

Top Selling Computer Games

Ever since the release of the first Atari computers in the 1970s, computer games have been popular. The companies that make them and the consoles have always competed to have the best-selling games, so it's no surprise that they try to out-sell each other every year. Compiling a list of the best-selling computer games is always tricky. Not all companies release the numbers at the same time, and many of the most popular games are included when you buy a console. That's not to mention that some of the most popular games ever haven't ever sold a copy – Fortnite is free to download and play on every console. So, instead of looking at a list of the best-selling games of all time, let's take a look at some of the best-sellers from different eras.

Tetris

It doesn't matter whether you talk about the 1980s, when Tetris was released, or all-time, Tetris is the best selling game in history (in fact, it was only the second-best-selling game in the 1980s, behind Super Mario Bros). Since its release on 6th June 1984, Tetris has sold over 500 million copies in various formats across different consoles. The simple concept, annoying yet addictive music and endless challenge captured the imagination of the public from day one. Tetris was credited with helping launch the Nintendo Game Boy successfully – it eventually sold over 35 million copies on the Game Boy alone (enough to put it inside the top 10 best-sellers of all time without even considering any other console). Nowadays, Tetris continues to be adapted and released in new and exciting formats. According to Henk Rogers, the managing director of the Tetris Company, the game has over 425 million paid downloads on mobile phones and tablets alone!

Minecraft

Perhaps even more impressive than Tetris is the block-based favourite, Minecraft. It is estimated that the game has sold over 200 million copies when you combine the console, mobile and PC versions of the game. If you include the free-to-play mobile version, then that number jumps to nearly 500 million. To reach a similar number of downloads (albeit free) to Tetris in a much shorter space of time is certainly very impressive.

Pokémon (various colours)

During the 1990s, consumers had a wealth of choice of console. They could choose from four different Nintendo offerings (SNES, N64, Game Boy and Game Boy Colour), Playstation, SEGA Megadrive and huge growth in PC games. Despite all this choice, the Game Boy dominated the



top 10 selling games, with 4 out of the 10 being Game Boy games. Of these, the best sellers by far were the Pokémon games. Each version had a different colour and gave the user access to different Pokémon. The Red, Green and Blue versions sold the most, with over 31 million combined sales between 1996 and 2000. The Gold and Silver versions sold 23 million between them in the same period.

Lemmings

Fourth in the list of 1990s best-sellers, and only just behind Super Mario World, Lemmings was a revolutionary game. The concept was simple enough - a bunch of lemmings have escaped and are intent on walking to their doom in any number of hilarious ways. Your job was to manipulate the environment to see them to safety. Throughout the 90s and beyond, different versions were released, each one as addictive and fun to play as the last. It's still possible to play the original game online or through the Microsoft Store on a PC.

Tomb Raider

Heroine Lara Croft may be famous now, but when she first hit screens in 1996, she was a revolution. Each level was fully 3D and set out on a grid, allegedly inspired by Ancient Egyptian pyramids. This was innovative at the time and caught the imagination of the public. The controls and gameplay were all created especially for the game as nothing like it had been done before. The original in the series sold over 7 million copies for PlayStation alone.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What is the best-selling game of all time?
2. What is the second-best-selling game of all time?
3. Which colours of Pokémon sold the most?
4. Where can you still play Lemmings?
5. Who is the main character in the Tomb Raider series of games?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- S** Why is it tricky to create a list of best-selling games?
- V** What does the word "heroine" tell you about Lara Croft?
- V** Which word tells you that the levels of Tomb Raider were only perhaps based on Egyptian pyramids?
- S** Why was Tomb Raider revolutionary?
- I** Why might the author think that Minecraft sales are more impressive than Tetris?

History of Home Computing

Microsoft Windows is one of the most commonly-used operating systems in the world. As of January 2021, Windows accounted for 31% of all operating systems worldwide. This puts it second behind Android, with 41% (Apple's iOS had nearly 17% for comparison). Nowadays, there are five main operating systems (Apple OS and Linux being the other two), but it wasn't always this way.

Early computers

Some of the first computers were a type of computer called a mainframe. They were big and powerful and didn't have an operating system. When the user arrived to use the computer, they brought all of the programs and data that they needed on a disk; the computer simply ran the program.

Some of the first home computers included the BBC Micro, Commodore 64 and Apple II series. These could be used with an operating system, but it had to be loaded each time on a separate disk, and most people didn't bother. At the time, floppy disks and their drives were very expensive, so most computers used a cassette tape drive to store games and information. One of the main jobs of an operating system is to manage all of the different applications and allow several to run at once. Early computers couldn't do this. If you used one program or played a game, nothing else could run. Can you imagine using a computer now and only being able to open a web browser and nothing else (although, don't forget that there was no Internet or web browsers back then).

Consoles

Some of the first computers to include a type of operating system were games consoles. These allowed users to manage their game saves and play audio or video CDs. This also meant that games could be copy-protected for the first time, which meant that people couldn't just copy a game and give it to their friend without paying for it.

Personal computers

One of the main reasons that operating systems became needed was because display screens reduced in price. This meant that people needed something more user-friendly when they worked on a computer. The first version of Microsoft Windows, Windows 1, was released in 1985. It was very basic and mainly allowed people to access files in a visual way, but it was already including



some of the things that would go on to become essential features of an operating system – connecting to a printer, using a keyboard and mouse and listening to sounds, for instance. It was also the first time that users were able to run multiple programs at once. The design was updated in 1991 and 1993 with Windows 3.0 and 3.1. These were the first versions of Windows that many home users saw. They were still very basic, and the graphics were inferior to modern operating systems, but they did include basic games such as minesweeper and solitaire. Even though support officially stopped for Windows 3.1 in 2001, you can still find working examples of it online, where you can see how far operating systems have come.

Windows 95 (released in 1995) was the first operating system that introduced many of the features users recognise from Windows today. It was the first time the Start Menu appeared and introduced the X in the top corner of a window to close it down. It was the first Windows operating system to introduce the idea of a “desktop” and give the user the option to add shortcuts to the desktop (Mac OS already had this feature). This was also the first time that Windows introduced the taskbar to show which applications were running. In line with the fact that the Internet was rapidly growing, Microsoft also introduced Internet Explorer for the first time in a Windows 95 update.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What percentage of devices use Apple’s iOS according to the text?
2. Which operating system first featured a Start Menu?
3. What did an operating system on a console allow people to do?
4. When did Microsoft stop supporting Windows 3.1?
5. What was the first version of Windows called?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

What was different between a mainframe computer and a home computer?

I

Why didn’t many people use floppy disks to begin with?

I

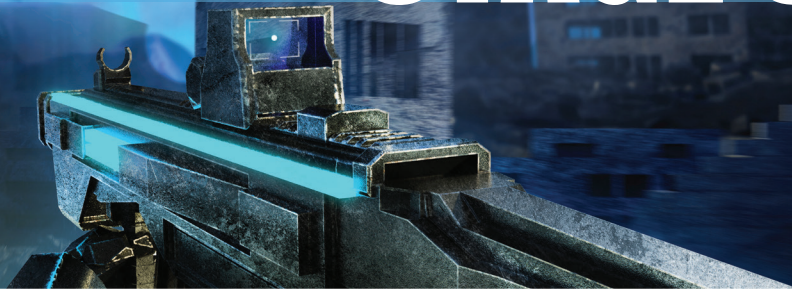
Why might people have been annoyed by operating systems on consoles?

V

Find and copy a word that tells the reader that the graphics on Windows 3.1 weren’t as good as modern systems.

V

If features were “essential”, what does that tell you?



On A Roll

Alice was on a roll. Forty-two kills in less than three minutes and all without the power-pack upgrade that she'd lost to a banshee in the last round. Her thumbs blurred across the controller as she ducked, dodged and fired whenever an opponent drifted into view. She'd never had a game like this before in her life. Every shot from the other team seemed to miss her, and every shot she fired seemed to hit home. Somewhere in the distance, her mum called her up to eat dinner, but there was no way she was going to leave the arena until the end of the game. She needed the high-score.

In her hands, the controller was heating up: she reassured herself that it was nothing more than over-use and that it would cool down after she'd finished. Her mum called her again, and she yelled something in response. It might have been gibberish for all Alice knew because her concentration was locked on the flashing screen. It was strange, the harder she concentrated, the hotter the controller became, and the closer the screen seemed to be getting. She knew she wasn't leaning into it; maybe it was just an optical illusion.

Now, she could feel herself becoming one with the game. It seemed like her hands were reacting without consulting her brain. She could hear the sounds of the battle closing in. A sudden explosion somewhere behind made her jump and jolt round. Instead of her bedroom, strewn with discarded clothes and half-eaten plates of food, she was staring back into the swamp-filled jungle that she'd just fought her way out of in the game. The feel of cold metal on the palms of her hands registered somewhere at the back of Alice's brain. Nervously, she glanced down. She was holding the RK1720 Blaster, fully loaded.

Panicking, Alice tried to drop the weapon, but it wouldn't leave her hands. She tried to think about the other weapons that she'd had in the game, and they appeared in her hands. A shot from one of her opponents whistled past her head and buried itself in a tree just behind her. She dropped to the ground and started to cry. All around her, she spotted familiar faces – avatars that she recognised from hours spent in the virtual battle arena. Only now it wasn't virtual at all. Suddenly, having the game of her life took on a much more literal meaning.



Cold, muddy water was seeping through her body armour and soaking her arms and chest. Alice knew that she needed to do something, but she had no idea how to get back home. The only thing she could think of was to win the arena. She didn't even want to think about what would happen if she died in the game.

Alice prided herself on getting out there and attacking her opponents - she normally ended each battle with one of the highest kill rates. Somehow, that didn't seem such a wise move now. Instead, she knew that she'd have to hide away until there were only a few enemies left, and then step out and hope for the best. It was a dirty tactic, but it was her only option.

Just as she was coming to terms with her new reality, Alice heard the click and whir of a plasma grenade. She watched, mesmerised, as the silver orb arced through the air and landed at her feet with a wet squelch.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Which phrase in the first paragraph describes how an enemy might appear?
2. What does the phrase "having the game of her life took on a much more literal meaning" mean?
3. Find and copy a word that means "talking to".
4. What does the word "strewn" tell you about how Alice left her clothes?
5. Which word in the text tells you that Alice couldn't move when she saw the grenade?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

Who had taken Alice's power-pack upgrade?

S

Why was Alice feeling lucky at the beginning of the story?

I

What evidence is there that Alice wasn't paying attention to what her mum was saying?

R

What weapon did Alice have in her hands when she entered the game?

I

How was Alice feeling when she realised where she was? How do you know?



Revolutionary Consoles

PlayStation 2

When DVD players were first released in 1997, prices were exorbitant. Entry models could cost over £400 and so were out of reach for many families. By the time the PlayStation 2 was released in 2000, this cost had come down slightly, but they were still luxury items. Sony realised that people who wanted to play computer games also wanted to watch DVDs, and so the PlayStation 2 also worked as a DVD player; this extra and valuable feature made sure that it was an instant success.

By the time the PlayStation 2 was released, Sony had spent over a decade working on it. They made sure that they kept the best features of the original PlayStation and ironed out any bugs and issues. On release, it was one of the most sought-after items in computing history. In total, the console sold over 155 million units worldwide and remains the highest-selling console to date.

At its peak, there were over 3,500 published games for the PlayStation 2, many of them exclusively for that console. It didn't matter what type of game you were into, there was something for you. Racing fans could speed around gloriously detailed tracks in Gran Turismo 4; fans of point-and-click adventures could grab *Escape from Monkey Island* or *Discworld II*; *Mortal Kombat* and *Tekken* provided two-player options for fighting fans and *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon* provided hours of fun for those who just wanted to play fun platform games.

Nintendo Wii

Most consoles have always been aimed primarily at children and young adults who like to play games for hours on end. The Nintendo Wii broke that mould by targeting the whole family all the way up to parents and grandparents. There were games for more hardcore Nintendo gamers, such as *Super Mario Galaxy*, but most of the releases were aimed at people who didn't have hours to spend playing games and wanted something fun, and that could be played with other people. The controls were simple, to begin with, but made even more accessible by the use of motion sensing. These made playing games like tennis and



golf and taking part in activities such as skiing, easy and fun. Never before had there been a console that was as fun and engaging to more people. For the first year or so after its release, it was practically impossible to get hold of one, as they repeatedly sold out around the world. To date, it has sold over 100 million units.

Nintendo Entertainment System (NES)

Atari was the first company to release a home console, but it was Nintendo that made it affordable and put it on the map. When the NES was released in 1986 (it had been released in 1983 in Japan under the name Famicom), it was an instant and innovative hit. It was more powerful and had more games than the Atari console and sold over 61 million units. Nintendo also released a number of accessories that were far ahead of other competitors. In 1987, they released a stereoscopic headset (that allowed people to play the games in 3D, much like virtual reality glasses today). Unfortunately, it didn't sell well and was never released outside of Japan. There was also a robot that connected to the system, a keyboard, and a gun that used infra-red to connect to the console and allow players to shoot at things in the game — much like in arcade games.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the word “exorbitant” mean?
2. What does the phrase “at its peak” mean?
3. Find and copy a word that tells you some games were only available for the PlayStation 2.
4. What are “competitors” in this context?
5. Find and copy a word that means the NES had new and original features.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

What did Sony realise that helped to make the PlayStation 2 a success?

S

Why did the Wii appeal to so many people?

R

What games did the PlayStation 2 have for people who liked point-and-click adventures?

R

Who are most consoles aimed at?

The First Computer Game

Computer games (or video games) are a huge industry, selling over \$100 billion each year. They've been around for decades, but over that time they have changed dramatically and gone through several different trends. More often than not, a desire for better graphics and more in-depth gameplay in computer games is one of the biggest reasons that computers get faster and more powerful.

In the beginning

Arguably, the first computer game was built in 1952 by professor A.S. Douglas. He created a computerised version of noughts and crosses called OXO. In 1958, a man named William Higinbotham created an early form of digital tennis at a laboratory in New York. Both of those games could only be played on the computer that they were created on. The first computer game to be created that could be installed on different computers came in 1962. Steve Russell built a game called Spacewar! at MIT in North America. The game was a space combat game and could be installed on a type of computer called a PDP-1 computer. These were incredibly expensive and powerful and could only be found at universities, but it was a step forward.

Consoles

Nowadays, most people play computer games on home consoles or home computers. The first console arrived just after Spacewar! In 1967, a group of developers invented a small game system that could be played on a television at home. It was called the Odyssey. The first one was sold in 1972, but it was never a success. In total, there were 28 games released for the Odyssey, and one of them went on to be incredibly popular elsewhere.

In 1972, Atari released a new type of games system - arcade games. Arcades had been popular in America for decades, with pinball machines and other coin-operated devices offering hours of entertainment. The first arcade game had been released a year earlier but hadn't taken off. When Atari released Pong, the now-famous tennis-style game where players move a small rectangle to "bat" a ball back to the opponent, nobody realised how successful it would be. In 1975, Atari released a home version of the same game which was equally popular. Pong was based on one of the Odyssey games, and the original creators took Atari to court, where they won.

Atari released the first home console that used joysticks and could have different games on it in 1977. The Atari 2600 was an important milestone in computer game history.

Other important events in the late 1970s and early 1980s included the release of Space Invaders, Pac-Man



and Donkey Kong. It also saw the company Activision formed who became the first company to just make games and not the console to play them.

The Crash

Despite massive popularity, the early 1980s saw a crash in the games console market. Many companies went out of business, and it took years to recover. It wasn't until 1985 when the very first Nintendo console was released that it started to pick back up. Nintendo was the first company to insist on certain levels of quality for companies making games for its consoles. Before then, a lot of games were released in a rush and didn't work very well. Nintendo also made handheld gaming popular when they released the first Game Boy in 1989. The ever-popular game, Tetris, had been released a few years earlier, but Nintendo acquired the rights and packaged it as a free game with each Game Boy.

Console Wars

The first console war hit the streets in 1991. Sega had released the Master System in 1986 and the Genesis in 1989, but neither had been able to compete with Nintendo's NES. In 1991, Sega released the Sonic the Hedgehog game and Nintendo released the Super Nintendo (SNES) console. For the first time, people had two consoles to choose from that were equally powerful and with fantastic and exclusive games. You couldn't play Sonic on the SNES, and you couldn't play Mario on the Sega Genesis: it was time to make a choice – Sega or Nintendo!

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Who created the first computer game?
2. Where was Spacewar! created?
3. Where are most games played today?
4. Which Odyssey game went on to be popular?
5. Which device made handheld gaming popular?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- S** Why were Activision different to other game companies?
- V** In the section "The Crash" which word tells you that Tetris was included with every Game Boy?
- S** Why did people finally have a choice in 1991?
- V** Find and copy a phrase that tells you some arcade machines needed coins to work.
- I** What evidence is there that people spent a lot of time in arcades?