

The Recent Decline of Product Quality in the Video Games Industry

There is no denying that the video game industry has come a long way in the last few decades. What started out as a means to test missile trajectories turned into a source of entertainment for children and adults alike. Video games are revolutionary; they are always testing the boundaries of what can be accomplished with technology in creative ways. With the player able to explore a world of their own at a self-guided pace, storytelling was taken to a whole new level. Contemporary video game graphics border on realism and make things that were once thought impossible available to anyone. With all this power, however, comes a pitfall. Many companies within the industry have become lazy. They reuse the same assets and advertise them as new, ignore their consumers, release unfinished games for the cost of a full one, and riddle their games with microtransactions. The industry itself is becoming a gamer's worst enemy.

We'll start with the most recent uproar within the industry: Cyberpunk 2077. Cyberpunk 2077, developed by CD Projekt Red, was released in December of 2020 after an eight year build up from the first teaser trailer. Fans had been anticipating a great game, since CD Projekt Red had a reputation of producing quality role-playing games like the Witcher series. Cyberpunk is considered a stain in the industry not because of its story or number of copies sold-- both of which were remarkable-- but because the company lied to its consumers and investors and released a game that was at times unplayable. It was riddled with game-breaking bugs and was largely available in name and price only on the PlayStation 4, which the majority of Sony users owned since most consumers could not get their hands on the PlayStation 5 at launch. Not long after Cyberpunk was released, Sony had to remove it from their store and issue 30,000 refunds.

This figure only accounts for customers who requested a refund by emailing the company directly, meaning the total number of refunds for this title is likely significantly larger.

Fans were furious and, although the development team have since made a comeback and updated the game a great deal, no one will forget the disastrous release; it is still referenced nearly two years later. Every time a new game's release date is pushed back, there are always comments such as: "Good, we don't need another Cyberpunk." According to an article written for Product Mint, "Characters would randomly disappear, main quests could not be completed, it contained epileptic triggers, and the entrance into the city even had a massive typo reading 'Nighth City.'"

One journalist, Liana Ruppert, who was able to play the game before its release, suffered a horrible seizure due to the flashing lights in game. She wrote an article about her experience that gained enough traction for the developers to see. Even the Washington Post wrote about it; "Some games and other forms of visual entertainment involving flashing lights or screen flickering are preceded by warnings for those who are sensitive to such effects. But "Cyberpunk 2077" lacked such a warning and did not include a way to turn off potential seizure-triggering scenes." CD Projekt Red eventually sorted out the issue but, by then, the damage had already been done.

While it was likely the most dangerous case, Cyberpunk is not alone in high priced mediocrity. Another example is Madden NFL, a popular sports game produced by the company Electronic Arts. Every year EA releases a new game and every year it is basically copy and paste of the previous year's title and sold for the same price. Some players, like video game commentator and YouTuber Angry Joe, have gone so far as to call the game a scam. Old assets

are reused, there are game-breaking bugs, the graphics are comparable to the graphics on PlayStation3 (released in 2006), and the game is full of microtransactions.

Microtransactions are in-game purchases that the player can make with real currency and, in return, get skins, weapons, outfits, and loot boxes. In some instances, it is even comparable to gambling. There have been studies, conducted by Plymouth, that have proven “that ‘loot boxes’ in video games are structurally and psychologically akin to gambling.” The promise of a chance to win a limited-edition item if the player spends real world currency has reached a very young audience. The promise is based purely on luck, just like gambling. Not only do many people consider this to be illegal, since minors have unregulated access to this, but also psychologically damaging to young minds.

Other companies have taken successful, dearly loved franchises and turned them into shadows of their former selves. Assassin’s Creed, developed by Ubisoft, is a prime example of this. A game that was once grounded in history and realism now gives the player the ability to fight mythological gods with supernatural powers. Ubisoft markets this game based on its historical accuracy, but in recent games have since forgone what made it so unique. Ubisoft also fills its games with microtransactions and have recently pushed NFTs (non-fungible tokens)-- digital assets that represent real world objects that are frequently bought and sold using cryptocurrency.

These are only a few examples within the industry that have made recent headlines, but they are not to be ignored. Companies like CD Projekt Red, EA, and Ubisoft dominate the industry and set the example for what multi-billion-dollar companies should be achieving, but their practices have become questionable over the recent years. What makes it worse is that most

of them do not seem to care to listen to their consumers either, blindly pressing forward and producing semi-functioning games. There have still been some games that haven't let consumers down in recent years-- like Ghost of Tsushima and Horizon: Forbidden West-- and some companies that have made a comeback, like Activision's reboot of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare. The industry relies on the entertainment of its people and, soon enough, the rot that has infested the industry will be cast aside but, for now, companies will continue these practices until something change

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