Activity Games with the Nintendo Wii

Since the game industry became part of our everyday consuming, there has always been made a great effort to find new and innovative ideas for games. One of the most interesting categories of new gaming ideas consists of activity games: For those, the gamer needs to interact with the game by means of physical activity. Understandably, every game needs some physical input for controlling it, but activity games usually focus on involving the gamer as much as possible. This includes swinging around with his arms or even moving the whole body. For these games, the gameplay is used to motivate the gamer to be more active.

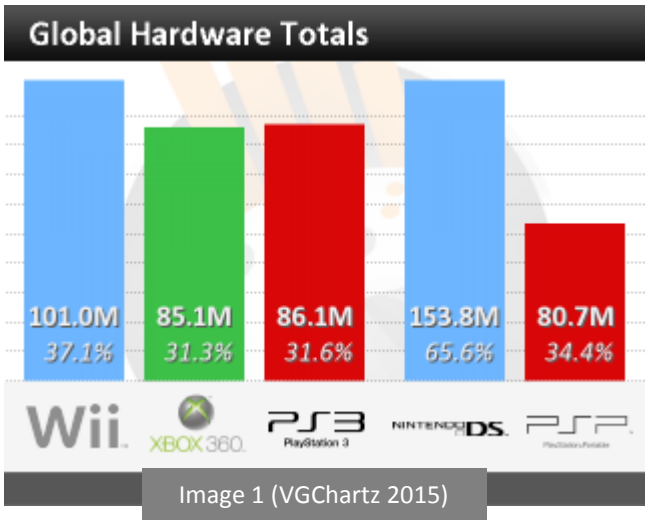

Image 1 (VGChartz 2015)

As an example, the Japanese game company Nintendo is considered very engaged with surprising people with fresh concepts. This is also connected to the fact that Nintendo only publishes games which are dedicated to their own console systems with distinguishable highlights and special features. One of the most successful devices have been the Nintendo Wii and the Nintendo DS. Especially the Wii offered a completely new gameplay with a pointing device called WiiMote. It captures not only the pointing direction using an infrared sensor, but also movements on three axes, using a gyro sensor. Image 1 shows the global amount of hardware consoles sold from the last generation. Nobody would've expected such a great success because Nintendo's company policy was always rather developing "[…] low-priced hardware" (Sloan 2011, p.6) and at these times, the competitors Sony and Microsoft offered far more qualitative hardware in almost all technical aspects, as Thurrott (2010) summed it up in his technical comparison between the major last generation consoles. (He looked at the stationary consoles XBOX360, PS3 and Wii) It's even more interesting that Nintendo's Wii reached the top of game industry. The secret seems to be a fresh and new interactive concept for gaming, affordable for any of "those 5-to-95-year-old gamers […]" (Sloan 2011, p.160), which is an admittedly large target group. And indeed, it worked out as a great concept, appealing for a broad range of people.

Sony and Microsoft had some inspiring ideas for capturing movements and using them for creating activity games, too: Microsoft Kinect captures the depth of a picture with two cameras and tries to turn it into a simple body rig of the player, which has a lot of potential. But this technology is relatively expensive and probably not affordable for "normal" gamers. For PlayStation Move, the gamer needs to hold one or two controllers which are working very similar to the previously described WiiMote. This isn't very expensive and works quite precisely. Although Sony and Microsoft also invented interesting new technologies, we'll focus on some games on Nintendo's Wii, which were even used in daily life.

The important step to this success was that Nintendo wanted to "[…] bring gaming back to the masses." (Sloan 2011, p.154) So, the aim wasn't to design a high-end stationary console for pro gamers, but more to help "[playing video games] morphing into an accepted expenditure of time that was perceived as useful for personal development, stress relief, exercise and family bonding." (Sloan 2011, p.160) It surely would've been much harder to catch up with the competitors regarding technical aspects than just to win new customers.

Many games used these features to create a completely new gameplay, for example:

1. **Wii Fit**
   This is a game that needs an additional controller: The "balance board" is able to detect pressure in each of its corners and process it to the game software. The game analyses these data and concludes the position of the gamer and other variables. There are many ideas to train especially your balance and coordination, while having a fun task to accomplish. For such a game, it's normally needed to offer many diversified exercises, because "when a game stops teaching us, we feel bored." (Koster 2005, p.42) And obviously, you want to train yourself over a longer timespan!

Image 2 (Nintendo 2015)

2. **The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword**
   It's not hard to keep this game going, since the main aspect is completing the exciting storyline. But for doing that, you need to put in some effort using your arms: The sword of our hero behaves exactly like the WiiMote in the player's hand. Hence, it's very decisive in which direction you're "swinging your sword". Some enemies are only vulnerable if you hit them in a certain direction, for example horizontal. As we see in Image 3 under "spin attack", you even have to combine your movements of the WiiMote with the nunchuk, which is an extension for controlling the game with other hand, too.

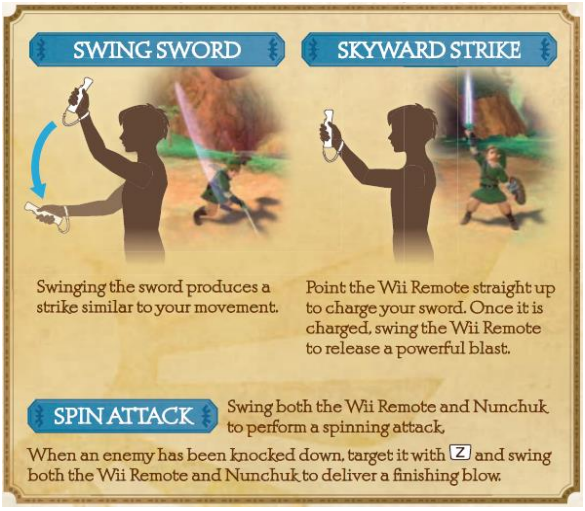

Image 3 (Nintendo 2011)

We've only seen two very popular examples of games on the Wii, but as you certainly can imagine, there's a lot more out there! And this seems to be one of the most important factors influencing the popularity of the Nintendo Wii: There are plenty of games for every type of user. Versatility should be considered a critical requirement for reaching the masses.

Regarding the growing sector of activity games, there's probably much more coming soon – not only from Nintendo. From a very commercial point of view, Kazuo Hirai (CEO of the Sony Corporation) summed it up, as he said: "We're not selling widgets, we're selling entertainment, and everyone needs to be entertained." (Sloan 2011, p.175)

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