

Video gaming tops R1.7 billion

From the games, the devices the games are played on, to the profile of the gamers themselves, South Africa's video gaming culture has undergone an evolution and has grown exponentially.

"At the end of 2011, the industry surpassed the R1.7 billion mark; it has also enjoyed year-on-year growth," says Ramone Pickover, category manager for games at kalahari.com.

With a global value of more than \$65 billion, video games are set to be the fastest growing form of mass media over the next few years. The video games industry is already estimated to be twice the size of recorded music globally.

"The local industry has grown compared to the US, which declined by 8% in 2011. The US gaming industry accounts for more than 60 % of the total gaming industry worldwide," says Pickover. Locally the growth of the industry has been synonymous with more gamers entering the scene, with the market split between casual and hard-core gamers.

Estimated at 3.5 million, casual gamers have been the biggest part of the market for the past two years. Casual gamers play easily accessible games with a short lifespan, mainly online or via social media, as well as on mobile platforms. Wii, DS, 3DS, PC, PSP and PlayStation 2 are also considered popular gaming devices for casual gamers.

"The gaming industry in South Africa has changed quite dramatically. Two years ago, the key drivers in the industry were casual games," says Pickover. However, South Africa's retailing giant points out that hard-core gaming is growing, and more women have begun to purchase both casual and hard-core games.

"With the announcement of the Wii U being launched at the end of 2012, and the lack of new PS2 content, South African gamers began to move to PS3, Xbox and PC considered to be tailored towards the 'hard-core' gaming marketing." This also changed the type of games that are played and titles such as Battlefield 3 and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, which were the site's top seller titles in 2011.

He also states that a major component of the games is based online due to the increase in broadband penetration, further displaying the move from casual to hard-core. In fact, the increasing access to high-speed internet connection has allowed more of these gamers to play multiplayer games online and has allowed them to access additional content for the games they purchase.

"There has also been a large increase in competitive gaming leagues in South Africa, operating on the same level as our local sport teams/leagues with organised tournaments and competitions, where we compete against other countries, further displaying how the gaming culture has grown in South Africa."

He adds that the need for high-speed internet to participate in these tournaments online fuels the demand for cheaper, unlimited broadband access in SA. Dedicated gamers spend hours online, a trend probably described best with the gaming mantra "this isn't a game anymore, this is my life!"

International exposure

The company will be attending the annual E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) convention hosted by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) in Los Angeles, California from 5-7 June. E3 is the world's premier trade show for computer and video games and related products and the largest of all conventions hosted in LA.

"I am very excited about this year's convention and I am expecting groundbreaking innovations, as all key announcements in the gaming industry are made there first," says Pickover.

The rumours in the industry hallways are that Microsoft (manufacturers of Xbox) and Sony (manufacturers of PlayStation) are set to announce their new consoles to rival Nintendo's latest console launch or introduce something more innovative to extend the life of the current generation of consoles.

"I am looking forward to try out the final retail version of Nintendo's Wii U, the successor to the Wii and the wide selection of new titles on display at the convention. I will bring back information, insights and trends back into the local market," he concludes.

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