
Subject: Article on EA's "monopoly" of the gaming industry

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Electronic Arts and the Growing Trends of the Gaming Industry

Anyone who plays videogames these days has probably played at least one game produced by Electronic Arts(EA). Brands like Madden, Medal of Honor, The Sims, and big name licenses like

2003, posting revenues of \$2.5 billion dollars for this past year. With strong franchises, a lot of money in pocket, and products on many different mediums, EA seems to have a bright future

growth present a threat to the advancement of games as a whole?

A brief history of EA shows an astounding pedigree. Founded in 1982, EA published many

critically acclaimed EA game was Archon, a top down, chess like strategy game. Other classics included The Seven Cities of Gold, where you explored the New World as Christopher Columbus,

created by the now famous Peter Molyneux and his development team at Bullfrog. In 1988, the famous Madden series was born on the Apple II, and it was quickly ported to the Sega Genesis in 1990, thus beginning the long series of Madden games to come.

In the 1990s, Electronic Arts had continued success with its publishing, licensing, and various acquisitions. In 1992, EA acquired Origin Systems Inc., thus securing the famous Ultima and Wing Commander licenses. Syndicate, another Molyneux classic, was published in 1993. EA Sports was formed in 1991 to develop several other licensed sports games like Madden, including NHL Hockey and FIFA. In 1994 Bullfrog struck again with Theme Park, and Looking Glass Studios' System Shock was released to incredible acclaim. In 1995, the first Need For Speed was released, and Bullfrog fully merged with EA. In 1997, EA released Ultima Online, one of the first persistent online worlds. Westwood Studios, the makers of the popular Command and Conquer series, was also acquired by EA in 1998 for \$122.5 million dollars. In 1999, the first Metal of Honor

branded games. Electronic Arts was now a force to be reckoned with in the gaming industry, but nothing could prepare the world for what would come in the next millennium.

The smash hit The Sims took the PC gaming world by storm in the year 2000. In early 2002, EA reported that The Sims had sold more than 6.3 million copies, making it one of the best selling games of all time, and the Medal of Honor series, the SSX series, and the various sports series developed by EA Sports are all top sellers. Licensed games from franchises like The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and James Bond also make large contributions to revenues.

market. Sales figures for the year 2003 show that EA has no more than four games in the top ten best sellers list (see chart below), a trend that continues from years prior.

Rank	Game Title	Console	Publisher	Total sales
2	Pokemon Ruby	GBA	Nintendo	1,500,000
3	Pokemon Sapphire	GBA	Nintendo	1,400,000
4	Zelda: The Wind Waker	GCN	Nintendo	1,300,000
5	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	PS2	Rockstar Games	1,100,000
6	Enter the Matrix	PS2	Atari	1,000,000
7	The Getaway	PS2	Sony	829,000
9	NBA Street Vol. 2	PS2	EA	790,000
10	The Sims	PS2	EA	707,000

Electronic Arts is expanding their operations more and more, and with new franchises like NFL Street, updates to old series like Madden, and a sequel to The Sims in production, their financial success as a corporation looks brighter than ever. Many analysts have praised the company and possibility that EA will become the most dominant force in the American gaming market.

But why am I telling you all of this? Why should you be worried that EA rules the American gaming market and dominates sales? Well, if EA becomes too large of a force in the industry, it has some potentially damaging side effects that will hurt us, the consumers.

First and foremost, competition breeds creativity. If EA can knock out the competition, it could (potentially) create a lot of problems for the industry. The early console wars gave birth to many creative and original ideas that helped push the industry to its current status. For example,

SEGA to launch its 16-bit Genesis system unimpeded. Nintendo was forced to catch up to SEGA in the early 90s by developing the SNES, and many console gamers remember this as a time of incredible innovation. As both companies were neck and neck, they were forced to push the boundaries of the industry, which greatly benefitted the consumer. Where there is competition, there is innovation, but if EA can keep selling the same football game every year with just a few small changes, how will games advance as a genre and art form?

With almost 600 million dollars in sales in 2003(not including December), and 20% of the entire when EA has enough money to buy out any studios that bring out a hit game, and secure popular franchises like Command and Conquer or SimCity. A good example is their acquisition of

DreamWorks Interactive (makers of Medal of Honor) in early 2000, and the subsequent exodus of the original Medal of Honor team two years later. One of those original team members, Scott Langteau, became the Chief Operating Officer for the newly formed Spark Unlimited development

wanted to create a place where the people who create game content have the best avenue by where they can get their amazing work into the game...In the past, it was difficult getting those

their own companies, such as Sacnoth (a company made up of former SNK and Squaresoft employees). If EA keeps acquiring budding development studios, and conforming new games to the current market trend, it might result in a stifling of creativity in the industry as a whole. Why innovate when you can stick to the get-rich-quick formula?

As entertainment software slowly grows into a lucrative business, companies once made up of gamers first and foremost are slowly giving way to corporations whose eyes are primarily fixed on

necessarily play games, but are instead primarily concerned about the bottom line. Every company that wants to stay in business needs to make money, however when execs are completely unfamiliar with the art of designing and developing a game, they tend to authorize less risks and more rehash. You could almost make an analogy between the gaming industry and Hollywood, in that major movie studios rarely put out truly experimental films and require most

industry (and possibly, their place in the company), resulting in more and more sequels that guarantee revenues, and less and less creative titles. Case in point: EA has released a total of six expansions for their flagship product, The Sims. These expansions retail at around \$30, but typically contain very little enhancement of the original premise, instead adding new skins and objects to use in game (which I feel should be made available online instead). On top of this, the design flaws of the original game (such as awkward pathfinding) have never been addressed. Despite all of these facts, the expansion packs are top sellers. Why make something better when

Although there are exceptions to the idea that big companies equal less innovative games (Capcom, Konami, Nintendo), the current economic trends (and the tendency for corporate execs to demand larger salaries) point towards a movement towards less chancy titles, which is why

Another example of corporate policy dictating game play is the changes made to Ultima Online in the year 2000. The rising success of Sony's EverQuest prompted EA to change UO in a way that would attract the same user base as EverQuest. Unfortunately, these changes eliminated much of the player vs player interaction that was a staple of UO, and cherished by many players. In the end, many of the older fans left Ultima Online as the ideas that made it groundbreaking were slowly phased out, only to be replaced by ideas that mirrored Everquest more "sugar-coated" game play.

on the making of Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, can see where the money went: the historical

accuracy was terrific, the cinematic style of each stage was painstakingly created, and the musical score was awe-inspiring. However, look at the wave of sequels that Medal of Honor has spawned, all using the same graphics engine and containing the same all-to-familiar game play elements, which unfortunately, still sell many copies. The new Ultima, UXO, will likely be developed with the shinier swords to swing around. EA will always go where the money is, and inventive developers

If we as gamers want the industry to grow and be accepted by the mainstream as art, the boundaries of our medium must be expanded by companies that are passionate about games and what experiences they can deliver to the audiences that play them. With wealthy companies like EA caring more about the bottom line than creativity, the progress of games as a medium will

aim of this article to demonize Electronic Arts or good business sense, but rather, to make gamers aware of something that has been brewing for a long time. Will the continued success of EA hurt the gaming industry as a whole? Only time will tell.
