

MAKING LIFE MORE FUN

The Future Of Gaming May Already Be Sitting On Your Desk

(NAPSA)—These days, video games are an increasingly popular form of entertainment, and if a video-gaming console has been at the top of your wish list, you have lots of company.

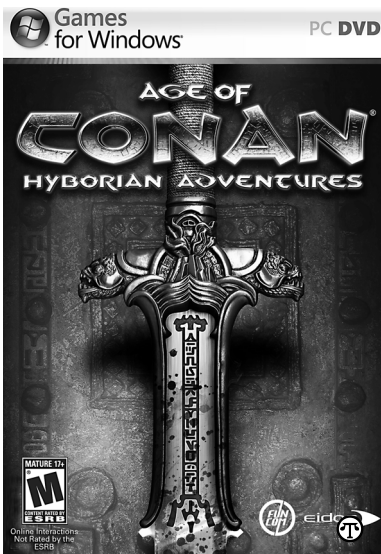
Interestingly, people often forget that there's a good chance they already have the most popular gaming machine in the world sitting on their desk at home. According to DFC Intelligence, an independent market-research firm, there are more than 260 million PC gamers worldwide. To put this in perspective, that figure is nearly equal to every man, woman and child in America.

Gaming Market Still Growing

In terms of revenue, the PC was also the largest gaming platform in 2007, earning \$8.2 billion in both online and retail sales worldwide. Despite this already incredible figure, analysts predict the market will grow by more than 80 percent in the next five years, with significant increases in revenue from digital distribution and hardware sales.

Popular Titles Available

This kind of momentum is hard to ignore, and major companies have begun to throw their weight behind the PC-gaming movement. In 2006, Microsoft Corp. launched its Games for Windows initiative, which is now home to some of the most popular PC titles available, including top-selling strategy game "Sins of a Solar Empire" and "LEGO® Indiana Jones™: The Original Adventures," the latest addition to the popular LEGO® gaming franchise. The program ensures that all Games for Windows titles have met a set of 25 technical guidelines, such as sup-



Highly anticipated is the multiplayer online game "Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures."

port for Parental Controls in Windows Vista and wide-screen displays, to ensure quality and consistency across all of its games.

"The PC is truly a first-class gaming platform, but we also need to ensure that people know how accessible it is," said Kevin Unangst, senior global director of Games for Windows in the Entertainment and Devices Division at Microsoft. "Our goal is to make PC gaming the best possible experience for consumers."

However, Microsoft isn't alone in championing the PC gaming space. Several of the industry's most influential companies, including Dell Inc., Intel Corporation, NVIDIA Corp. and Microsoft, recently formed the PC Gaming Alliance (PCGA), a nonprofit consortium designed to advance the

PC as a gaming platform. The PCGA members hope to work together to improve the quality of gaming and address some of the challenges facing the industry, such as software piracy.

"Organizations like Games for Windows and the PCGA will really help to reinvigorate PC gaming," said Jørgen Tharaldsen, product director of Funcom's upcoming "Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures." "It's reassuring that the companies behind the technology we showcase in 'Age of Conan' have also shown such a commitment to promoting the platform as a whole."

Coming Attractions

"Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures" is a highly anticipated, massively multiplayer online game that some industry insiders predict will rival the popularity of "World of Warcraft," which has 10 million active subscribers and earned \$1.2 billion in revenue last year. "Age of Conan" also uses cutting-edge Microsoft DirectX 10 graphics, which deliver a cinematic quality.

Casual Games

What's more, the PC has another ace up its sleeve—the growing casual games market. Casual, Web-based games, such as "Sudoku" and the popular "Bejeweled" franchise, represented a \$2.25 billion industry in 2007, according to a report from the Casual Games Association. The demographic for casual games includes everyone from soccer moms and career women to teens and Fortune 500 jet-setters. After all, while some of us crave the most-advanced technology available, there's nothing wrong with a nice game of "Solitaire," is there?