

# Games in libraries – because there's more to libraries than just books



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## References

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**2 Entertainment trends in America:** <http://bit.ly/AcrDQT>

**3 2011 Sales, demographic and usage data:** <http://bit.ly/kLHJ2Q>

**4 Gaming in UK libraries; a survey by Sarah McNicol and Carl Cross:** <http://bit.ly/xrT7NH>

**5 How games saved my life:** <http://gamessavedmylife.com/>

**6 Barnet Libraries activities and clubs for young people:** <http://bit.ly/AvXtwb>

**7 A simple Google search will throw up many. One example of many is Sandhurst library:** <http://bit.ly/Apkj62>

**8 Wiltshire Public Library stock policy 2009:** <http://bit.ly/yVkzqn>

**9 National Gaming Day 2011:** <http://ngd.ala.org/>

**10 Finnish Library Uses Crowdsourced Game To Fix Indexing Errors:** <http://bit.ly/thr40N>

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**12 Read Beyond the Lines: Transmedia has changed the very notion of books and reading:** <http://bit.ly/ujHf2t>

**W**e all play games. Whether it's the mainstream digital formats offered by video and handheld consoles; board games such as chess or monopoly; the challenges of the crossword puzzle; or the more abstract games that form our lives, such as beating the traffic light before it turns red, finding the best bargain in a store, trying to 'win' the argument for keeping libraries open against those who wish to close them, or climbing the career ladder by fair means or foul.

## Everyone plays games. Everyone is a gamer.

In this regular series of articles for *Update*, we'll look at the more tangible uses of games in libraries, and how they benefit librarians and patrons.

Much of this focus will be on digital games. How popular is this particular media? In a nutshell: very – more than most forms of media and culture. For example, one recent video game launch generated first day sales of \$400m, the largest opening day in entertainment – not just gaming – history.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is not surprising, as more Americans play video games (63%) than, for example, watch movies in the cinema (53%).<sup>2</sup> The average age of a video game purchaser, 58% of whom are male, is 41,<sup>3</sup> while 72% of American households are game playing, and 29% of gamers are over the age of 50. The emergence of a variety of gaming platforms, such as smartphones and tablet PCs, has accelerated this demographic spread, with digital game playing increasingly common amongst the very elderly, the disabled, and children under the age of three.

The data for Britain, home of one of the earliest video game 'scenes' in the 1980s, is similar.<sup>4</sup> And, despite the traditional media cherry picking the odd bad example of game players amongst the hundreds of millions of normal ones, there is a substantial and growing body of research and examples of the physical, psychological, learning and social benefits of many games and game playing.<sup>5</sup>

Games – especially those offered by public libraries – are not

## Gaming

The latest news on games in libraries

restricted to the digital medium. Analogue, non-digital, games are available in, or facilitated by, some libraries. For example, several libraries in Barnet run gaming clubs and events, drawing in disengaged young people and those who aren't aware of what libraries offer. As well as video game clubs, these include chess clubs<sup>6</sup> which are hugely popular with boys.

Game playing is also not limited to public libraries. Bridget Knutson runs a school library in Cheddar, where the children are encouraged to play games: 'Currently the most popular are Madlab, Buckaroo, Connect 4, Battling Tops, Ker-Plunk, and Jenga. Also used is Battleships and Guess Who. Maybe these are not the most intellectually challenging of games, but they keep our Years 9-13 quite happy.' Meanwhile, at Holmesdale Technical College, Caroline Roche, the school librarian, reports that: 'We run an after school club for Warhammer 40,000, which is really popular and attracts around 15 boys each week.'

In public libraries, the considerable majority of gameplay involves digital or video games. These typically run on a PC, or a video game console such as a Playstation, Wii or Xbox. In the UK, hundreds of public libraries<sup>7</sup> lend video games in much the same way as they lend CDs, DVDs, or books. For example, the Wiltshire public library stock policy of 2009<sup>8</sup> includes:



'Level 6 and 7 libraries and Wootton Bassett also hold collections of Playstation 2 console games... and Salisbury and Chippenham libraries have collections of Wii games.'

A smaller number of UK libraries hold events, such as video gaming evenings, drawing in mainly (but not exclusively) teens and young adults. These events are more widespread in the US public library sector, where gaming is commonplace. For example, the most recent annual National Gaming Day<sup>9</sup> – supported by the American Library Association – saw 27,767 registered players at 1,412 participating public libraries play a variety of games, some of which were networked and therefore enabled patrons to play against patrons at other libraries: 'The largest demographic group of attendees was families (21.9%), followed by a mix of ages (19.3%) and a mix of children and teens (18.9%).'

Games aren't used merely to draw new patrons into the library. The National Library of Finland uses a digital game where people check whether erroneous words exist in their archive, thus helping increase the accuracy of the digitised content.<sup>10</sup> The LemonTree game turns academic book location into a more interesting (and, therefore, more used and understood) experience for university students.<sup>11</sup> Libraries such as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France are cataloguing and preserving games as historical media. And researchers of trans-literacy point to video games as an entry point to related works in other media, such as graphic novels and other book formats<sup>12</sup>.

This column returns in March, when we'll look at video game genres, and list do's and don'ts of running a library video game event.