

Graphics in Gaming

Does it really matter?



Ever since the birth of video games, each year has brought on a new wave of games each vying for commercial dominance. This is to be expected, since computer components in general become smaller, faster, and more powerful almost constantly. Games, however, present an interesting challenge in that all the computing power in the world may not produce a successful game. Obviously, when all other factors are equal, a game with better graphics will be better overall than a game with worse graphics. However, with the introduction of video game consoles that are capable of running in high definition, it seems that the video game industry has determined that each year games must look better graphically in order to be successful. Unfortunately, this seems

to mean that the focus of many new games has become graphics, rather than gameplay – reducing the game to a series of movies with some button pushing in between.

It is difficult to compare two games under the best of circumstances. It becomes even more difficult when you try to compare games from different time periods.

Although few would deny that PONG was a groundbreaking game, and a game that was great in its day (1972), few people play PONG on a regular basis. Unfortunately, we cannot isolate the reasons why PONG isn't popular today – is it because the graphics are too basic, because the gameplay doesn't have much depth, or because 35 years of playing PONG was just too much to handle? In reality it's probably all of the above, but it makes it difficult to compare PONG with a game produced recently. It becomes even more difficult when you consider the variety of games available today. In 1972, if you wanted to play a video game, you had no choice but to play PONG. Now, you have the option of arcade games, console games, or PC games. If console gaming is your preference, you still have to decide which console you're going to get – and if you enjoy PC gaming, you need the hardware to be able to support that particular game. Newer games not only cost more in production, but they put more of a burden on the consumer in order to support the advanced graphics. In fact, an avid PC gamer would most likely have to upgrade at least every two years in order to be able to run the newest games at maximum capacity.

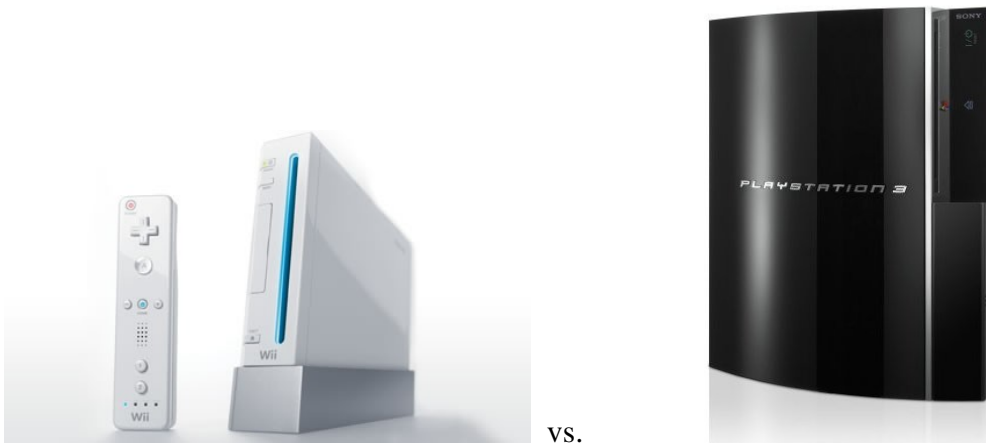
Although the games industry is growing rapidly, it is being restrained somewhat by the escalating costs of game production – which is due in large part to graphics.

Are the increased costs of game production really worth it? It's difficult to make comparisons, since no designer intentionally designs their game to look worse than it has to – and the conventional wisdom is to make games look as good as possible. Obviously, graphics alone won't make a game good or popular. The game "Shenmue" for the Sega Dreamcast cost over \$20,000,000 USD and took 7 years to make – yet sales were much less than projected. Granted, the Dreamcast wasn't very popular and thus limited the number of people who could potentially buy the game, but its graphics were very advanced for the time and were highly critically regarded. Games tend to make the best use possible of the hardware available to it. Thus, we can potentially view a 2D game for the Super Nintendo (released in 1990) as graphically "better" than a game for the Playstation 3 (released in 2006 and technically vastly superior), simply because the SNES game made better use of the resources available to it and/or was more artistic.

Conversely, the game "Far Cry Vengeance" for the Nintendo Wii was rejected based mainly on its graphical shortcomings. The review from IGN.com states that "The Wii build successfully capitalizes on Nintendo's innovative remote, enabling a comfortably high level of control speed and accuracy as gamers run and gun down opponents in the jungles and in the surrounding waters. But just as Far Cry initially set a new graphic high

on PC, so does it set a new graphic low on Wii, with visuals so blurry, smeary, sluggish and ugly that you'll question whether the title could realistically run on Nintendo 64.”

The failure of both these games suggests that good graphics won't necessarily make a game, but bad graphics will probably break it.



The recent success of the Nintendo Wii over Sony's Playstation 3 suggests that consumers are willing to forego superior graphics for more entertaining gameplay. (The XBOX360 is being left out because it was released a year earlier, while the Wii and PS3 were released two days apart.) As of the beginning of February, an estimated three Wiis were being sold for every Playstation 3 sold. However, the Playstation 3 is able to produce graphics far better than the Wii. While there are other issues involved such as pricing and the PS3 being tied in with the Blu-ray DVD format, the numbers suggest that people are not willing to pay the additional cost required in order to get the better graphics available on the PS3.



vs.



While the screenshot from a PS3 game on the right is considerably more detailed than the screenshot of the Wii game on the left, they both look good enough that only the most graphics-happy individuals probably care too much about the difference.

In conclusion, while good graphics will certainly not make a game good, and bad graphics will probably make a game bad, superior gameplay is the most important factor in the success of a game. Obviously, a better looking game is more fun to look at – but if you just wanted to look at something, you’d have gone to a movie instead of buying a game.

Images from:

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