriptions of the content in a game and provide a rationale for why a particular rating was assigned.

The entertainment software industry has universally adopted the ESRB rating system; retailers support it and parents and opinion leaders consider it the best entertainment rating system in the country. The latest report of the Federal Trade Commission shows that over 80 percent of parents are aware of the ESRB system and over 70 percent of parents use it in making their buying decisions. Parents can find more information on ESRB's Web site at [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org) or the mobile site, [m.esrb.org](http://m.esrb.org).

Many parents also take advantage of parental controls that are included in game consoles. For example, on Sony's handheld PlayStation Portable console and its PlayStation 3 console, parents can block games and movies they don't want their children to view. In the fall of 2007, Microsoft, with the support of the Parent Teacher Association, unveiled a new tool for its Xbox 360 that allows parents to limit the amount of time kids spend on video games. Parents can learn more about Microsoft's features at [www.xbox.com/en-US/support/familysettings/](http://www.xbox.com/en-US/support/familysettings/).

Parents have also created their own resources for video game information. Andrew Bub maintains GamerDad.com, a site at which he and other volunteer parents rate video games. Gamer parents and professional writers provide articles, community forums, and updated video game reviews to keep parents informed about specific video games.

### 79 percent

The percentage of game players of all ages who report exercising or playing sports an average of 20 hours a month.

### \$48.8 billion

The amount of revenue expected to result from "Family Entertainment" portable software sales by 2011, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report.