

"Disabled Gamers" Comprise 20% of Casual Video Game Audience

More Than 10% Have Had Casual Games Prescribed or Recommended By A Doctor; Players With Disabilities Play Longer, More Often, And For Different Reasons

SEATTLE, June 11, 2008 /PRNewswire/ -- Tens of millions of disabled consumers have gravitated to "casual" video games as a source of relief or distraction from their infirmities, as well as a sense of accomplishment or belonging, according to a new survey conducted by Information Solutions Group on behalf of PopCap Games.

According to the survey, more than one in five (20.5%) players of casual video games have a physical, mental or developmental disability; this compares to 15.1% of the American population overall who are disabled, according to the latest U.S. Census data. Over three quarters of the more than 2,700 disabled consumers who participated in the study described their disabilities as "moderate" or "severe," and the benefits to, and methods of play by, disabled gamers vary considerably from those of non-disabled casual gamers.

Compared to the casual gamer population as a whole (which industry estimates peg at 300 million to 400 million players worldwide), those with disabilities play more frequently, for more hours per week, and for longer periods of time per gaming session. They also report that they experience more significant benefits from playing and view their game-playing activity as a more important factor in their lives than do non-disabled consumers.

Profile of Respondents

A total of 13,296 casual game players responded to the survey, with 2,728 respondents (20.5%) identifying themselves as "mildly" (22%), "moderately" (54%) or "severely" (24%) disabled. Of those, 46% indicated that their primary disability was physical, 29% said it was mental, and 25% stated they had a developmental or learning disability. Over two thirds (69%) of disabled respondents were female, and a third (35%) of all respondents had another person -- parent, adult offspring, spouse, guardian or caregiver -- assist them in taking the survey.

The most common types of disabilities and medical conditions cited by respondents, by category, were:

- Physical: Rheumatoid Arthritis/Osteoarthritis (14%); Fibromyalgia (11%); Multiple Sclerosis (7%).
- Mental: Moderate/Severe Depression (41%); Bipolar Disorder (16%); Anxiety Disorder (15%).
- Developmental/Learning: ADD/ADHD (46%); Autism (15%); Dyslexia (11%).

The majority (61%) of those survey respondents with a physical disability are age 50 or older, while slightly more than half (52%) of those with a developmental/learning disability are under 18 years of age.

Perceived Benefits of Play

Fully 94% of disabled players of casual games said they believe playing casual games "provides physical or mental benefits" -- compared to 80% of casual game players overall. The most common benefits cited by disabled gamers (when asked to choose as many as applied) were stress relief (81%), mood lifting (69%), distraction from issues related to disability (66%), improved concentration (59%) and mental workouts (58%). Interestingly, the top benefits varied significantly based on the type of disability; the top three benefits by disability type were:

- Physical: Stress relief (84%) and distraction from issues related to disability (73%).
- Mental: Stress relief (87%) and mood-lifting (78%).

- Developmental/Learning: Improved concentration (79%) and improved coordination/manual dexterity (73%).

Those with developmental/learning disabilities cited learning (pattern recognition, spelling, typing skills) far more often (61%) than those with disabilities that were mental (26%) or physical (23%).

Furthermore, 77% of disabled players said playing casual games provides them with "additional benefits over and above what a typical non-disabled player might experience."

Of the "additional benefits," responses were numerous and varied, often citing deeper sensations of achievement and "belonging," or distraction from loneliness and/or chronic pain. As one respondent put it, "Our son with Attention Deficit Disorder does not really remember he has a disability when he is playing." Dr. Carl Arinoldo, a Stony Brook, New York-based psychologist of 25 years' experience who has treated patients with a range of physical and mental disabilities, agrees: "With some forms of depression, a person may be very focused on something that clearly amounts to a misperception of reality. So the chance to distance themselves from the perceived negative situation and relax may allow them to think more clearly and consider the situation later in a more realistic manner."

Gary Robinson, a 58-year-old North Carolina resident with severe physical disabilities, states "Games like Bejeweled and Peggle, with simple controls that are also mentally challenging and engaging are ideal for me, because my mind moves as quickly as the next guy's but I type with a mouth-stick. In some ways, games like these are the greatest thing that's appeared on the computer scene for people like me."

Playing Habits

Among all disabled gamers, nearly two thirds (64%) said they play casual games every day, and an additional 28% play several times per week. By comparison, 57% of casual game players overall say they play daily. In terms of time spent playing, disabled gamers are more "avid consumers" than the average casual game player:

- 60% of disabled gamers play casual games for five or more hours per week (vs. 52% of casual gamers overall).
- 40% of disabled gamers play for 10 or more hours per week (vs. 29% of overall casual gamers).
- 24% of disabled gamers play for 16 or more hours per week (vs. 13% of overall casual gamers)

Gary Robinson estimates he spends four or more hours each day playing casual games. "Let's just say that playing the games helps my whole well-being; sometimes they give me a direct and immediate purpose in life, and that's an important sensation to have every so often."

When asked to choose the single most frequent time for playing casual games, 26% of survey respondents with physical disabilities, and 29% of those with mental disabilities, indicated "late at night, before bed," compared to just 11% of those with developmental/learning disabilities. The latter group indicated weekends (30%) was the time they played most often. This is presumed to be due to the large number of children in the category.

Playing Preferences

Almost half (44%) of all disabled gamers indicated that they had recommended playing casual games to others with significant disabilities, and more than a tenth of respondents (11%) said that a "physician, psychiatrist, physical therapist or other medical professional had prescribed or recommended playing casual games as part of the treatment" for their disability.

As for solitary versus companion game play, 44% of disabled gamers said they played casual games with other people at least part of the time. Of those, more than one in four (28%) said they played casual games with other disabled individuals. Among respondents with developmental/learning disabilities specifically, 60% said they played casual games with other people.

When asked to pick their favorite categories of casual games, disabled gamers' choices closely mirrored those of non-disabled players, with "puzzle" (84%), "word and trivia" (61%) and "arcade" (59%) being the three most-cited genres. "Card" (54%) and "hidden object" (51%) games rounded out the top five categories among disabled gamers.

Casual vs. Hardcore

Only 26% of disabled casual gamers said they also play traditional, "hardcore" video games; among those respondents with physical disabilities specifically, that figure dropped to 18%. Among all disabled gamers who also play hardcore games, 25% said they played hardcore games on a daily basis -- compared to 64% who play casual games daily.

Survey Methodology: This international research was conducted by Information Solutions Group, www.infosolutionsgroup.com on behalf of PopCap Games. These results are based on online surveys completed by 2,728 respondents randomly selected between April 2 and April 17, 2008. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20, the results will differ by no more than 1.9 percentage points from what would have been obtained by seeking out and polling all PopCap.com users. Survey subjects were presented with exhaustive lists of various types of disabilities by category in order to assist in accurately categorizing themselves. For the purpose of this survey, a disabled person is defined as one who has a significant medical condition or a physical, mental, developmental or learning impairment/disability. This includes, but is not limited to, medical conditions that affect mobility, vision, hearing and learning. It also includes chronic diseases, such as multiple sclerosis and chronic fatigue syndrome; mental disorders, such as depression or anxiety; and developmental disabilities, such as ADD/ADHD (recently re-diagnosed as AD/HD -- Predominantly Inattentive Type), dyslexia and autism.

About PopCap: PopCap Games, www.popcap.com is the leading multi-platform provider of "casual games" — fun, easy-to-learn, captivating computer games that appeal to everyone from age 6 to 106. Based in Seattle, Washington, PopCap was founded in 2000 and has a worldwide staff of over 200 people in Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, Vancouver, B.C. and Dublin. Its games have been downloaded more than 1 billion times by consumers worldwide, and its flagship title, Bejeweled(R), has sold more than 10 million units across all platforms. Constantly acclaimed by consumers and critics, PopCap's games are played on the Web, desktop computers, myriad mobile devices (cell phones, smartphones, PDAs, Pocket PCs, iPod and more), popular game consoles (such as Xbox), and in-flight entertainment systems. PopCap is the only casual games developer with leading market share across all major sales channels, including Web portals, retail stores, mobile operators and developers, and game device manufacturers.