

Chapter 35

Online Games for Children

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ABSTRACT

This chapter studies the niche market segment of the gaming industry which is the educational games for children aged 3-12. Gaming behaviors including both positive and negative effects of online gaming on children were noted. A framework for developing an online children's educational game is proposed. A prototype is developed to illustrate the use of the framework. Together with the proposed framework (and prototype), the ADVISOR framework has been used to discuss on the product platform, sales, and marketing strategies. The promotion of such online educational games is discussed based on the advertising and promotion strategies. The pricing strategy of the digital product will be discussed using the 3 Cs of pricing framework. Recommendations are suggested to help the online educational gaming industry to cross the chasm. The authors would like to propose the following set of CSR initiatives with alignment to government regulatory.

INTRODUCTION

Since the development of networked computers, online games have become a part of people's life. Modern online games are played through internet connections. There are many digital products and services such as music, movie, games and educational services launched in IDM market with target ranging from children to adults. Particularly for

children, most of what they experienced on the internet is new. Children are keen on searching cartoon characters of their interest and playing simple games online. Older children however are more interested in enjoying the 'cool' experience of interacting with each other through instant messaging, email, blog, social networking web sites and interactive games (Demner, 2001). However, some potential unsafe factors such as violent games might threaten the well being of the children. There are violent games which can be accessed

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on the internet (David, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary for the IDM companies to launch more appropriate digital products such as educational games for children, and government should set regulatory rules to monitor the content produce by the IDM companies.

It has been observed that the numbers of children playing online games are on a globally increasing trend. According to NPD Group 2007 report, a provider of reliable and comprehensive consumer and retail information for a wide range of industries, from toddlers to tweens to teens, more than one-third of kids in the United States are spending more time playing games today than they did one year ago. This trend is particularly pronounced for online game play, according to Kids & Gaming, the most recent report from The NPD Group. The report also reported that although males and older kids are more likely to spend more time per week on gaming, the most significant jump occurs from ages 2 to 5 to ages 6 to 8. At this time, kids become more serious about gaming, reflected by spending 3 more hours a week, or 75 percent more time than they used to (Corporate Social Responsibility, 2008). According to an online article, research shows that the children who played online games were more active and had sharper minds than their other counterparts. Some games have been specifically designed to teach people about a certain subject, expand concepts, reinforce development, understand a historical event or culture, or assist them in learning a skill as they play (David, 2007). However, computer and games also receive much more negative criticism because games are often coined with issues such as mindless entertainment, enhanced social recluse, sexism and consumerism. Research shows that kids who play violent games showed an increase in emotional arousal and a corresponding decrease of activity in brain areas involving self-control, inhibition and attention (David, 2007).

The authors analyze the different requirements of each children group in the game industry and

elaborate the whole business framework of online educational game for children. A framework for developing online educational games targeting at the niche portion of the market i.e. the age group of 3-12 is proposed. The games that are developed through this framework seeks to develop the children in this age group in a positive manner and reduce major negative effects as introduced above. This business model covers the deep analysis of technology platform and product prototype, approach, market strategy, promoting and selling such online educational games, impact on the society and regulatory and policy issues and future trends in the children online educational game area.

BACKGROUND

Choosing the right game software for children will stimulate their interest in learning. Children dislike having to read manuals or even onscreen instructions. The game should have simple and direct visual instructions superimposed in game-play. It is advisable that the child does not engage in computer games more than three hours a day. Table 1 shows the recommendation game type for different children age group (Demner, 2001).

Table 1 shows that Nursery children need to learn ABCs, how things work and recognize numbers. They are new to interface such as mouse and keyboard. As they are very young, it is recommended that they should not play game for more than 10 to 20 minutes. Kindergarten and lower primary children are hungry to explore the new world. They are curious, and the game type should encourage their interest in mathematics, phonics, reading and spelling. The game should not be more than 20 to 30 minutes. For the upper primary children, they like to be socially involved. They are recommended to play games that encourage critical thinking and those that have build in chat functions. They are recommended to play for half an hour at one stretch.

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