PROFESSIONAL WRITING AND VIDEO GAMES

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The international economic, cultural, and educational significance of video gaming is hard to overlook. In 2009, worldwide revenue for the video game industry exceeded US$60 billion, and is expected to reach US$112 billion by 2015. This is not just recreational gaming; the Entertainment Software Association reports that "70 percent of major employers utilize interactive software and games to train employees" (2012, p. 2). But why should this interest those who practice, research, and teach professional communication?

First, video games show much potential as "pedagogical tool[s] for professional writing courses and professional writing training" (Sherlock, 2009; see Coppola, 2003, and Jennings, 2002, for discussions of individual game-based courses). Scholars such as Gee (2003) and Squire (2006) have argued that video games are ideal environments for learning, and the social nature of many contemporary video
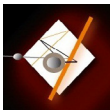
games encourages communication and collaborative problem-solving that extend beyond the game itself to include the many public forums where gamers gather to deliberate and strategize. Sherlock (2009) argues that "grouping" by players into collaborative teams to solve problems and reach goals encourages gamers to reflect upon the ideal "division of labor" that will allow their group to "work more efficiently and effectively toward their outcomes" through "explicit and implicit evaluations" about past interactions (p. 271). Effectively managing such a group—often composed of players distributed across the globe communicating through instant messaging and voice-over internet protocols—requires strategic thinking, technical knowledge, and timely communication.

Second, although they are highly visual media, video games enable numerous text-based interactions (Schmid, 2008) and are rich sites for facilitating meaningful communication (Bronack, Cheney, Riedl, & Tashner, 2008). Unlike static print texts, gaming spaces are "procedural" environments that allow for user-initiated "transformations and reconfigurations" within an "orderly system of causes and effects" (Kaplan, 2001, n.p.).

Such environments encourage players to become what Daniel Anderson (2003) called "prosumers"—individuals engaged in "productive consumption" of new media texts. For instance, many games allow users to create "mods"—modifications—to the gaming environment, and players of the online video game *World of Warcraft* have produced the second largest wiki, after Wikipedia, with over a quarter-million articles sharing their collective wisdom. Such user-created supple-

ments suggest how participation in video game communities can lead to engagement with complex literate practices (Mason, forthcoming).

Professional communicators and scholars can look to conversations within the field of gaming studies to understand contemporary changes in communication practices, interface design, and technical genres; what job opportunities lie in the gaming industry for professional communicators; and what skill sets these positions require. While venues such as *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* publish scholarship relevant to professional communication, books on video games can also enhance one's understanding of professional ethics (Consalvo, 2007), collaboration (Schroeder and Axelsson, 2006), and design (Zemliansky and Wilcox, 2010). Consalvo (2007), for instance, looked closely at how, given the "torrent of information" available online about how to play video games, gamers construct the line between a gamer being "informed" and a gamer being a "cheater" (p. 8). Such situations provide opportunities for professional communicators to reconsider, for instance, the ethical consequences of providing comprehensive content to users. For those interested in issues of human rights and social justice, the "serious gaming" movement even promises games that draw attention to social issues and solve public problems (McGonigal, 2011).

The clearest articulation of the potential for gaming as both a site for the employment of working professionals, and as a site for research and theory-building by communication scholars, however, is Eyman's 2008 article. In this article—one of several related articles in the 2008 special issue of *Technical Communication* devoted to 3D

virtual worlds—Eyman examined games as complex ecologies that enculturate players into professional discourse on topics such as interface design, systems management, and legal/ethical regulation. Enculturation into these topics can occur when, for instance, a gamer's frustration with an existing interface leads the gamer to research and install mods created by other gamers designed to add functionality to the interface. Or it can happen when a player, wanting to take advantage of the ability to design and sell digital content for a game, begins to study the intellectual property documentation published by the game developer. This ability to engage gaming as producer and not just consumer—to reconfigure and transform the gaming experience for oneself and for others—is key to gamers' enculturation into professional communicative practices.

Professional communicators, with their broad knowledge of textual and human systems, have the appropriate expertise needed, Eyman (2008) claimed, to "write themselves into the gaming industry" (p. 246). Video games and the communities they support thus provide substantial opportunities for researchers, consultants, educators, and writers alike. ■

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