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THE SONY PLAYSTATION!
**Consumer Marketing the world's most popular
interactive entertainment home console.**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of the Arts in Media Studies
at Massey University
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Raymond Tung
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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the marketing methods used for the Sony PlayStation. Marketing in the video game industry has been ignored by a number of theorists, who tend to concentrate on the influences and effects of video games on children and youth.

There are two research methods used. The first is textual analysis of selected video games, in terms of the availability of related marketing material. The individual marketing techniques used by Sony for each game are outlined and discussed.

The second research method used is qualitative research via questionnaires on the marketing of PlayStation games. Respondents were asked a number of questions about marketing techniques used by Sony. This method was used to gain information from the most important factor in marketing, the consumer.

The results from the questionnaires and case studies revealed that communication strategy and pricing strategy were the most important features in marketing the PlayStation. The advertising for PlayStation games promotes and informs the consumer and the price of games is an important factor for the purchaser.

As with every promotion or advertisement, the trademark logo of the Sony PlayStation are visible in television ads, magazines, store displays and posters. The logos and brand trademarks provide Sony with a business image that can be identified. Essentially, Sony have used different forms of media technology to market their products to the consumer.

The content and material from a number of PlayStation promotions is ambiguous. Sony are prepared to create advertisements where consumers are expected to make the connection between the content within the advertisement and what is actually being promoted.

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Introduction

The video game console industry is massive. It is a worldwide industry and is continuing to grow. With the new consoles available on the market (Sony - PlayStation 2, Nintendo - GameCube and Microsoft - X Box both in 2002), the industry is now becoming more competitive than ever. Kotick insists that "video games are finally being taken seriously . . . and are one of the fastest growing industries in the United States", (Kotick, 2001 : 34). Gardner believes that "the console industry is exploding as makers Sony and Nintendo and now even Microsoft plan to release next generation consoles that take direct aim at PC gaming's strongest assets", (Gardner, 2000 : 192-200).

The video game industry is now a multi-billion dollar business. Electronic companies like Sony are making huge profits. This thesis will analyse the marketing techniques and strategies used for selling electronic home video games. Marketing is extremely important and an essential element in the video game industry. Distinctive marketing techniques and promotional content are used by Sony. Marketing is a mechanism that connects the attraction of video games with the consumer. It is a calculated attempt to use the power of persuasion on the consumer to purchase the software and to isolate a specific element or theme of a game that will remain in the memory of the consumer.

The focus of the thesis is the Sony PlayStation. Not only is it the world's most popular home video game, Sony is renowned for their home entertainment technology. About "85 million PlayStation units have been sold globally since its 1995 launch", (Elkin, 2001b : 4). Since the launch of the PlayStation, the video game industry has fast become the fastest growing segment of the entertainment industry.¹ And with PlayStation 2 on the

¹ Business : playing with the big boys. (1999, May 15) *Economist*. vol 351, iss 8119. pg 65-66.

market since 2000, it is important that Sony promote the console to the greatest effect to gain greater success than its predecessor (PlayStation) and to out sell their competitors.

A reason for selecting marketing is that there have been past studies and research compiled on other aspects of video games. These aspects include youth, gender, violence and ethnicity and how they relate to video games. Work on marketing is almost nonexistent. As there is little literature that investigates marketing in any analytical depth, there is an opportunity to examine strategies that the video game industry utilize.

Furthermore, apart from the fact of being an owner of a PlayStation, my knowledge of the PlayStation far exceeds that of Sega and Nintendo. Also, marketing is an enormous subject to cover, it would be impossible to investigate all of the video game companies. Concentrating on one console is appropriate for this research project.

Chapter 1 is a review of literature, which identifies the four tools of marketing. Each section identifies different strategies in marketing. It is these strategies which are the crux of marketing :

- 1) The first strategy is *pricing*. The focus here is on the price charges for video games and how price can influence the consumer.
- 2) The second strategy is *communication*. Common attributes include advertising and promotion of video games. Discussions include the different forms of media used in promotions for video games.
- 3) The third strategy is the *product*. Concentration will not be on the product itself, but on its *branding and packaging*.
- 4) The fourth strategy is *distribution*. This relates to how and where PlayStation games are sold.

One aspect of marketing is the importance of the target audience. Marketing for a target audience is a major factor even though it is not considered as part of a four section strategy. It seemed important to include this as it is a major factor in marketing decisions.

Following the review of literature, Chapter 2 outlines the methodology used for this project. This chapter focuses on the type of research methods used. Discussion includes the use of qualitative research, textual analysis structured questionnaires, sampling size, sampling methodology and criteria, and subjects. These topics are analysed and discussed in detail where they were utilised in researching the topic.

Chapter 3 is the discussion which explores the findings from the four areas of marketing. This includes the marketing strategies used to promoting PlayStation games. Also, the results from the questionnaires conducted will be the nexus of the discussion.

Chapter 4 is a selected number of PlayStation games that have been employed into case studies. These games were selected on their wide exposure of promotion and the marketing techniques used. A selection policy was used to determine which games would be studied.²

There is also a case study on PlayStation 2.

Chapter 5, the conclusion addresses the key issues from the data collected and whether or not the data supports or contradicts the relevant literature.

Included at the end are two appendices. The first is the questionnaire that was sent to Sony. The second is a content list that is on the accompanied video tape.

² There are certain titles that are given wider promotion than others. Selection was based on choosing the most publicised games and what material was available at the time.