The PokÃ©mon Phenomenon: Crash Course Games #28

Crash Course: Games
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===== Introduction (0:00) =====

Hi, I'm Andre Meadows and this is Crash Course Games.

Now that we've gotten this far along in the series, today we are going to do something a little different and use everything we have learned to do a case study of sorts. We're going to take a detailed look at a single game that is actually a bit of a phenomenon. It has crossed cultural boarders, geographical boarders, genres and even found itself in a bunch of different types of games and even non-gaming spheres.

There is probably only one game that you can think of that has done all this. We're talking about Pokémon! Which you probably figured out from the title.

Pokémon has done something that very few other games have done. We've talked about the cultural impact of games like Pac-Man and Mario and those games were and still are hugely influential to gaming and pop culture. But Pokémon has managed to do something a little different.

So let's dive into the history of Pokémon and try to figure out how it became: the book, magazine, television show, movie, video game, card game, mobile game, dice game, board game, educational game, PC game, role playing game, and toy line that it is today. Did I miss anything?

[Theme Music]

===== History and Design of Pokémon (1:03) =====

So, 2016 marks the 20th anniversary of Pokémon. The first initial games were released on February 27th, 1996.

It was then that the very first Pokémon games, Pokémon Red and the (Japan only) Pokémon Green were set loose on the world. In September of 1998 will make it's way to the United States with Pokémon Red and Blue. So where did this idea of Pokémon come from? Well, it all started with game maker, Satoshi Tajiri's desire to recreate his childhood experiences catching bugs and exploring around his home in Tokyo.

He gained help from his friend Ken Sugimori who has been the official Pokémon artist this entire time. The friends formed a company called Game Freak and later on a studio by the name of Creatures Incorporated. Tajiri was greatly inspired by the Game Boy link cable. He imagined that the cable allowed bugs and small creatures to travel from one system to another. And his second bit of inspiration came from the TV show, Ultra Man.

In this series large creatures were kept in small balls, ready for battle. This is why one of the original names of Pokémon was Capsule Monsters but was later changed to Pocket Monsters which in turn was shortened to Pokémon.

But Tajiri and Sugimori had a terrible time pitching the idea to Nintendo until they made a friend in legendary designer Shigeru Miyamoto who was able to successfully lobby the company to make the game. And the rest is now 20 years of history.

Pokémon was designed to be a simple turn based role playing game with a story-line that could be played continuously and while the style of the game play doesn't really change the constant addition of new Pokémon manages to keep the game fresh and exciting. And the game was able to turn what is usually a solitary experience, playing on a handheld console, into a social activity. The game encouraged social activity by allowing Gameboys to be linked for multi-player interactions within the game.

Because the games were separated into colours players that wanted to catch all the Pokémon had to trade with other players, making the social interaction a necessary game component. And they have maintained that aspect since, using wireless adapters and online connectivity. And the games numerous monsters with their varying attributes is particularly well suited to the style of socializing that kids partake in, showing off what they know to other kids. (I know some adults like that too.) This is something that the Pokémon franchise took advantage of when designing their games, understanding what kids enjoy.

===== Pokémon and Children (3:01) =====

Lets go to the thought bubble. One of the main reasons the Pokémon franchise is so successful is that it based their products on the play strategies and social life of children. It is almost a reciprocal process, the creators use the culture produced by children as inspiration for their story-lines and game designs.

This makes a product that kids will take an active interest in and manipulate for their own uses, providing even more fodder for the producers to work with. As psychology researchers Laven, Gelman and Galotti put it 'Pokémon is an excellent example of the type of learning and memory competencies that thrive in a cultural setting that feeds children's interest through a variety of media.' In a study focusing on Pokémon's affect on children, they found that kids are incredibly knowledgeable about Pokémon, they are able to organize information about all the different characters in ways that are meaningful like how different characters might be linked. The study also found that it wasn't the parents teaching the children about Pokémon, parents often had no idea what the game was about, or how it works.

What happened was that children learned from other children as they socialized. So Pokémon managed to tap into kids minds by focusing their games on activities that are appealing to kids already: Identification, of monsters, Memorization, of monsters and moves, Collecting and trading, of Gameboy monsters and cards.

And just like Tajiri's original inspiration for the game, it taps into kids desires to explore the world by learning about creatures and how they evolve from one form to another. Of course it helps that all the Pokémon are super cool or super cute, or like Pikachu, a nice mix of both. Thanks Thought Bubble!

===== Pokémon TV Series and Movie (4:20) =====

So one year after the game was released the Pokémon television series was released bringing Pokémon to life by the story of Ash Ketchum and his quest to be the very best, like no one ever was, by catching them all. The Pokémon tv series first aired in Japan in 1997, turning the plot of the Gameboy games into an original series, but the series immediately diverged from the games by starting Ash out with Pikachu, a character not available to a new trainer in the games.

This along with some slight changes helped the series to find its own voice apart from the game. And the first series was well received, so much that things would come full circle with the series altering and inspiring future games. For example, Pokémon Yellow was a special edition of the Red and Blue games which featured Pikachu as a trainer's first Pokémon. And just like in the animated series, little Pikachu would follow you around while you were walking.

So after the first season a sort of formula emerged connecting the games and the tv series. As new games were released the series would advance the story-line to match so that Ash went to the same locations that the newly released games existed in. Ah cross-

marketing!

This formula seems to be working out for the Pokémon series because it's currently in its 19th season and still going. Having produced over 1000 episodes! Its like an animated soap opera.

Its been licensed in over 160 countries, and in 30 languages. And its important to note that the Pokémon names are translated across languages in a way that ensures they reflect that specific language and culture appropriately. There have even been 19 different movies!

The first one being in 1998, and being aptly titled Pokémon: The First Movie, that's pretty bold. Nows there's even been talk of a live action Dectective Pikachu movie in the works! But the series has come under some criticism, producers of Pokémon were accused of making a series that effectively functions as a weekly 20 minute long commercial.

But instead of denying this the folks at the Pokémon company openly acknowledged it saying 'we consciously launched the tv show for the intention of selling our products.'

===== Pokémon Board Game (6:04) =====

Now another arm in Pokémon's franchise is their Pokémon trading card game. The game first debuted in 1996 in Japan, and while there were other versions previous to this, it was the first to be branded Pokémon. The trading card game was inspired by the Red, Green and Blue video games, the actual game play being based on the same mechanics as Magic the Gathering, but simplified.

Yet again Pokémon had a success on their hands. Having sold over 20 billion cards over the last 20 years. The trading card game was received so well that they created digital versions of the game, the Pokémon trading card game on the Gameboy Colour and now for the 3DS, and Pokémon TCG online for the computer.

And while the game play rules were simple enough for older kids and adults to master, younger kids found them complicated and often played by their own rules. But that's the thing about the card game, it can be played by the rules, played by house rules, or even just collected for the pretty pictures.

===== The Pokémon World (6:51) =====

So the video game, television series, movies and card games are all closely linked, coincidence? No. This was a calculated approach by its creators, J. C. Smith, marketing director for the Pokémon company international points out that 'one of the reasons is the richness of its world. There are more than 640 Pokémon now. So everyone has a favourite or a team of favourites.

The principle tenet of Pokémon is collect, trade and battle. Now you have 640 options. You can collect them, trade them with your friends, or train them for battle in the trading card or video games.

People want to complete their collections or find that one new Pokémon that helps their battle strategy. And I'm assuming that there's more than 640 now, or there will be by the time this airs. So unlike traditional venues, there really is no end to the Pokémon experience.

You can watch the tv show and when it ends up can continue in the world by picking up the video game or trading cards with your friends. And unlike Nintendo's other first party titles Pokémon are part of a privately held company, The Pokémon Company, which gives them the flexibility to explore other venues for connecting players to Pokémon. For example, in 2003 Play!Pokémon was established as a division of the Pokémoncompany that hosted official leagues, players could compete against each other in both card and video game formats in local, pre-release or premiere tournaments. And if players were good enough they could even compete in the world championships its like trying to become a Pokémon master in real life!

And speaking of which, we now have Pokémon GO, the AR global map addition to the franchise, which has so far been proven a successful one. The game peaked at close to 45 million daily active users around the middle of July 2016. And during the Sunday of its first release it accounted for around 47% of the US games market.

Good with getting your service to work on that day! And its being played in over 65 counties, and in true Pokémon fashion the game encourages social interaction between its players, this time including real world exploration. It also capitalizes on the nostalgia of the franchise's oldest players who are excited to once more immerse themselves in the Pokémon world, or rather bring the Pokémon to our world.

But it also introduces Pokémon to second generation players who were too young to be there at the beginning. Just like the television show and card game Pokémon GO has found was to even intersect with non-players lives. Local animal shelters have seen their adoption rates go up, as they allow people to walk dogs and cats while they play.

Shops of all kinds have seen an increase in business as they lure nearby Pokéstops and attract not just Pokémon but new customers. And Pokémon GO has also had a huge effect on people's mental health for providing motivation to go outside and interact with people. There are probably people who have never played Pokémon before who are now playing Pokémon GO.

===== Conclusion (9:16) =====

So Pokémon's transcendence into a global phenomenon really comes down to carefully orchestrated planning. Pokémon managed to infiltrate itself into numerous markets, merging them seamlessly into what the centre of the Japanese economy and business describe as "a comprehensive entertainment package, which includes the elements of illustration, game program, sound effects, digital visual effects, and card trading."

Its not just that the Pokémon franchise was hugely successful, but that each arm of the franchise was an incredibly implemented, orchestrated and successful piece of the Pokémon world. The creators of the game understood their target audience, and apparently still do by the looks of parents and children out there chasing Weedles and Pidgeys at your local park! Thanks for watching and we'll see you next time!

By the way, is it weird that the first Pokémon game I ever played was Pokémon Pinball? Pokémon are everywhere, you can't escape them.

===== Credits (10:05) =====

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