

History of video games



The History of Video Games

One of the youngest forms of entertainment to date, the path that led the video game industry to be the giant multibillion dollar industry that it is today is about as humble as World War II. Mounted in mystery and finding its roots in gambling dens and the minds of defense contractors, the history of video games is obtuse and then some. This essay will present a summary of the history of videogames, as it started in the mind of Ralph Baer, the 'Father of video games', to its place in present and future society as the place holder for billions of dollars in the entertainment industry.

Although he is barely spoken of today, except by those the behind scenes, the idea of interacting with televisions further than changing the volume and channel sprang out of the mind of Ralph Baer. After escaping Germany with his parents at the age of 16, Ralph came to America and began working in a television and repair factory. In 1943 he was drafted in the United States Army and served in World War II in Army Intelligence. (Game Informer, 2009)

Baer learned much of his knowledge in electronic technology while working for Loral, a military contractor that specialized in airborne technology. Loral approaches Baer with a mission: He is to make the best television technology and money can create. It was at this time that Baer had an idea to make a television that people can be actively engaged with. Loral wasn't nearly as enthusiastic as Baer was and shot his idea down, an action that may have been hastily made. (gamespot. com, 2009)

In the year of 1966, Baer approaches his associates with a full page paper on his idea, which is now in the Smithsonian. " That Document was basically the

Magna Carta of the home game industry. Within a year and a half, we were playing video ping-pong, hand ball, and shooting the screen with light guns,” Ralph Baer told Game Informer Magazine. (Game Informer Magazine, Gamespot. com)

Sanders and Associates gave Baer the thumbs up. They provided Baer with the backing he needed to start development on his beloved idea. Baer successfully created interactive games such as a chase game, a video tennis game, and a game involving a toy gun that could distinguish between different of types light emitted from a television screen.

Baer and other engineers on his team begin creating a prototype. In 1968, the Brown Box was created, named for its faux wood-grain housing. All that was left for Ralph Baer was to put his brainchild in the hands of the populous. This was much more difficult than expected. Sanders asked Baer to find a production partner for his invention. Many of the television and entertainment companies that he approached enjoyed the idea but did not want to enter into contractual obligations. Then he found Magnavox. In 1972, the Brown Box was released as the Magnavox Odyssey. One of its first games was the forever famous, Pong. (Game informer Magazine)

Before the first home console hit the stage, in 1958 the very first invention to resemble a video game was a table tennis like game played on an oscilloscope. Willy Higinbotham sought to keep visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory interested. A year later, he added a fifteen inch monitor to his unique device. He never placed a patent on his machine. (gamespot. com)

An MIT graduate by the name of Steve Russel created the first computer game, called SpaceWar. SpaceWar was played on a rigged up Digital PDP-1. This machine spurred the mind of many imaginative thinkers, one such being was Nolan Bushnell. (gamespot. com)

During his academic career, Bushnell sees SpaceWar and is left an everlasting impression. While working a summer job at a carnival, he sees the local coin-operated arcade filled with dozens of computer machines. Realizing it is only a dream, he sees that the cost of computers in that day makes this feat impossible. (gamespot. com)

In the early 1970's, Nolan, with the help of Ted Dabney, wanted to make an arcade booth with a SpaceWar based game. The result was Computer Space, the first video arcade game. Placed in a futuristic housing cabinet and crowned with a whopping (for those days) thirteen inch television, Bushnell and Dabney immediately gained support from Nutting Associates, an arcade game manufacturer. 1972 heralded the public's mass exposure to video arcades. Computer Space's success was short lived, as the public found the gameplay too challenging. (gamespot. com)

1972 was a busy year for video games. The dynamic duo Bushnell and Dabney, left Nutting to start Atari, naming it after a word equivalent to 'check' in the Japanese game Go, which is similar to chess. The two enlisted the help of AI Alcom to program the games. Alcom was given a preliminary assignment, and programmed the first ever Pong. A Pong machine was thrown together and placed in a bar, Andy Capps. Less than two weeks later, the machine broke down. The culprit was the coin storage bin, which was

flooded with quarters. Pong was a hit, and paved the way for modern day arcade games. (gamespot. com, Game Informer)

Years later, Baer took Bushnell, along with several other video game companies, to court for Bushnell's version of Pong. A settlement was reached out of court, where Bushnell finally agreed to pay the licensing fees. (Game Informer)

Nintendo, a Japanese word meaning, "leave luck to the heavens," is one of the oldest gaming companies today. Its roots began in the year 1889, as a Japanese playing card company. Nintendo quickly gained a following, as the Japanese mafia, the Yakuza, began using Nintendo's cards in their illegal gaming and gambling dens. This provided a steady income allowing the company to flourish. Nintendo first appeared in the United States in 1907, creating American styled cards. Impressed with Nintendo, Disney approached the company in 1959, commissioning Disney character cards. This brought Nintendo into the home of more upstanding families.

In the late 1970's to the early 1980's Nintendo put its foot in the door for electronic gaming, creating sundry unsuccessful arcade games, that is, until Donkey Kong. 1981 saw the flight of Donkey Kong, a game which took the nation by storm. Its success was only bested by games with the likes of Pac-man. This movement caused Nintendo to switch gears, and give serious thought to the video game industry. In 1985, it put the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in homes worldwide, giving itself the concrete foothold into the home console market that became the mainstream concept of most gaming companies of the day. (Wii for Dummies, nintendo. com)

The other large scale production companies of the day were Sony and Sega, both starting out as electronic repair and development companies. Those companies, along with Atari, Activision, Coleco, Magnavox, Mattel, and Nintendo, produce more than 15 home-based consoles in the span of six years, while gaming was only out of the womb for less than five years.

(Game Informer)

Original games such as Pong were played on a very limited plane comprised of dots and squares. The first games were also immovable programs that came with the consoles, which usually only had a few games. Optional peripherals could be purchased to slightly increase gameplay. In 1976, cartridges debuted, allowing games and consoles to be purchased separately, and for more games to be created and implemented well after a console's release. Cartridges, along with VHS tapes, held strong until 1992 when the compact disk killed cartridges for most consoles. Other than computers, the Sega Genesis was one the first consoles to use this form of the medium . Today, handhelds are the only platforms to see their usage, and we are actively watching them disappear and go the way of the VHS. Most games today float through airspace, are on CD's, or flow through cables. (gamespot. com, Game Informer)

Games also have under gone massive prosthetic changes. In the days of Odyssey, games were pixilated and simple to look at. In 1981, one of the first three dimensional games was created: Battlezone. It was also one of the first first-person games. One player played as a tank and faced enemies in a battle like simulation. It was met with much success and gratification. It even fell into the lap of the US Army, and an enhanced version was commissioned

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and used as a battle simulator to train troops. (gamespot. com, Know the Score)

Today, games continue to push the envelope. In 2000, Sony placed the Playstation 2 in the market, dazzling gamers with its almost lifelike games. It was met with Nintendo's Gamecube and Microsoft's Xbox. Four years later, the Xbox 360 hit the scene, with graphics that looked like works of art. A year later the Wii and Playstation 3 burst into the market, after much speculation about both. The Wii falls short of the other two consoles at first because of its graphics, but quickly gains fame due to its new wireless motion sensed controller. By November 16, 2006, it had sold more than fifty million units worldwide; more than that of Sony and Microsoft Combined. However, the undisputed champion of sales, is that of Nintendo's first handheld, the Gameboy. The Gameboy sold over one hundred-sixty million units worldwide. (nintendo. com, Game Informer)

The gaming phenomenon has reached heights that were never expected, especially given its complicated history. Its memorabilia have gained collective value faster than any franchise before it, with games less than 20 years old being bought and sold for more than three-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars. They are even moving in the direction of removing controllers from gameplay by having cameras capture and process movement and simple or complex gestures to advance the player in the game, such as Project Natal. (Game Informer)

This essay has captured the rocky surface of the video game movement. It began with its speculated beginnings, and ended with its present and future

outlook. Video games have stretched the relative views of space and time, pointed out infinite possibilities, have been emulated on the ' Big Screen' and allowed expressive outlets for the mind and bodies of my generation, and will continue to dazzle and amaze us for the remainder of our lives.

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