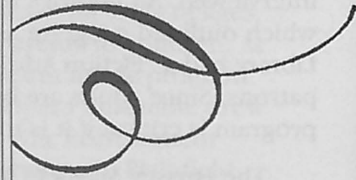# PROVIDING COMMUNITY OUTREACH THROUGH THE NINTENDO WII

by Tim Gritten

A new interactive video game is helping the Indiana State University Library disseminate an awareness of the library to underserved members of the local community. As part of the library's community outreach program, librarians have introduced the Nintendo Wii to a local retirement center. Residents are able to socialize, exercise, and revitalize in a weekly setting that continues to draw crowds. The Wii is easy to setup, easy to use, and easy to play, making it a perfect event for a predominantly sedentary population.

PURPOSE OF OUTREACH

Librarians have traditionally regarded advertising and marketing as unseemly behaviors unbecoming library professionals. Historically, the service would sell itself. Now, other activities outside the public sphere compete for attention. Librarians might post announcements within the library, or advertise in a newspaper, or on a calendar of community events. As Google infiltrates the mindset of the typical youth, librarians are becoming increasingly concerned about connecting with their patrons. If libraries are to survive, they must proactively approach their community with the services themselves (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2003).

As society witnesses rapid expanses of technology, we have seen an increased understanding that we must commit to what has become known as lifelong learning. No longer can successful citizens stop learning once they close that last textbook or place down the pen after the ultimate final exam. In order to thrive, we must constantly learn new procedures, acquire new skills, and discover new talents. The library's greatest impact in outreach can be the assistance in the drive for lifelong learning (Cawthorne, 2003). People can visit the library to increase their level of information literacy or libraries can visit underserved populations with the mission of improving the situation.

As we aim to meet the needs of underserved populations, we can simultaneously improve our image. Academic libraries, as part of a college or university, occasionally have a reputation of aloofness within the ivory tower. Many community members sense a semblance of superiority amongst the academic community, based upon events from decades past. This reputation will not fade unless the library makes a conscious decision to break down remaining barriers between town and gown. At Indiana State University, one of our stated missions is to create a close connection with the Terre Haute community; outreach should not be limited to serving students in various locations across campus (although that remains our primary goal). If we want our students to engage in community and public service, we must set a strong example ourselves. We must connect with the surrounding neighborhoods as a condition of being a good citizen.

In order to best serve the community, the Indiana State University library recently engaged in a lengthy discussion with campus and neighboring institutions to learn what our stakeholders need and how we might help them. As part of the development of an innovative strategic plan, the library created a new logo. Over the image of a soft chair, the tagline reads "Your Campus Living Room." As a brand, this tagline gives users an expectation of available services. But if we are making an implied promise of types of services to prospective and current patrons, then we must find ways to follow through on that promise if we want to retain our users' goodwill and our users themselves (Stimson, 2007). The brand necessarily affects our strategies for outreach. To that extent, we contacted a local retirement community, Westminster Village, in the summer of 2007 and asked if they would like to see, and possible play, a Nintendo Wii.

WHAT IS THE WII?

In November, 2006, Nintendo (the same company that produced such titles and gaming systems as Donkey Kong, Super Mario Brothers, and Super NES) released the Wii, an interactive video gaming system designed to emulate a player's physical movement. Nintendo hoped that the Wii, enunciated exactly like the pronoun "we," would greatly expand the demographics of people interested in video games. When people are asked their impression of typical video

games, they might describe an image of 14-year-old boys huddled in front of a television, rapidly pressing a myriad of buttons on a small controller. Nintendo designed the Wii to break that stereotype. Players wave thin controllers at a remote receiver to interact with a game. Even the "ii" within the name Wii emphasizes the new concept of gaming, as it "symbolizes both the unique controllers and the image of people gathering to play" (Nintendo, 2006).

One of the major advantages of the Wii is its relative simplicity to play. Unlike other video games that require memorizing vast permutations of different buttons, the Wii has three basic buttons. In the introductory games, a player might use one or no buttons. Instead of confronting a phalanx of buttons, the player may just need to move his or her arm. In a game of tennis, the player swings the controller as if it is a racket. This interactivity and the comparative ease at which players learn the basic games have made Wii incredibly popular from preschoolers to octogenarians. Nintendo has also created games that interest both genders.

The chief way that people interact with the game is through their Mii. Enunciated like the pronoun "me," players can create avatars that depict the characteristics of who they are or who they want to be. Apart from the expected choices of gender, height, and weight, players can personalize such features as eyes, nose, or facial hair. Using the Wii Remote as a point-and-click stylus, you can take a minute to choose from a series of previously generated Miis, or you can leisurely fashion and revise a new Mii. You can choose from more than 200 different shapes, and then adjust the color or position of those shapes. The personal expression has even exploded onto the Internet, where people showcase their personal Miis (http://www.famousMii.com/).

The Wii's interactivity, ease of use, and ability to personalize has elevated the game system to a worldwide phenomenon. By the end of 2007, barely one year after its initial release, Nintendo had sold more than 20 million Wiis (Nintendo, 2008). Compared to other video game consoles (notably Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Sony's Playstation 3), the price of a game system is relatively modest. For $250, you can purchase a system with controllers for one player and an initial game. This game, called Wii Sports, comes on an optical disc similar to a DVD. Several games within Wii Sports allow up to four people to play simultaneously, and a few game titles sold separately allow up to eight. If a library wished to offer Wii Sports to the most number of people at one time, it would need to purchase three additional Wii Remotes ($40 apiece) and one additional Nunchuk ($20), a controller attachment.

As popular as the Wii has been, the game can be exceedingly difficult to obtain. If the game is in stock, you could buy the game online at sites such as Amazon, in bricks and mortar electronic stores such as Best Buy, GameStop, Electronics Boutique, or general stores such as Target or Wal-mart. The dilemma is finding the game in stock. It has not been uncommon—especially between Thanksgiving and Christmas—to discover a line of people waiting outside a store at 6 a.m. on the rumor of possible Wiis. Even recently, the stores around Indiana State University will typically sell their inventory within hours of arrival. So how can someone buy a Wii without spending half their life browsing retail stores?

You can find several sites available on the Internet to assist your search. Wiitracker (http://wiitracker.com/) helps you locate a game through an online retailer. Unfortunately, many Internet retailers sell Wiis bundled with a group of additional games with a concomitant increase in the price. Prices from eBay or Amazon resellers tend to be higher than the list price, as sellers try to take advantage of the desperate. Wii.findnearby.net (http://wii.findnearby.net) overlays the location of stores and online auctions on a Google map. Since the site uses Google maps, you can see the phone number and get directions to the store. The website iTrackr (http://www.itrackr.com/) requires that you create a free account, but the site will then notify you via mobile phone or email when the Wii becomes available at a local store. I used a more traditional approach to finding the Wii for the Indiana State University Library. I struck up a conversation with the manager at a local GameStop. I explained my mission to her, and she was exceedingly helpful. She told me that, although she could not be certain on which dates the Wii consoles would arrive, she could tell me when her store received general deliveries. If I called, and the store had one in stock, they could hold it for me until I arrived. Naturally, this strategy is not always effective. The manager at another GameStop was not interested in my mission and lacked the ability to hold a game at any time.

The Wii is quite easy to setup for even those with limited technical ability. The initial box comes with a console, a Wii Remote, a Nunchuk, a sensor bar, and three cables. The console is relatively small (approximately the size of three standard DVD cases standing up next to each other). The cable heads are unique, which makes it quite simple to determine where one must plug everything in. The first cable connects the RCA plug with that of your television/receiver (typically yellow, white, and red jacks). Most TVs and VCRs have these inputs, but you should make sure you or your partner organization have those connections on the TV before you purchase a Wii. A second cable connects the power. The third cable connects the sensor bar. The

sensor bar must be placed above or below the TV. The Wii Remote, which operates like a remote pointer, interacts with the sensor bar to synchronize the action of the Mii on the TV. The Remote requires two AA batteries, which come with the game. The Nunchuk, which is only used for some games (only boxing in Wii Sports), connects directly to the Wii Remote when in use.
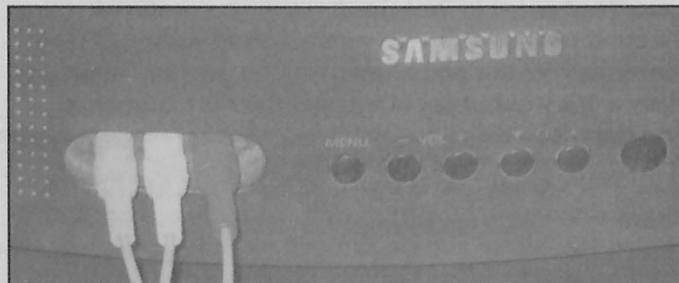
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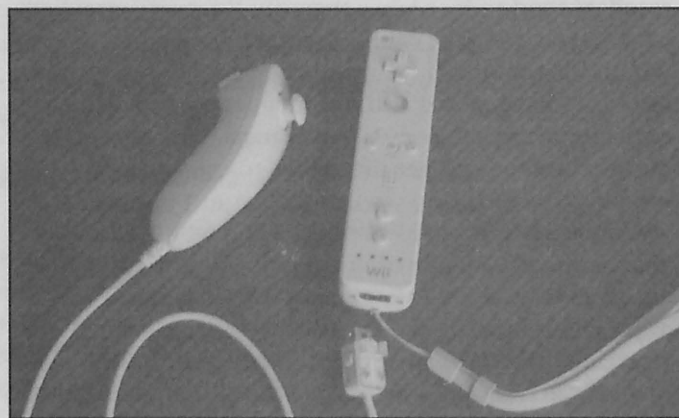
Nunchuk and Wii Remote

After you connect all the cables, turn on the Wii. Look for the input select on your TV to view the game. Most likely, you will need to press the TV/Video button on your television's remote control. If your TV remote lacks a TV/Video button, you will need to change the TV's channel to the video input channel (typically channel 2, L2, or S2, depending upon your TV/cable system). You will soon see the Wii Menu. The Wii Menu displays windows of options to select. In addition to the Weather channel and the Internet channel, the two main options will select the game or will select the Mii channel. Choose the Mii channel when you want to create or edit a Mii. You do not need to create a Mii to play any game; "guest Miis" are always available as a default selection.

To play a game, aim the Wii Remote on the game window in the Wii Menu. From there, it is just a matter of selecting the individual game you wish to play. When you select a specific game, a small window will display the number of your active Wii Remotes. In

order to save battery life, Wii Remotes go to sleep (much as your computer goes to sleep after a certain amount of inactivity). You can try pressing the main A button on the front of the Wii Remote to wake it up. If the console still cannot "see" the Remote, you must sync the remote with the console. If you open the back panel on the Remote (where the batteries are located), you will see a small orange button. If you open a small panel on the console, you will see a slightly larger orange button. Press both the button on the Remote and the button on the console, and you should see that your Remote is now "available." If the Remote is available, a small blue light will appear on the bottom of the Remote in one of four places, signifying players 1-4, respectively.

The game that accompanies the console is called Wii Sports. Wii Sports is a collection of five separate games—tennis, baseball, bowling, boxing, and golf. Up to four people can play tennis, bowling, and golf. Up to two people can play baseball and boxing. Most of the games are abbreviated in length from an actual game. Tennis is configured as a short doubles match. You can choose to play a single game, best two out of three, or best three out of five. If two people are playing, you can choose to play as partners against a computer opponent, or you can play against each other with a computer partner. You do not have to push any buttons to play tennis. You hold the Wii Remote in your hand as if you are clasping a racket handle. When the ball approaches your Mii on the screen, you swing your arm as you would a racket. The faster you swing, the faster your Mii hits the ball. If you swing at the ball early, you will pull the ball. If you swing late, you will slice the ball. Other games, such as bowling, might require you to hold a single button. As with many video games, you will need some hand-eye coordination, but practice with the game usually will suffice. It takes some players—even those who might be octoge-

The author's Mii bowling

narians—a few games to develop a decent feel for when to swing the remote.

The bowling alley realistically depicted

WII AT WESTMINSTER

As a target of Indiana State University Library's outreach program, Westminster Village seemed like an ideal location. First, retirement centers house many residents who infrequently leave the building. These individuals are much less likely to venture into our library for any service. Second, many of Westminster's residents were formerly affiliated with Indiana State University. Since we were trying a new service, we could build upon the previous relationships that the residents had maintained with the University. Ultimately, we believed that offering to bring the Wii to Westminster met the library's guidelines for outreach. The outreach was an extension of the new tagline that the library is "your campus living room." Just as patrons might play a game in their living room, we hoped that they might consider using the library to play a game. The outreach also enabled the library to improve its connection with the community. Finally, the outreach gave the library an opportunity to enhance its image— an increasingly relevant motivation when many institutional administrators debate the library's purpose.

We needed a few additional pieces of equipment before we started providing the service at Westminster. Since we hoped to draw an audience larger than a few people, we sought to use one of Westminster's projection systems. A TV by itself was too small, as we also wanted a group of people to be able to see and interact with their Miis. Next, we needed to buy a traveling case for all the Wii's components. You can actually find a traveling case designed for the Wii (the Wii Pro Gamer's Case, list price $30). It was helpful to include extra batteries in the traveling case for those moments when one of the Wii Remotes lost power. Finally, because Westminster's projection system's control unit

(receiver) was in the back of the room, the cable attached to the sensor bar was not long enough to reach the screen at the front of the room. Therefore, we purchased a separate wireless sensor bar (list price $20) to replace the original sensor bar that shipped with the console.

When the library first contacted Jan Cockrell, Director of Leisure Services at Westminster Village, she knew that the Wii was an interactive video game. Vibrant images of people playing games suggested to her that people could have the opportunity to physically play rather than merely exercise their thumbs. News programs showed people who played the game were enjoying themselves. Since the library already owned the equipment, knew how to use it, and was willing to visit and share with the Westminster residents, "we didn't have anything to lose" (Cockrell, J., personal communication, January 31, 2008). With the growing success of the program, Cockrell has since given talks about her experiences with the Wii to other leisure directors around the state. Eventually, she hopes that her residents can play other retirement communities (e.g., bowling tournaments with a center in Indianapolis).

The library initially offered to visit every other week for 60-90 minutes. The initial attendance typically ran between 3-5 people. This was a rather small turnout, but the residents who participated were devoted to the program. They expressed some concern that the library would not continue to visit Westminster because of the relatively small numbers. Part of the problem was that the Wii program seemed to conflict with other events whenever we visited. After approximately three months, the library discussed ways to improve the service with Westminster. We decided to change the time that we visited and to bring the Wii weekly instead of biweekly. Attendance immediately jumped. Since the change in frequency, 12-18 residents have attended the program every week. Some people just want to peek in for a few minutes to observe the excitement, some people want to watch other people play, and some people enthusiastically seek to play.

Residents seem to get much out of the program. Cockrell explained that "besides exercise, I heard laughter coming from the group of people. People are laughing whether they are playing a game, watching others play, or creating characters (Miis). I overhear people talking about the game in the hallways. Mostly, I see people having a good time" (Cockrell, J., personal communication, January 31, 2008). As a result of the residents' appreciation for the Wii, Westminster decided to buy a Wii for themselves. They offered their Wii to their assisted living residents, health care residents (nursing home), and to supplement the library's services when we could not visit (for example, over the University's Winter Break). But Westminster

still desired to participate in the library's outreach program. As Cockrell explained, "The library has more expertise [with the Wii]. Additionally, the residents who participated every week were already interacting with Indiana State University" (Cockrell, J., personal communication, January 31, 2008). The relationship had become just as important as the service.

Louie Finkbiner, Bernice McGarvey, Phyllis Elenich, Suzy Cristee, and Louise Clark wait for Joan Fuelle to bowl one of her patented curves

Louise Clark bowls, while Bernice McGarvey, Louise Jones, and Joan Fuelle watch

The heightened demand resulting from the program's success started to create some concern. It was proving difficult for a single librarian to visit Westminster every week. Today, a combination of four librarians and library staff rotate throughout the semester. We each have our unique personalities and have developed our own individual relationships with the residents. Officially, we visit for 60-minute sessions, but that limitation didn't last long. Now we typically stay between 90 and 120 minutes, and we don't rush the residents to leave at the end (but don't tell that to my boss).

Some residents had prior knowledge of the Wii, if not much experience. Once the library began making regular visits to Westminster, curiosity proved an irresistible draw for other residents. The realistic nature of the games drew others into the program. You can play tennis without running around a court, you can bowl without having to throw a heavy ball, and you can box without getting your head smashed. Joan Fuelle expressed appreciation for the increased fellowship of the gatherings. "Now I might know a few more names" (Fuelle, J., personal communication, February 1, 2008).

Several of the residents enjoyed creating their own Miis. One resident latched onto a Mii that an Indiana State University student had previously created. The resident now actively chooses the Mii named "SexyNurse." The greatest joy seems to emanate from the concept of video gaming as group gathering. The residents unreservedly support each other when someone else is playing. They clap and cheer when someone bowls a strike and groan when someone misses a spare. If someone misses getting a strike, or ends up with a split, they are likely to exclaim, "Oh, you were robbed!"

Marion Dillon, Ruth Liechty, Louise Jones, Louise Clark, and Bernice McGarvey cheer as Finkbiner bowls a strike

As with any game, everybody must face a learning curve. Some players have more difficulties than others. Other residents respond with shouts of hints and encouragement. Generally, the residents can quickly grasp the intricacies of playing the games in Wii Sports, but it still requires patience to develop a certain amount of hand-eye coordination. More experienced residents have been quick to help the beginners use the Wii Remote and interact with the game. The best suggestion has always been to pretend you are actually engaged in the sport. If you are bowling, hold the Remote as you would a bowling ball in an alley. As you walk toward the screen, swing your arm backwards. As you bring your arm forward, "release" the ball (by letting go a single button). Fuelle shared she was "impressed how people are able to learn. All of a sudden, it clicks" (Fuelle, J., personal communication, February 1, 2008).

Playing the Wii is not limited to the physically capable. People in wheel chairs, people with balance issues, and people with limited memory have all been successful playing the game. Since Wii Sports requires only that you move your hands, residents have happily bowled from their seats. Other people have held onto a chair as they walked forward to bowl. Some people might not remember the precise method needed to bowl, but how they scream in delight when they bowl a strike!

Although in general, most of the residents express a preference for bowling, some have tried Wii Tennis, a few have tried golf, and a couple have played baseball. When we first visited Westminster to demonstrate the Wii, we showcased Tennis. Coincidentally, a previous high school tennis champ (from approximately 65-70 years ago) saw what we were doing. We encouraged her to try the game out. She broke away from her card game to play a single game. It took a couple swings for her to develop the hand-eye coordination. When she was done, she confided to her friends that she had actually been sweating! Although the residents tend to gravitate toward bowling, they sometimes express an interest in trying one of the Wii sports that they never played when they were younger. One woman expressed a great interest in boxing, which the author happily accommodated. It was a great treat to see her flail her arms at the projector screen, while her Mii whaled away at mine.

Ultimately, the library has found the outreach experiences at Westminster to be a great success. The residents understand that the librarians and library staff are donating our time and greatly appreciate our visits. Our goal is not necessarily to get the residents to visit the library; we want them to engage in lifelong learning and to maintain or develop a positive image of the library. The residents have made personal connections with the Indiana State University librarians and staff, which is more than enough to make a difference in people's lives.

Suzy Cristee, Ruth Liechty, Marion Dillon, and Karen Brimberry watch Louise Clark and Joan Fuelle play tennis

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