

2021 ESSENTIAL FACTS

+ ABOUT THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY +



entertainment
software
association



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The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) released the *2021 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry* in July 2021. Ipsos conducted the annual research for ESA in February of 2021 using an online methodology. The study gathered data from approximately 4,000 Americans (18+) about their video game playing habits and attitudes (margin of error 1.55%). All data included refers to adult video game players, except where noted. The *2021 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry* also includes data provided by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). Quotes included in this report are taken from survey responses to open-ended questions. Some quotes have been edited for clarity and/or length.



FOREWORD

We are a nation of video game players. This became increasingly clear during the global COVID-19 pandemic, as we all adapted to working, learning and playing at home. People from all walks of life reached for video games to find joy, connection and a sense of belonging when it was needed most. And games continue to be a positive source of entertainment and comfort.

This year's report is a snapshot of the American video game playing community following a year of social distancing, just as the country was starting to open again. **Today, nearly 227 million Americans play video games.** Players across the country embrace the ability of games to inspire, provide stress relief and mental stimulation or simply bring joy through play.

We're also increasingly playing together. More than three quarters of players play video games with others online or in person at least weekly, up from two thirds last year. **And playing together is a family affair, as 74 percent of parents play games with their children at least weekly, up from 55 percent in 2020.** To reflect this growth, we have included, for the first time, quotes from survey respondents to illustrate the meaningful ways video games shape our lives and show how video games will continue to shape our world.

Games transcend age, race, gender, platform and even political parties. Indeed, this is the United States of Play.

— **Stanley Pierre-Louis**

President & Chief Executive Officer, Entertainment Software Association

THE VIDEO GAME PLAYER COMMUNITY

More than two out of every three Americans play video games.
There are players of all ages and from all backgrounds.



77% voted in the 2020 election

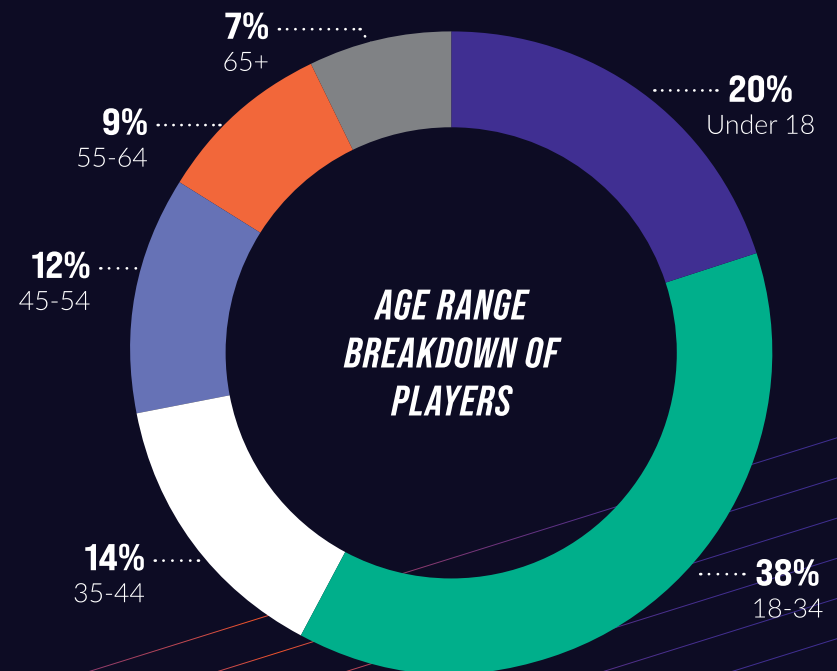
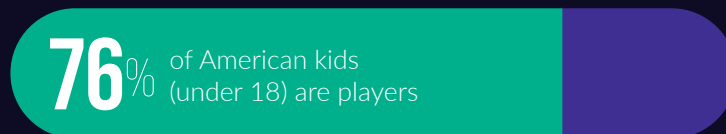
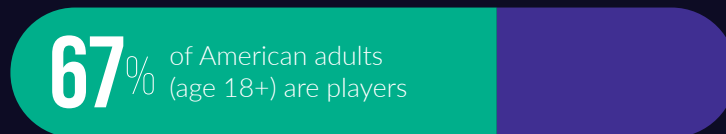
There are nearly
227 million
players across all ages in the US
(226.6 million players)

The average video game player is

31 years old

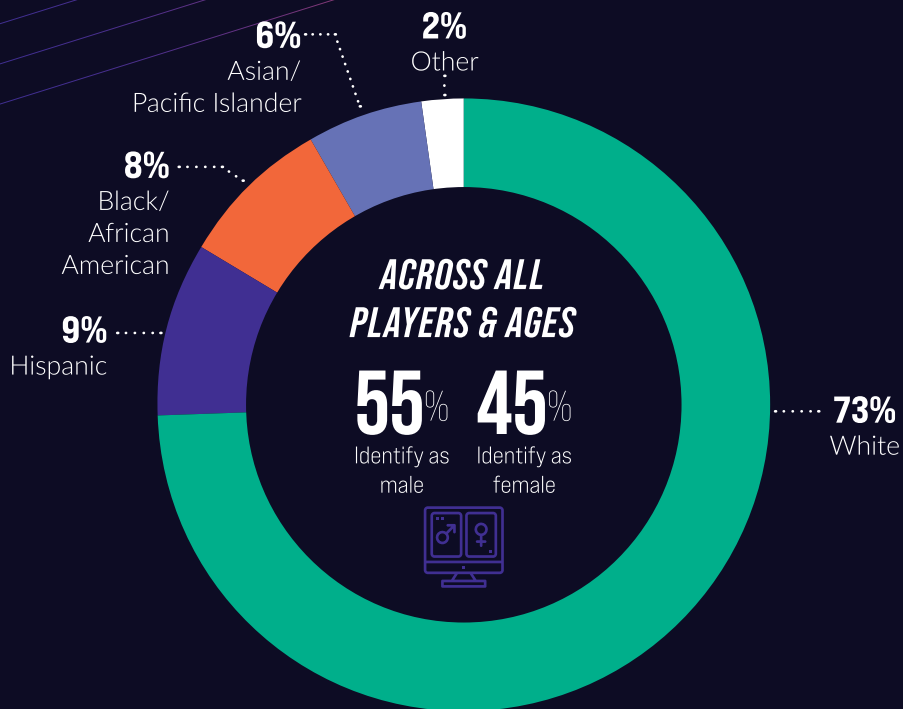
Across all ages, 80% of players are over

18 years old



THE VIDEO GAME PLAYER COMMUNITY

PLAYER ETHNICITY



87% of players agree that video game players are a diverse group of people



74% of Americans have at least one video game player in their household



32% of players have children under 18 in their household

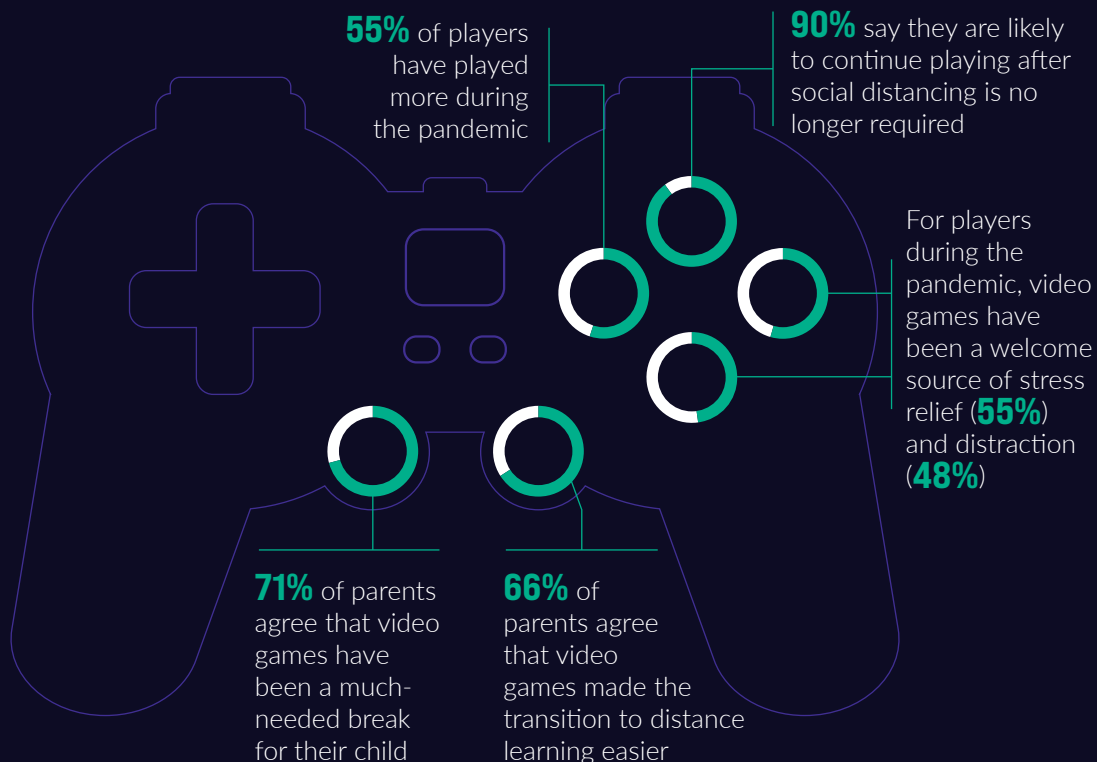


Not only did I meet my closest friends through video games, some video games have helped me (and are still helping me) understand my identity as a queer person and how I fit in the world.”

— a player on what got them into video games

VIDEO GAMES AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

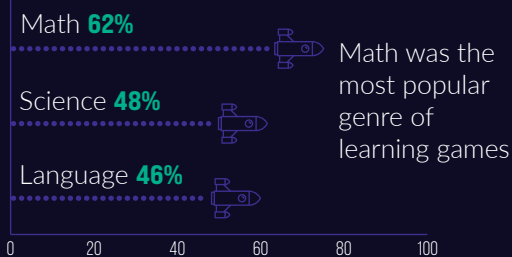
Video games have been a source of relaxation, comfort and connection during an extraordinarily difficult year.



70% of parents said they have allowed their children to do more when it comes to video games during the pandemic

59% of parents say their child used education games during the pandemic

63% of those parents said the education games were very or extremely effective



“Due to COVID, online video games have ensured we keep Friday game nights while remaining safe at home.”
— a player on what got them into video games



THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

We use games to relax, to connect, and to be entertained.
Players are a diverse community, strengthening bonds through play.



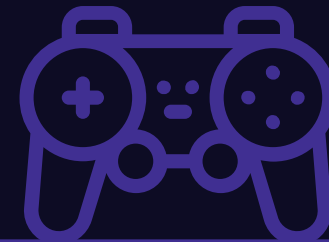
89%

say video games can bring together different types of people (individuals of different cultures, races, ages, political affiliations, etc.)



89%

say video games can create accessible experiences for people with different abilities



Players think that video game play has a positive impact on their lives

90%

say video games bring joy through play

87%

say video games provide mental stimulation

87%

say video games provide stress relief

81%

say video games can help build teamwork and collaboration skills

79%

say video games can inspire people

THE BENEFITS OF PLAY



77% play with others online or in-person at least weekly (up from 65% in 2020)

Online with others

7.5

hours/wk
(up from 6.6 hours in 2020)

 **HOURS PLAYED**

In-person with others

4.5

hours/wk
(up from 4.3 hours in 2020)

VIDEO GAME PLAYERS PLAY WITH

53%

Friends

31%

Spouse/
Partner

31%

Other family
members

23%

Team/guild/
clanmate/"online
only" friends

6%

Parents

78%

think games introduce us to new friendships and relationships

54%

have met people through video games they otherwise would not have met

53%

say video games have helped them stay connected to friends/family

42%

have met a good friend, spouse, or significant other through video games



They give me entertainment and give me the opportunity to spend times with my friends and family that I don't get to see often."

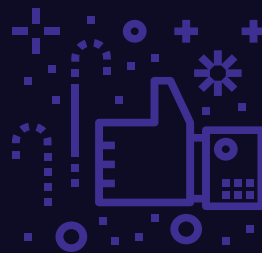
— a player on what got them into video games



PLAYER HABITS AND PREFERENCES

Sometimes we play to be entertained, sometimes to relax, sometimes to problem solve. There really is a game for everyone and for every mood.

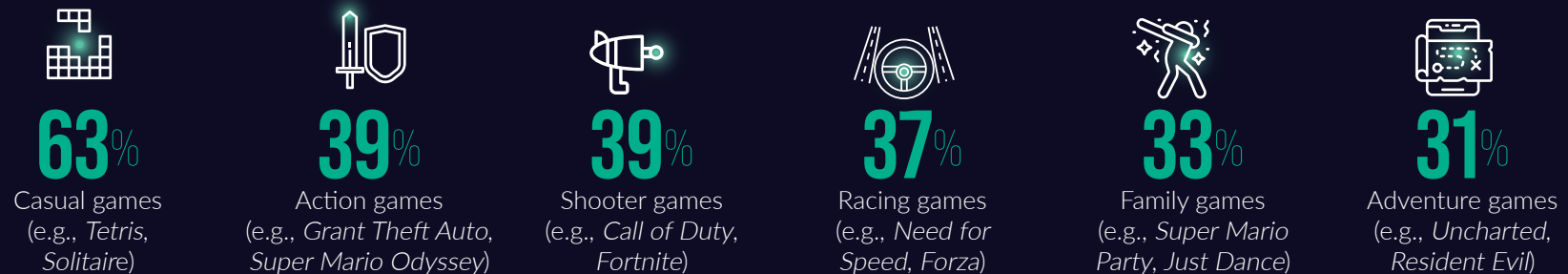
DEVICES USED FOR VIDEO GAMES



HOURS SPENT PLAYING PER WEEK



MOST POPULAR GAME GENRES PLAYED REGULARLY



GAME PREFERENCES PER PLATFORM

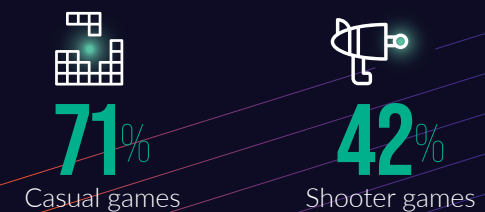
SMARTPHONE PLAYERS



GAME CONSOLE PLAYERS



PC PLAYERS



PARENTS, FAMILIES AND VIDEO GAMES

Video games are a family affair for a majority of families. Parents use a combination of household rules, parental controls and ratings to find the right balance for their families.

AMONG PARENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO PLAY VIDEO GAMES REGULARLY*



86%

of parents are aware of the ESRB ratings** and 76% regularly use ESRB ratings



82%

of parents use parental control settings on at least one of their child's game devices

MOST PARENTS HAVE HOUSEHOLD RULES FOR VIDEO GAMES*



90%

require their children to obtain permission from a parent before making any purchase using real money within a game



83%

say their children must secure a parent's permission of any video game they want to play



78%

have screen time rules for playing video games such as specific time of day or how long their children can play (or both)



77%

say their children must get a parent's permission to communicate with others online



ESRB Rating Data*

Of the 4,201 ratings assigned by the ESRB to physical and downloadable console games in 2020:



49%

received an E (Everyone) rating



16%

received an E10+ (Everyone 10+) rating



21%

received a T (Teen) rating



14%

received an M (Mature) rating

* Source: ESRB

** Among parents who purchase physical games for their children)

PARENTS, FAMILIES AND VIDEO GAMES

74% of parents play games with their children at least weekly (up from 55% in 2020)

TOP REASONS FOR PLAYING WITH THEIR CHILDREN

57%
say it's fun for all of us

54%
say it's a good opportunity for me to socialize with my child



53%
say video games are a great way for the family to spend time together

51%
because my child asks me

IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN JUST FUN

80% of Americans agree that video games can be educational

75% of Americans agree that video games can create experiences that improve cognitive skills

68% of Americans agree that video games can create experiences that improve creative skills

53% of Americans agree that video games help teach kids how to win and lose in a health manner



My daughter wanted a game system, so I got one and I kind of enjoyed it too."

— a player on what got them into video games



PROFILES OF VIDEO GAME PLAYERS

No matter who we are or where we're from, the joy of play unites us all.

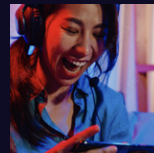
PLAYERS ON THE BENEFITS OF VIDEO GAMES

“



They have taught me to collaborate with others and be more culturally sensitive towards those different from me.”

“



I have learned problem solving skills and communication skills. I have learned to become more adaptable.”

“



They're a fun and exciting way to pass the time with my partner and friends. Some video games have educational elements that I really like too as a history nerd.”

“



I do get to spend time with my son playing and talking about what we are going to do next is a nice bonding opportunity.”

AGES 18-34

Men and women in this age group both say they play to escape and be entertained (**56%**). More women (**67%**) say they play to unwind than do men (**55%**).



PROFILES OF VIDEO GAME PLAYERS



58% play on a console



57% play on a smartphone



89% play with others



80% play for 3+ hours a week



60% play with friends

PREFERRED GAME GENRES



53%

Casual games
(e.g., *Tetris*, *Solitaire*)



53%

Shooter games
(e.g., *Call of Duty*, *Fortnite*)



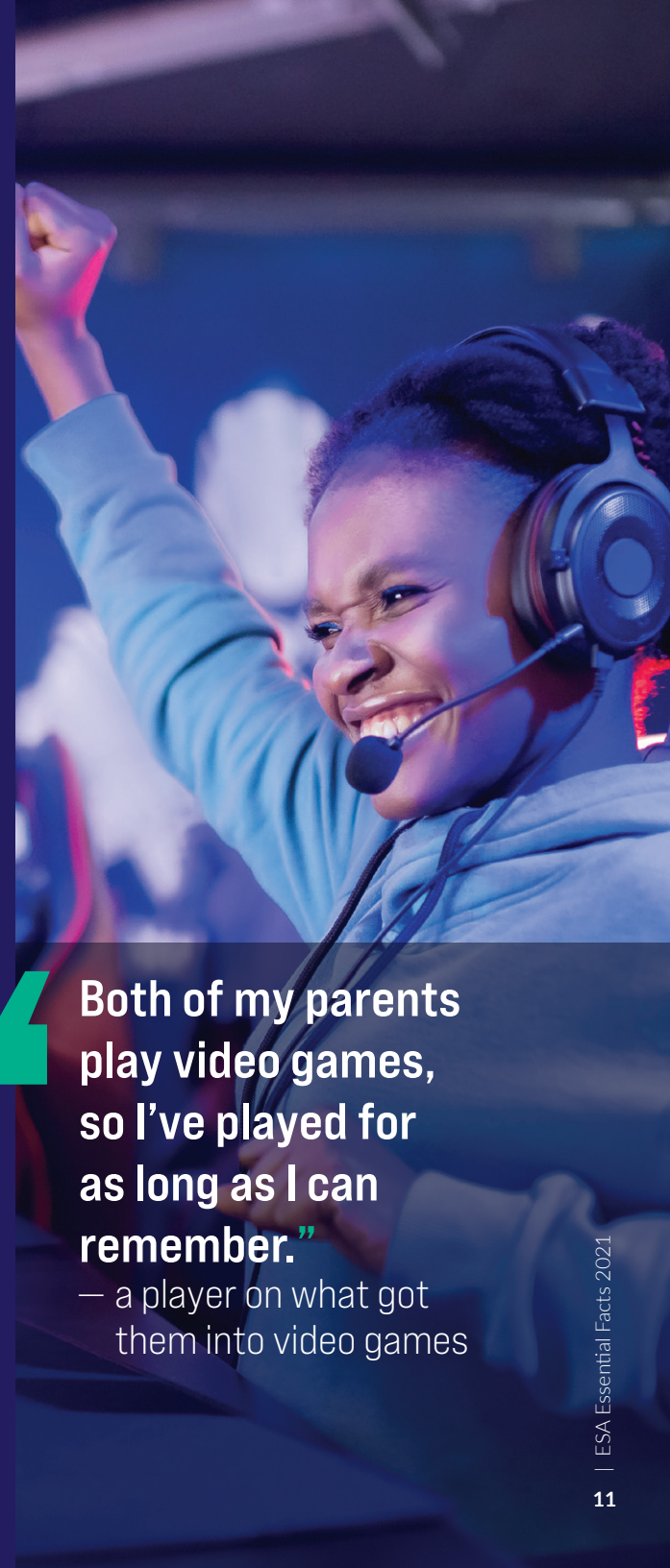
51%

Action games
(e.g., *Grand Theft Auto*, *Super Mario Odyssey*)



Both of my parents play video games, so I've played for as long as I can remember."

— a player on what got them into video games



AGES 35-44

Men in this age group most commonly play with their children (**56%**) and their friends (**45%**). Women in this age group most commonly play with their spouse/significant other (**49%**) and their children (**44%**).



PROFILES OF VIDEO GAME PLAYERS



64% play on a smartphone



53% play on a console



81% play with others



76% play for 3+ hours a week



51% play with their children

PREFERRED GAME GENRES



66%

Casual games
(e.g., *Tetris*, *Solitaire*)



48%

Racing games
(e.g., *Need for Speed*, *Forza*)



47%

Action games
(e.g., *Grand Theft Auto*, *Super Mario Odyssey*)



“Long periods at sea in the Navy, and games helped me deal with boredom during deployments.”
— a player on what got them into video games

AGES 45-54

On average, men in this age group spend just over **10 hours** a week playing with others in-person or online. Women in this age group spend just over **11 hours** a week playing with others.



PROFILES OF VIDEO GAME PLAYERS



59% play on a smartphone



38% play on a console



68% play with others



75% play for 3+ hours a week



46% play with friends

PREFERRED GAME GENRES



72%
Casual games
(e.g., *Tetris*, *Solitaire*)



36%
Arcade games
(e.g., *Pac-Man*, *Pinball FX3*)



31%
Action games
(e.g., *Grand Theft Auto*, *Super Mario Odyssey*)

“When I was younger, my family and I would play together. Then as an adult I wanted to bring back those memories.”
— a player on what got them into video games

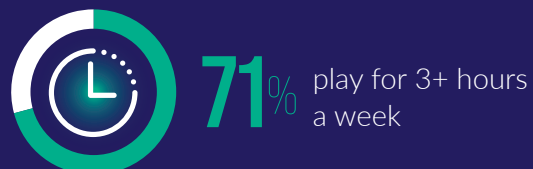
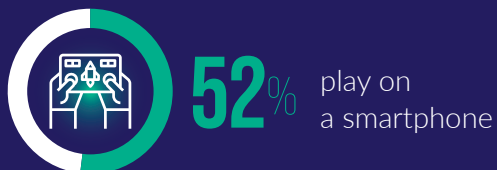


AGES 55-64

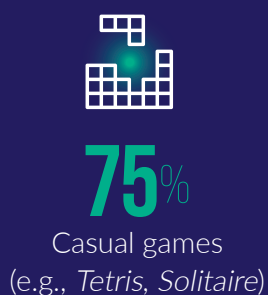
About a third of men in this age group (30%) play on a game console, and about a third of women in this age group (31%) play on a tablet or other wireless device.



PROFILES OF VIDEO GAME PLAYERS



PREFERRED GAME GENRES



“As a 62 year old, the games I like to play help keep my mind active and sharp.”
— a player on what got them into video games



AGES 65+

On average, men in this age group have been playing for about **17 years** a week playing with others in-person or online, women in this age group for about **12 years**.



PROFILES OF VIDEO GAME PLAYERS



61% play on a computer



34% play on a smartphone



38% play with others



78% play for 3+ hours a week



40% play with friends

PREFERRED GAME GENRES



81%

Casual games
(e.g., *Tetris*, *Solitaire*)



17%

Arcade games
(e.g., *Pac-Man*, *Pinball FX3*)



After years of playing games on my smartphone, my son introduced me to computer video games. Not only as a way to relax but a way to make new friends.

— a player on what got them into video games

THE ESA AND OUR PARTNERS

Entertainment Software Association | [TheESA.com](https://www.theesag.com) • [@TheESA](https://twitter.com/TheESA)

The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) serves as the voice and advocate for the U.S. video game industry. Its members are the innovators, creators, publishers and business leaders that are reimagining entertainment and transforming how we interact, learn, connect and play. The ESA works to expand and protect the dynamic marketplace for video games through innovative and engaging initiatives that showcase the positive impact of video games on people, culture and the economy. For more information, visit the ESA's website or follow the ESA on Twitter @theESA.

ESA Foundation | [ESAFoundation.org](https://www.esafoundation.org) • [@ESA_Foundation](https://twitter.com/ESA_Foundation)

The ESA Foundation awards scholarships to the next generation of industry innovators and supports schools and nonprofits that leverage interactive entertainment technology to create meaningful opportunities for America's youth. It seeks to harness the power of the video game industry to create positive social impact and supports geographically diverse projects and programs benefitting grantees of all ages, races and genders.

Entertainment Software Rating Board | [ESRB.org](https://www.esrb.org) • [@ESRBRatings](https://twitter.com/ESRBRatings)

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is the non-profit, self-regulatory body for the video game industry that assigns age and content ratings to video games and mobile apps to help parents decide which are appropriate for their family. ESRB also ensures companies responsibly market their products, as well as protect their users' privacy.

ESA MEMBERS

505 Games US

Activision Blizzard

BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment America

Capcom USA

CI Games

Disney Interactive

Electronic Arts

Epic Games

Focus Home Interactive

Gearbox Publishing

GungHo Online Entertainment America

Intellivision Entertainment

Kalypso Media USA

Koch Media

Konami of America

Legends of Learning

Marvelous USA (XSEED Games)

Microsoft Corporation

Mythical Games

Nacon Gaming USA

Natsume

NCSOFT

Nexon America

Nintendo of America

NVIDIA Corporation

Paracosma

Rebellion Developments

Riot Games

Sega of America

Six Foot

Sony Interactive Entertainment

Square Enix

Take-Two Interactive Software

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