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Media Minder -- Building a Video Game Collection: Resources to Help you Get Started

Philip Hallman

Ambassador Books and Media, philip@absbook.com

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So what do we potential customers do? We default to **Google**, and **Google Scholar**.

Google is a starting point for much serious research. It is free of charge. And it is good enough for most initial searches, given that we are otherwise priced out of the market. We may also visit a nearby university library on occasions where a generalist search engine is simply not good enough. There, we might simply use **Web of Science** or **Scopus**.

Speaking personally, my search engine of choice is **Google/Google Scholar**. I am generally looking for survey research and other sources of data, together with literature on publishing, library processes and reader behavior. Although I am not engaged in scholarship, I am not entirely untypical. I know my field, and I can recognize what is useful and what is irrelevant. **Google** gives me information that I would otherwise be unaware of. It is effective, and it presents a real alternative to A&I services priced at a premium for institutional libraries. The value of the selective, quality controlled A&I product is outweighed by the money involved.

In the longer term, it is probably not the big discipline-based indexes that will suffer. Databases such as **BIOSIS**, **EconLit**, **PsychINFO**, **Sociological Abstracts** and **CINAHL** are “category killers.” Such category killers will survive because they are the databases that are demonstrated to freshmen undergraduates as the principal tool for navigating the particular discipline. They become part of the information furniture of the discipline. It is all those other indexes that are under threat. They are “secondary” databases, irrespective of their depth of coverage going back years, their value as highly specialized indexes or as interdisciplinary databases, or the range of content they cover — books, journals, government/IGO publications, grey literature etc...

So A&I publishers are facing multi-directional challenges:

- Faculty and researchers are increasingly doubtful of the relevance of the library to their research activities, while A&I services continue to treat the library as the sole purchaser of their products;
- **Google** and other generalist search engines can provide a ‘good enough’ result, at least as the starting point of an inquiry;
- The opportunity to enfranchise users, like me and thousands of other small organizations and individuals, is being studiously ignored, because we are outside the cosy institutional framework that so obsesses them.

In summary, they need to convince users of both relevance and cost-effectiveness. They need to explore wider, albeit more difficult, markets than the academic and research library community in which they have felt so cosy. Otherwise their businesses will be eroded. Users disenfranchised by vendors’ current pricing policies are prepared to pay for good information tools and for the convenience of using them where they work. It is extraordinary that the opportunity to make more money continues to be ignored. Hiding their heads in the sand will not make the challenge — or the opportunity — go away. But it may hasten their demise. 🐘

Media Minder — Building a Video Game Collection: Resources to Help you Get Started

Column Editor: **Philip Hallman** (Ambassador Books and Media) <philip@absbook.com>

My interest in video games began, and subsequently ended, with the release of Pong. It was Christmas, 1975, and my eldest brother bought a system for all us kids as a family gift. We proceeded to open the box and placed the overlay on the television screen. Excitedly, we hooked up the cable connections at the back of the set. These were the days long before installing a VCR was an act similar to screwing in a new light bulb, so doing anything *behind* the set seemed foreign and a risky undertaking best left to a TV repair man. After a few minutes of tinkering, we were ready to play. Two rectangles about the size of a cigarette lighter appeared on the screen and the remote control allowed you to move the rectangles up or down in a straight line. A smaller ball of light went back and forth across the screen in a manner reminiscent to ping pong (hence the game’s name) and the object was to use the bigger rectangles as if they were paddles and hit the ball of light out of the reach of your opponent. When the “ball” was struck, an electronic noise, kind of like a thump sound, was generated. Like Peggy Lee, I asked myself “is that all there is?” The excitement I felt initially soon vanished and I probably played it no more than a half dozen times. Apparently, I wasn’t the only one to feel that way. While hundreds of thousands of units were sold that first Christmas, it didn’t generate the massive interest in home video games that its manufacturers had hoped for or intended and most Pong games were relegated to the basement and eventually the junk yard.

Fast forward three decades. Thanks to the world wide success of the home computer and vast improvements in technology, video game design has improved exponentially and the home video game market is so successful that it now rivals and often outsells movie ticket sales as the primary source of popular entertainment. In 2006, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that **Warner Bros.** film studio announced that they were undertaking a concerted effort to become a major video game publisher. According to the article, the film industry is feeling the heat from the new kid on the block. Lower box-office returns, revenues lost to piracy and slowing DVD sales have led the studios to begin developing their own video games in order to compete more effectively. Additionally, the concept of convergence is upon us. The relationship between movies and games will be greater than ever. Most will be marketed and promoted together and noted directors will be hired to help create the look of the game in addition to the film.

Responding to the frenzy, colleges and universities have joined the band wagon too. Many now offer courses that examine the cultural and sociological significance that game playing has had on our society. **Sheila Murphy**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Screen Arts & Cultures at the **University of Michigan**, has taught a course on video gaming for the past seven years. “When I first developed and taught the course in 2003,” **Murphy** says, “there were few academic sources available on video games and most video games were collected by avid fans, not libraries. But all of that has changed quite rapidly. Today there are peer-reviewed video and computer game journals (*Game Studies*), numerous academic programs in interactive media and game design (USC, etc.) and the emerging scholarly field of gaming studies. Courses on gaming are taught across the US and Europe and draw students from the arts, humanities and engineering, all eager to study video games as code, art and industry.”

Additionally, other academic institutions are teaching the skills needed to create, program and design video games. As **Murphy** mentions, one leading place is the University of Southern California and their Electronic Arts Interactive Entertainment Program and Game Innovation lab. On the more grassroots level, many community colleges are seeing a growing demand for game design courses and have responded by developing degrees for interested students. **Austin Community College** is just one example of an institution that now offers three associate degree plans — Game Design, Game Art and Game & Visualization Programming.

So where do libraries fit into this equation? They’ve joined in as well. Or, at least some have. Public libraries are accustomed to collecting what the general public demands, so many now have full out collection development and circulation policies for video games. Academic libraries are further behind, but not all. The **University of Michigan** and the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**, two of the top ten largest library collections in the country, are going full speed ahead to collect and develop video game collections and archives to be used by their campus communities. According to its Website, the **University of Texas at Austin’s Center for American History** has already created a video game archive that will seek “to collect and provide access to materials that not only facilitate research in

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videogame history, but also provide materials of interest to those studying communications, computer science, economics, and other academic disciplines that are now, and will for the foreseeable future, be drawn to the processes driving the videogame industry.”

Media librarians uninitiated in the ways of video game collecting may be asking “where do I begin?” Like any librarian asked to develop a collection, the same types of tools and resources are available to help understand the history of the medium and to place it into some better context for the selector. As in all cases, reviews are used as a starting source. With video games and gaming in general, a majority of the better reviewing sources will be online resources. Websites and blogging sites are the best ways to keep relevant rather than print sources.

Getting Started...

Books

Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter (Steven Johnson, 2005, Riverhead)

Encyclopedia of Arcade Video Games (Bill Kurtz, 2003, Schiffer Publishing)

Arcade Fever: The Fan's Guide to the Golden Age of Video Games (John Sellers, 2001, Running Press)

The Encyclopedia of Game Machines (Winnie Forster, 2005, Magdalena Gniatczynska)

The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon (Steven L. Kent, 2001, Three Rivers Press)

Paid to Play: An Insider's Guide to Video Game Careers (Alice Rush, 2006, Prima Games)

Rules of Play: Game Designer's Fundamentals (Salen/Zimmerman, 2003, The MIT Press)

The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology (Salen/Zimmerman, 2005, The MIT Press)

Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture (David Kushner, 2004, Random House Trade Paperbacks)

Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role Playing (Matt Barton, 2008, A K Peters Ltd)

Video Games Guide (Matt Fox, 2006, Boxtree Ltd)

Book of Games, Volume 1: The Ultimate Guide to PC & Video Games (Stang, 2006, , gameXplore N.A. Inc.)

Book of Games, Volume 2: The Ultimate Reference on PC & Video Games (Stang, Osterholt, 2007, gameXplore N.A. Inc.)

Classic Home Video Games, 1972-1984: A Complete Reference Guide (Brett Weiss, 2007, McFarland)

Classic 80s Home Video Games: Identification & Value (Robert P. Wicker, 2008, Collector Books)

What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy (James Paul Gee, 2007, Palgrave Macmillan; 2nd edition)

Good Video Games and Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Learning and Literacy (New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies) (James Paul Gee, 2007, Peter Lang Publishing)

For some, there will always be a nagging suspicion of the medium and questions will continue to be raised about its relevance. Others may be concerned about giving a portion of their already small non-print media collection which barely buys enough DVDs and CDs over to

video games. **Steven Johnson's** book is a great source for contextualizing the reasons why building a collection is acceptable and a good first read. The others will help to identify classic and current games that you may wish to consider purchasing or that will help students consider what career opportunities are available.

Reviews

C/Net (www.cnet.com)

G4 Television Network (www.g4tv.com)

IGN Entertainment (www.ign.com)

Gaming Target (www.gamingtarget.com)

Game Rankings (www.gamerankings.com)

Game Spot (www.gamespot.com)

School Library Journal (www.slj.com)

Reading reviews is an essential element to collecting video games, but the majority of reliable reviews will be found online rather than in print sources. The first four are recommended sites by an avid gamer who trusts the reviews. This same gamer prefers these to reviews by average bloggers who post to their individual sites. Many blogging sites are hit or miss given that most sites are updated intermittently and inconsistent in knowledge or overview of the field. He also suggested **Amazon** because so many game buyers will add comments after purchasing items. Many of the sites offer downloads so that users can try out a game and see if they wish to purchase it.

Journals/Magazines

Electronic Gaming Monthly (www.1up.com)

Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research (<http://gamestudies.org>)

Game Informer (www.gameinformer.com)

Games for Windows (www.gfw.com)

Nintendo Power (www.nintendopower.com)

Official Xbox Magazine (www.officialxboxmagazine.com)

PC Gamer (www.pcgamer.com)

PC Monthly (www.pconline.com)

Geek Monthly (www.geekmonthly.com)

Play (www.playmagazine.com)

Wired (www.wired.com)

Compared to other disciplines, the selections are limited in numbers. *Game Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal whose mission is “to explore the rich cultural genre of games; to give scholars a peer-reviewed forum for their ideas and theories; to provide an academic channel for the ongoing discussions on games and gaming.” *Electronic Gaming Monthly* and *Game Informer* are broader in scope compared to the others which provide detailed information for specific platform. The last three listed are general interest magazines and provide an overview of games but also computing in general.

Webpages of Interest

Online Education Database (http://oedb.org/library/features/bringing_gaming_100_library_resources)

This page written by **Jessica Merritt** and entitled “Bringing Gaming (and Gamers) to Your Library: 100 Tips and Resources” is something you definitely want to bookmark. First, it begins by providing the library selector with 39 tips to make the selection process easier. Some are practical, some are promotional, but it is certain to have five or six things that you simply didn't think about. Following the tips are a great selection of magazine and journal articles, additional books, blogs and collections to peruse.

Core Collections: Video Game Evaluation, Selection, Cataloging, Storage and Marketing (<http://www.slideshare.net/informationgoddess29/core-collections/>)

This power point presentation by **Beth Gallaway**, self-proclaimed information goddess, is indeed packed with information. It points out all the various considerations that one needs to get started in a beautifully concise and detailed manner.

All books listed, as well as individual games one would wish to purchase, are available through **Ambassador Books & Media**.

And, **speaking of scholarships**, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the **ACS Charleston Conference Scholarship** which has been funded for several years. This year's winner is **Elizabeth Dyer** <edyer@une.edu>. Thanks to ACS and **Adam Chesler** and his group for this wonderful opportunity!

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