



Games, Geeks and the Parent's Dilemma - Audio

Games Design and e-Safety

Key:

AS: Angela Saini
B: Boy
G: Girl
F: Female
VC: Victoria Cooper
KS: Kieron Sheehy
PS: Phil Stuart
TF: Tia Fisher
J: James
C: Caroline
V: Vicky
Fel: Felicity
Ba: Barney
DH: Dawn Hallybone
Mi: Miranda
Ma: Martha
H: Hamish
JPG: John-Paul Gayford

AS: **Forgot books, music, TV or film, video games dominate the entertainment landscape. Blockbuster franchises like Call of Duty, FIFA and Mario are part of the most profitable medium in the world. In 2011, video games sales hit 1.93 billion pounds, 40.2% of the UK entertainment market, surpassing video formats like DVD for the first time.**

Over the decades, British design talent has played a key role in shaping this global games industry.

The epicentre of Britain's web based technology companies is the old street area of London, dubbed Silicone Roundabout, and that's where you will find Phil Stuart, creative director at Preloaded, a BAFTA winning games study.

PS: Playing games are just really an instinctive learning tool and the small children were testing out social dynamics to the games itself and understanding order and systems for game rules and actually building relationships through co-operations.

AS: **As you'd expect, he's a passionate advocate for the power of games.**

PS: It almost feels nonsensical to stop playing games as you get older and actually I think pushing games and play all the way through your life is a really, really important thing.

AS: Phil is at the leading edge of developments and games with a deep understanding of the way children and young people play them.

PS: Consoles, they get things like Nintendo, PlayStation, Microsoft, Xbox. They are the sort of dominant players but they are now on the decrease in favour of multipurpose devices such as smartphones, and smartphones and now Kindles, iPads, iPhones, are really dominating the market.

Games are becoming increasingly pervasive. So the act of playing games is now seeping into everyday life so whether you are playing games in the back of a car or on the bus on the way to school or in school lessons itself, in the playground, on the way home, whether you are playing with friends in the evening, even maybe late at night on your own, games are really changing into the kind of increasing demand and need of a mainstream audience. So players want to play the games more often and therefore games and the game design themselves is adapting and it's this demand that's fuelling one of the biggest kind of growth areas in the British technology industry.

AS: From Moshi Monsters and Club Penguin for the young gamer, to the less winsome, more adrenalin fuelled style of Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty, there's a bewildering array of games available to play on a range of different platforms.

PS: Games are really divided into genres just like films are, so the genres, kind of, provide the categorisation for games and for players and also for game designers themselves. Some familiar genres they'll be aware of will be things like platformers. So games like Super Mario or Sonic, adventure games, arcade games, games that are designed for very, sort of, short, kind of, like, frenetic gameplay, FPSs or First Person Shooters. So games that put the player into a 3D world that's often highly realistic, games like Call of Duty, even Grand Theft Auto has a sort of First Person Shooter element to it. You have sports games, you have racing games and simulation games, simulators like flight simulators and trying to recreate complex situations and scenarios in a kind of authentic accurate way. You've got RPGs, puzzle games, music games.

Really, game designers design into the genres and the genres provide the means for the player to be able to find the games and choose which games they want to actually play. So new subgenres emerge off the back of new commercial models or developments and technology. So in recent years, I am sure people will be aware of Nintendo Wii and Xbox Kinect and PlayStation Move that allow players to interact with the consoles in, like, their living room and their 3D space. That criteria for actual gameplay is informing the way we design games for those types of games and in effect creating a completely new genre in itself.

AS: Games companies are very aware of who their customers are.

PS: When you are designing games for young children, you are not only designing games that will be fun for them but will also appeal to their parents, after all, they are the people who have the money and the people who are going to be buying the game. When you edge older into the teen market where they have their own disposable income, you are really simply designing games that appeal to their own sensibility. So the space is hugely competitive

and as with most trend-driven content, the trends are linked to what is popular in the playground.

AS: Journalist and presenter, Charlie Brooker, has memorably described games as time sponges but some games are designed to be something more.

PS: We are different to traditional game studios in that we make games with purpose. We believe that the best games are something they are about and the about in our games is the history, the science, the embedded content. Our games take that content and make it the DNA of the game, so the idea is that as you are playing the game, as you are learning how to complete it, how to progress, how to win, you are understanding the learning in the process. And we believe, you know, really, really strongly that, actually, the best games can have embedded content in them and that the best games have something they are actually about themselves – that's the thing that makes them more interesting. And playing a game about the Opium Wars or 1066 or about Trafalgar or genetics, is actually intrinsically interesting because the content itself is interesting.

B: Yeah, what do you do?

AS: Children and young people increasingly play games with each other interactively online which brings with it a whole set of safety concerns. There are many large children's entertainment sites which run games and social networks for children to join in with. Safety is a paramount concern for the companies who run them and they use online moderators to ensure all is well.

TF: I am Tia Fisher. I work for eModeration which is a social media management agency and I have a special interest in child safety.

We work for some of the larger children's entertainment sites who run children's games and social networks and for those we act as community managers and moderators. The distinction between the two isn't very, very clear but community management is more to do with being the social host and moderating is more to do with being, if you like, the policeman. But generally speaking, for children's games the two functions very much overlap.

When your child first wants to go onto a gaming site, you should look at how the site is moderated. It should tell you in its terms. It will tell you what is and what is not allowed on the site and the behaviour which is expected. You should also sit down with your child and make sure that you have found together where the report button is - that might be called the report button, it might be called the flag button. It's where if your child sees any kind of inappropriate content or feels uncomfortable in a situation. Perhaps there are a group of avatars all ganging around him and, kind of, kicking him, then he can press that button and this situation will be brought to the attention of a moderator, who will hopefully be sitting behind the scenes 24/7 looking for these alert flags.

B: Cor, you have jumped into the beginning of a new world.

AS: When it comes to online safety, the advice to parents is to be aware and stay involved, set parental controls and perhaps disallow internet

connections in bedrooms. Age ratings on games are also important. Games like Call of Duty come with an 18 rating but it's widely played by people who are much younger. Exposure to violence and bad language are a concern and, of course, violent computer games have occasionally been blamed for influencing violent crime in the real world.

PS: Games are always designed with an age group in mind.

AS: Phil Stuart again.

PS: And just like movies, games go through a rigorous age certification process so the content found in these games is meant for players of that age and if you don't want your child to play a violent video game, you really just need to pay attention to the sticker that's on the front of the box. There's no doubt, though, that kids are playing games that are, kind of, aimed at an older audience and really that's just about good parenting and I don't think it's something like legislation can really stop, just like with an 18 certificate video, you know, when you are 14, you do end up watching them.

AS: In the final track of this podcast, we'll be hearing a discussion covering some of the points raised here by Phil Stuart and Tia Fisher. And, in the next track, you can hear parents give their views on the benefits and disadvantages of gaming for their children.