Chapter VI

Games and Advertisement: Beyond Banners and Billboards

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Abstract

The use of digital games for the promotion of goods and services is becoming more popular with the maturing and penetration of the medium. This chapter analyzes the use of advertisement in games and seeks to answer in which way brands are integrated in interactive play. The branding of virtual worlds offers a completely new range of opportunities for advertisers to create a web of brands, and it is the usage of marketing through games that differs considerably. This chapter offers a categorization of advergames and will address the use of advergames from a developmental perspective, differing between commercial games with in-game advertisement and dedicated advergames. Where TV commercials, print ads, and the World Wide Web rely on representation for the conveying of their message, advergames are able to add the extra dimension of simulation as a mode of representation, resulting in various interesting game designs.
Introduction

The increasing sociocultural and economic importance of digital games not only caught the attention of politicians, academics, and journalists but advertisers as well. Modern day gamers complement their use of the television screen with playing games, and use their PCs for Web browsing and buying books online as well as gaming. Marketers may have found their way around in the cinema and the television set; but the virtual world has yet to be fully explored. Slowly but steadily, the adaptive character of advertisement is spilling over to digital games. Besides money earned from the original purchase and subscriptions another revenue stream may become equally important for game publishers and developers. Why have digital games become such an interesting medium for advertisers? And in which way are brands integrated in interactive play? This chapter seeks an answer to both questions.

Digital play on its part can no longer be seen as child’s play. The question is, if games ever have been child’s play. Due to the graphic nature, but also the complexity and sophistication of many contemporary PC games, children are not by default the primary target group of game publishers. As stated elsewhere in this volume, the average age of a gamer is not 13, not even 20, but 29, while 59% percent of the players are male. A significant number (43%) of all of all U.S. gamers play online and the gender breakdown of online players is similar to the overall demographics (ESA, 2004). And when gamers do play, they take their time. They have to, as contemporary console games for the big three—Xbox, PlayStation 2, and GameCube—as well as the majority of PC games, allow gamers to invest dozens of hours of their free time.

Single-player, narrative-driven role playing games such as the Final Fantasy series can take hours to complete, more open ended simulation games such as The Sims series or the Rollercoaster Tycoon series can grip the short attention span of Generation Y even longer, and online multi-player games in theory be played indefinitely, for those considering playing games as an essential part of their lives. For the “hardcore” gamers, gaming is part of their lifestyle. The complex social worlds online multi-player games have become, makes playing such games even more rewarding from a sociocultural perspective, as discussed by Sal Humphreys elsewhere in this volume (Chapter IV). Spending 5 hours a day—on average—playing Counter-Strike with friends or clan mates, or playing 6 hours a day—role playing as a level 60 Night Elf Rogue in World of Warcraft with guild mates—is not an uncommon activity at all.

The Online Games White Paper 2003 by the International Game Developers Association (2003) estimates the U.S. market size of PC CD-based online games at less than 5 million gamers, and the PC Web-based category at 50 million (or more) gamers. The growing broadband penetration in the United States, Europe,
Building the Force: Enacting Fan Brand Community Through the Star Wars BB-8 Droid Builders Club
www.igi-global.com/chapter/building-the-force/190236?camid=4v1a

Customer Perceived Values and Consumer Decisions: An Explanatory Model
www.igi-global.com/chapter/customer-perceived-values-and-consumer-decisions/109679?camid=4v1a