



Manufacturers, Get Your “Collective Butts” in Gear

Dear CSR,

Our company does consulting in many different libraries on Long Island, as well as in Upstate New York. I was introduced to your magazine by a librarian in the Half Hollow Hills Library (Betty Tomforde). Your article regarding Windows XP and compatibility with games was of great interest to me. I was curious when you would be posting a database of sorts, or if you have any kind of extensive list of what games are compatible and what aren't. Manufacturers need to get off their collective butts and get things in gear, especially with Microsoft pushing the Windows 9x family out the window over the next few years. I'd like to hear your thoughts. Thanks.
Dave Rubin, 3rd Alternative

Dear Dave,

It is a problem when older versions of Disney's Magic Artist, I Spy School Days, the Logical Journey of the Zoombinis, Math Blaster and Schoolhouse Rock will not run on XP and all being sold today at stores like Walmart as Windows compatible. From a business perspective, Microsoft is not motivated to take care of consumers who buy older titles because there is no other OS for consumers to switch to. Microsoft has the luxury of thinking only about the future. The reality is that in our testing, Windows XP will only run 71.4% of children's Windows programs.

Apple, Microsoft's closest competitor, knew that it would be lambasted by picky consumers (educators in particular) if it came out with a new OS that would not reliably run older titles. From a business perspective, they were motivated to make a "classic mode" that will run the older software because dissatisfied consumers might switch to their competitor (Microsoft) otherwise. OSX is about 96.4% Macintosh compatible, according to our limited tests. We wish we could conduct further testing and post a list of compatible and non-compatible products as you mentioned, but we simply don't have the resources to do this at this time.

Given the large number of US consumers, schools and public librarians who have a investment in CD-ROM based software; as well as the large number of consumers currently thumbing through jewelcases in the bargain bins at Walmart, we'd like to see this issue covered in major news media. We've asked The New York Times to properly report on this situation, but have yet to hear a definitive yes or no on coverage.

You Really Missed the Boat on Star Flyers

Dear CSR

I run a computer lab in a private K-8 school. I have subscribed to your magazine for over five years and rely on your reviews to guide me in my purchase decisions. You've never steered me wrong until now. I bought multiple copies of StarFlyers: Royal Jewel Rescue and StarFlyers:Alien Space Chase based on your reviews in the May/June issue. You really missed the boat on this one! They are both almost entirely devoid of educational content. Additionally, they have entirely too little content period. I can spend a couple of months with my second graders playing Treasure Galaxy or Read, Write, & Type. Several of my second graders have finished Royal Jewel Rescue in just four class periods. The program also freezes often on all of my hardware configurations. I have always relied on your reviews in the past, but this one is so far off your usual unbiased assessment that I almost

wonder if The Learning Company paid you for this review.
Sharon

Hi Sharon,

Thanks for the feedback. Regarding the Star Flyers, we have plenty of family testing time on both titles to give us a high degree of confidence in our rating. We don't see these titles working well in a school lab setting, due to the indirect nature of the educational content, the design of the game; plus the entire look and feel is very unschool-like (a fact that we think is well described in the review).

PLEASE don't think that we get paid for reviews. We don't, never have and never will. We state our relationship with publishers, at <http://www.childrenssoftware.com/editorialguidelines.html>. Please study these guidelines. If you still don't believe us, contact any publisher directly and ask them if it is possible to buy, bribe, or otherwise influence a review from CSR. They'll tell you. We congratulate your willingness to question our ratings. We feel that every review is the start of a conversation, and the more informed, unbiased participants in the conversation, the better off we'll all be. In the meantime, we feel your comments are likely to be helpful to other lab coordinators, so we'll put them online.

What's next at Toys R Us? Bud Light?

Dear CSR

Why do I see Mature Rated games, like Grand Theft Auto, Vice City being advertised in the Sunday circulars for Toys R Us and Walmart?

We decided to ask both companies, and went to their customer-service "contact us" web pages. No response. Donning our official "Members of the Press" badges, we contacted each company's corporate headquarters. Both Walmart and Toys-R-Us offered similar responses. "We sell these products because our customers buy them." Both retailers claim that they make every effort to be responsible by denying sales to minors. When MATURE-rated games reach the cash register, their barcode triggers a prompt for the cashier to check the customer's ID.

In our opinion, there are two problems with this approach. First, parents do most of the videogame buying (not kids)—and they simply buy what their teens ask them to get, assuming the content can't be that bad if it's in Toys-R-Us (trust us, it is). Second, using the logic "we sell it because customers buy it" is a cop-out. Teens would buy cigarettes and beer, too. Will we see those products next at the corner toy store?

What do you think? Let us know, and we'll be happy to bundle your letters together, and send them en mass to the software retailers.

*We welcome questions, stories and especially reviews from our readers. Submitted materials become property of CSR and may not be returned.
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