

# games: IMPROVING THE WORKPLACE



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As the generation that grew up with video games enters and assumes leadership positions in the workplace, computer and video games increasingly play a role in business operations. A growing number of major companies, from automobile manufacturers to beverage producers, use video games to find and train employees and increase sales among their younger, tech-savvy customers. With the video game industry booming and its products gaining broader acceptance, the use of games in the workplace is certain to expand in the years ahead.



## RECRUITING

In recent years, organizations across all sectors have discovered that computer and video games are effective tools for raising awareness and generating excitement among young job candidates and current employees.

In 2011, Marriott International launched its own Facebook game to help recruit new employees for its expanding global network of hotel locations. The first version of *My Marriott Hotel* places players in a hotel kitchen, and challenges them to shop for ingredients, purchase cookware, hire and train chefs, and complete food orders. The game also features a "Do It For Real" link that connects players to the career page of Marriott's website. The company plans to release additional versions of the game in which players serve as housekeeping and room service staff.

In collaboration with Enspire Learning, Sun Microsystems developed two computer games, *Rise of the Shadow Specters* and *Dawn of the Shadow Specters*, to recruit new employees and teach new hires about the company's structure, history, business strategy and office culture. The games are set in an alternate fantasy universe called "Solaris" that has been settled by colonists that share Sun's core values. Solaris is divided into five worlds, each representing a different business unit within the company, and players must use a different product or philosophy to save each world from the "shadow specters" that threaten it.

**1 billion**

Expected global market,  
in dollars, for in-game  
advertising by 2014,  
according to Massive, Inc.

In addition, staffing firm Kelly Services created a virtual headquarters on Linden Labs' Second Life. The company's various "islands" within Second Life enable job candidates to work in a variety of virtual jobs that showcase some of Kelly's real-life career opportunities. Users can also visit the virtual headquarters for career development tips, seminars, conferences, job fairs, training, and a job search aid called "The Jobbit."

Companies also use video games to appeal to potential job candidates and boost the morale of current employees. Offices are abandoning ordinary break rooms and creating game zones where employees can relax and relieve stress. PopCap Games, a Seattle-based video game developing company, takes potential employees on a tour of their game room during interviews to give them a sense of the company and its culture. However, it is not just companies in the video game industry that see advantages of an in-house game room. Host Hotels & Resorts, based in Bethesda, Md., offers employees a game room complete with a big-screen TV and a video game console along with pool and foosball tables. *Washingtonian* magazine highlighted the company's game room in its "Great Places to Work" article series. Other companies use games to encourage healthy lifestyle choices among their employees. Humana, Inc. developed an Innovation Center that aims to motivate both customers and employees to make healthy decisions through the use of games and other technologies, including social game *FamScape*, which seeks to increase players' physical activity.

**75**

The percentage of companies whose managers said their employees like video game-based training more or the same as traditional training, according to a 2008 Entertainment Software Association survey.



## TRAINING

Because the costs can be less and the learning experiences more engaging, video game training offers public and private sector organizations a better way to train employees. According to a study by the Entertainment Software Association, 70 percent of major employers utilize interactive software and games to train employees. Additionally, more than three-quarters of organizations not utilizing this technology said they are likely to offer it by 2013.

These training techniques deliver valuable results. According to research conducted by Dr. Traci Sitzmann, a professor at the University of Colorado Denver Business School, employees who used video games during their training had a nine percent higher retention rate, an 11 percent higher factual knowledge level and a 14 percent higher skill-based knowledge level. Dr. Sitzmann encourages employers to provide employees with unlimited access to these training games, because playing a game multiple times further enhances their learning.

Canon U.S.A., for example, uses a video game to train new copier technicians. To play, technicians must drag and drop parts into the right spot on a virtual copier. IBM developed *INNOV8*, an interactive, three-dimensional educational game to teach graduate students a combination of business and IT skills. Meanwhile, railroad giant Union Pacific designed a video game to train employees to safely maneuver cars and locomotives in its rail yards and is now using it in 45 locations across the country.

UPS began experimenting with using video games to train newly recruited drivers after finding that 30 percent of candidates failed the company's traditional training program. In one video game, trainees take the driver's seat and must identify various obstacles, while another puts the trainee's avatar in a room where he must identify competitors' packages.

**1983**

The year Anheuser-Busch, Inc. first included advertising in Bally Midway's game *Tapper*.

Of the 1,629 trainees who have completed the program since its inception, only 10 percent have failed.

Even professional athletes use video games as a training tool, crediting the quality of sports simulations in games such as *FIFA Soccer* and *Madden NFL* with helping them improve their physical and mental skills, or to help maintain their skills while recovering from injuries.

The use of video games as a training tool has led to the creation of new companies to serve this growing demand. Marc Prensky founded Games2Train.com, where he has created more than 100 software titles for companies such as American Express, Bank of America, Charles Schwab & Co., Estée Lauder Companies, Inc., IBM, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Nokia Corporation, and Pfizer Inc. Stanford University education professor Dr. Byron Reeves founded Seriosity, which applies “game elements” to the human resource issues of Fortune 500 companies.

The public sector is also embracing this trend. For example, a team of scientists and graphic artists at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico developed a 3-D virtual training program for nuclear facility inspectors. The Virtual Simulation Baseline Experience (VISIBLE) uses models of real-world civilian reactor facilities to help inspectors learn to identify safety hazards at a plant. VISIBLE also enables inspectors to pinpoint and examine sections of a facility that are not within view of a security camera, providing an opportunity to identify areas of vulnerability within the facility.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is currently working with researchers at Sandia National Laboratories to develop a touch-screen, game-based simulation to train personnel and help agency leaders make key policy decisions. The *Borders High-Level Model* provides a virtual environment where users can play through different border incident scenarios, controlling (CBP) agents while managing budgetary and time constraints.

In addition, the Intelligence Advances Research Projects Activity, located within the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, initiated its Sirius Program in 2011 to support the development of serious games that can train intelligence analysts and help them overcome their biases.

14

The percent higher skill-based knowledge level exhibited by employees who used video games as part of their training program, according to Dr. Traci Sitzmann.



## MARKETING

As the video game playing population expands and diversifies, marketers are increasingly using in-game advertisements and advergames to reach potential customers. The market for such advertising is expected to expand enormously in the years ahead. According to Massive Incorporated, a creator of dynamic video game advertisements, the market for video game advertising will reach \$1 billion by 2014, a 13-fold increase from the \$75 million level identified by Nielsen Media Research in 2006.

Anheuser-Busch, Inc. and Adidas Ltd., set the tone for computer and video game advertisements in Bally Midway’s *Tapper* and Moby Game’s *FIFA’s International Soccer* in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, a number of industries and companies are building on this foundation. Film production companies may use original games to promote their films, such as Sony Pictures’ release of a nine-week episodic online game to stir audience interest in “Salt” before it hit theaters in July 2010. Ford Motor Company launched a “Start More Than a Car. Get More Than a Test Drive.” program in 2011 that incorporates interactive game-like elements into a test drive of the 2012 Ford Focus. Potential customers navigate a test track outfitted with electronic markers, and receive scores based on the accuracy of their driving. Drivers also hear the sounds of a crowd cheering when they precisely hit a target.

In addition, Home Shopping Network, Inc. (HSN) added an online HSN Arcade to its main website in hopes of attracting customers. Site visitors may choose to play one of 25 different games while viewing live streaming video of HSN's main television channel. One game, *Today's Special Puzzle*, is a jigsaw puzzle that pictures an item HSN features repeatedly within a 24-hour period. Those who complete the puzzle fastest are eligible to receive a variety of prizes. Hairstyling products company Redken sponsored a video game for Nintendo's Wii and DS platforms that teaches players hairstyling techniques while exposing them to Redken's products.



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