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Computer Gaming and Your Family

Harnessing the Benefits of Gaming for Your Child and Managing Their Exposure to Violence

Video games first exploded on the PC entertainment scene 37 years ago and have evolved to become a multi-billion dollar industry that has captivated gamers and even technophobes with the depth and quality of graphics and action. From the first rudimentary games and hand held devices such as Donkey Kong and Tetris, to today's awesome consoles and mind-blowing graphics, the technological growth of the gaming industry has not been without its share of controversy, in much the same way as the media and film industry.

Michael James, director and organiser of the upcoming rAge 2009 technology expo taking place from 2 – 4 October 2009 at the Coca-Cola Dome in Northgate, believes there are far more benefits than there are disadvantages to gaming, and that managing your child's exposure to violent content is no different to managing what they are exposed to on TV and the Internet. "Age restrictions are there for a reason – whether it's on a movie, book or computer game, they need to be adhered to and parents need to supervise and guide their children irrespective of the medium," says Michael.

"The increasingly exciting and visually stimulating nature of PC and console games makes them enormously popular with the youth and there is no doubt that the popularity of gaming will continue to grow in this sector. There is a huge variety of games available on the market that are perfectly appropriate for children and youth and many, if not most of them bring a lot of benefits to the table besides the entertainment component, such as problem solving, strategy and stimulation of logical and deductive thinking," explains Michael.

However, excessively violent games have rightfully raised the concerns of parents, educators and medical professionals about the effect of extremely violent games and content on children. "The bottom line is that in the same way you would not allow your young child to watch horror movies or X-rated films, the same principles apply to gaming content. Probably even more so with gaming because of the absorbing and engaging nature of role-playing called for.

“Technology and computer games will continue to be an exciting and growing part of children’s lives and with so many really good games and content available for children and youth, it’s important that parents educate themselves on what their children are doing and the games they are playing. If you’re not sure try it out for yourself – you could learn a thing or two and may even surprise yourself at how enjoyable gaming can be and how it can in fact, increase the amount of quality time families spend together,” says Michael.

Dr. Christopher Ferguson, a researcher at Texas A&M International University concluded in a recent study that there is little evidence from the current body of literature on violent video games that playing violent video games is either causally or correlationally associated with increases in aggressive behaviour. “The penetration of television in comparison to any form of gaming is in fact far greater,” says Michael.

“We live in a world where the average family needs a dual income to get by financially. It is often an easier solution to keep the children occupied with entertainment on the TV, iPod, gaming consoles, computers and social network sites while parents recover from the day and stresses of work. There is a great deal of literature that supports the educational benefits of gaming, it does however remain the parent’s responsibility to strictly adhere to the age restrictions that games are issued with. More recent video games and consoles now offer parental control options that make allowance for parents to monitor their children’s activities and even limit the amount of time they spend gaming. The best suggestion is to take some time and play the game with the child to see what they are getting up to. You will be amazed at how much fun you can have spending this time with your children using a medium that they fully relate to,” says Michael James.

South Africa’s crime levels and the economic downturn are also acting as catalysts whereby families have moved to “cocooning”, one of the biggest established trends on the market front today whereby individuals and families choose to perform the majority of social and cultural interactions such as working, entertaining and relaxing at home, rather than going out. This in turn has seen considerable growth in purchases of home theatre and entertainment systems. “Families are searching for entertainment alternatives that are affordable and safe. Anecdotal consumer behaviour research has shown that families are compensating and cutting back on spending outside the home, which includes eating out, entertainment and holidays. So much so, that any preconceived ideas you may have of gamers being pimple-faced teenagers have been shattered. Today, the term ‘typical gamer’ is a total misnomer – a gamer is anyone from the over-achiever student to the executive professional, board member, entrepreneur, engineer, sportsman to mom and dad looking to escape the stresses of the day and spend quality time together as a family,” says Michael.

“There is no doubt that consumers are moving towards purchasing console games such as Xbox 360, Wii and PlayStation 3 in addition to a healthy uptake of online gaming. All forms of gaming offer an affordable and safe alternative as a recreational activity in which the entire family can participate at a fraction of the cost of taking the whole family out for a few hours of entertainment. The fact that current available gaming content can be described as being compelling and engaging further enhances the trend.

“Social media has evolved at such a spectacular rate that it allows you to interact and communicate with people from across the globe. It is also the only entertainment forum that effectively transcends various social barriers such as age, gender, race and culture. These aspects do not feature in the gaming world. Another interesting phenomenon is when you start communicating with individuals from across the globe, you realise that people are essentially very similar in how we think and act,” Michael explains.

“The gaming industry as we know it is radically changing the world's definition of entertainment. Not only is it creating the setting for the family unit to spend quality time together as a whole, but it is also creating a means for kids to entertain themselves with something that is thoroughly engaging in the safety of their own home, keeping them safe from harmful, external influences,” concludes Michael.

Dates:	2-4 October 2009
Time:	Friday: 10h00-18h00 Saturday: 09h00-18h00 Sunday: 10h00-16h00
Day ticket	R50 per person
Weekend Ticket	R80 per person
Family Pass Ticket	R160 (two adults and two children)
Kids under 6	Free
NAG LAN	Sold Out

For more information visit www.rAgeexpo.co.za, contact 011 704 2679 or visit the official rAge 2009 forums here: <http://forums.tidemedias.co.za/nag/>

About Tide Media

Tide Media is a South African based company, whose primary focus is publishing NAG Magazine, SA Computer Magazine (SACM) and organizing and running the annual rAge Expo. Through various initiatives, Tide Media has been instrumental in growing the computing and entertainment technology industry in South Africa with the magazines, retailers and in particular, the rAge Expo.

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