

The Wii and Mii

What experience-based products teach about breaking the mold on industry growth.

BY SHAREEF MAHDAVI



When first introduced last year by Nintendo of America, Inc. (Redmond, WA), the Wii (pronounced *we*) video game console didn't attract much attention. Hard-core video gamers, the customer base that drives the industry, had come to expect higher-resolution

graphics and faster processing speeds such as those offered by the Xbox 360 (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA) and Playstation 3 (Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., Foster City, CA). Instead, Nintendo broke ranks and developed a system that is attracting an entirely new segment of consumers: casual gamers.

Nintendo took a risk by steering the Wii's development in a different direction, and the decision is paying off by expanding the market beyond the core audience of video gamers. People who previously would never have spent time in front of a TV screen playing a video game, such as parents and grandparents, are drawn to the system because it is easy to use and has an engaging interactive component. Families are now video gaming together with the Wii console—an unimaginable concept with earlier-generation gaming systems.

The Wii features a user-friendly interface and intuitive feel. Its console comes with a handheld remote (called a *wiimote*) that can sense the operator's movements and respond to them within the games. The wiimote's appeal is in its intuitive simplicity, which is far different from that of traditional (often complicated) video game controllers. The Wii's first games were also simple, featuring sports such as tennis, bowling, and boxing—a far cry from the ultra-slick, heart-thumping action games found on other systems. Nevertheless, the Wii has outsold other systems 4 to 1 so far in 2007, and stores are having trouble keeping units in stock.¹

Although game developers initially resisted the new format, they are now clamoring to adapt their offerings for the Wii, because the system's interactivity gives them greater latitude in designing games. Karaoke, dancing, and aerobics modules are being developed for the Wii and are expected to further expand the demand for the platform.

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WEB-ENHANCED EXPERIENCES

Another great idea designed to attract new customers to a business is connecting a product to an online experience. One good example is Webkinz (Ganz Corporation, Toronto, Ontario, Canada), a family of stuffed animals that at first sight look no different from the thousands of others collected by children. Webkinz departs from the traditional model of toy sales by assigning each animal a secret code that allows its owner access to a Web site. There, the child can play games and earn “kinzcash” to feed, clothe, and shelter the online version of their stuffed animal. The Internet has enabled the manufacturer to create its own social network of customers; kids can invite friends (who must own a Webkinz animal) to “come over and play” online. This virtual world has become to the elementary school set what MySpace and Facebook are to teenagers and college students. Webkinz converts a physical commodity into a compelling experience. Kids are not just receiving a toy; they are receiving the ability to explore a whole new world.

GAMING AND REFRACTIVE SURGERY

Refractive surgery would benefit from unlocking the demand for new consumer segments within the category. Conventional wisdom would have manufacturers focus on designing faster lasers featuring layers of technology designed to eke out more surgical efficacy. Clearly, the industry needs to break through the current paradigm for attracting candidates to refractive surgery. Perhaps it is time for manufacturers to consider a Nintendo-like move that would attract a new segment of patients beyond the core group of highly motivated consumers. At the same time, physicians should employ more creativity in how they counsel candidates about their surgical options.

WORD-OF-MOUTH AT WORK

Given the importance of word-of-mouth referrals to sustain refractive surgery, I want to highlight two initiatives that Advanced Medical Optics, Inc. (Santa Ana, CA), one of my corporate clients, is undertaking to help stimulate the market.

The first is a Web site called Reality LASIK (<http://www.realitylasik.com>), which has put an authentic and original twist on the celebrity endorsement by allowing Kristin Cavalleri (of MTV's "Laguna Beach") to document her own LASIK journey with video cameras. Kudos to Advanced Medical Optics' IntraLase marketing team for launching a campaign directed toward Generation Y (ages 18 to 29). Reality LASIK's footage gets turned into "webisodes" that can be viewed online and ultimately encourage fans to learn more about LASIK. The real magic of this campaign is in its YouTube-style contest that gets Advanced Medical Optics' laser customers involved in promoting amateur video entries by their patients.

Advanced Medical Optics' second promotional effort is to sponsor a Word of Mouth expert at the 2007 AAO Annual Meeting. The team that runs AMO University (formerly known as Visx U) is hosting the nation's foremost expert on word-of-mouth marketing in New Orleans on November 9. Andy Sernovitz, author of *Word of Mouth Marketing*,¹ will share strategies for encouraging patients to spread the word about their refractive surgery experience (equally applicable to LASIK and IOLs). Registration is available at <http://www.visx.com/amou>.

1. Sernovitz A. *Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking*. Chicago, IL: Kaplan Publishing; 2006.

TAKEAWAY LESSONS

The success stories described herein illustrate several points that can be applied to the refractive surgery experience and the education of potential patients. These concepts are:

1. **Active and immersive.** Both the Wii and Webkinz allow people to escape into an imaginary world. What can you do to help patients better explore the possibilities of independent vision?

2. **Inherently personal.** The Wii allows each user to create a Mii (pronounced *me*) character within the system (that's my own Mii self-portrait at the opening of the article). The Webkinz site's first prompt asks visitors to name their animal. The personalized component of these products enriches the owner's experience. Because vision is inherently personal, what can you do to expand your patients' understanding of their own sight as a means of better engaging them in the process of choosing refractive surgery?

3. **Fun and educational.** The Webkinz site is teaching my kids about earning, saving, and spending money in a way that is fun and relevant to their age and understanding. How can you make the process of learning about vision and the options for refractive surgery more fun for your patients?

4. **Reinforced online.** The Wii and Webkinz products both have Web-based components that further engage consumers and extend their experiences to a

community of fellow participants. When was the last time you updated your practice's Web site to make it more appealing and to communicate what is unique about it?

A DIFFERENCE

You may wonder whether any efforts to make your patients' time in your practice more enjoyable and educational will really improve your bottom line. The short answer is that service-related experiences that are unique and memorable drive word-of-mouth referrals (see *Word-of-Mouth at Work*). In a world that is oversaturated with marketing and gimmickry to attract consumers' attention, the two exemplars noted herein have appealed to consumers because they alter the user's experience in a meaningful way. Focusing on breaking the mold of today's run-of-the-mill clinical experience for your patients will help reinvigorate your practice and polish its reputation. ■

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1. Acohidio B. Wii wins big among casual gamers. *USA Today*/Web site. May 29, 2007. Available at: http://www.usatoday.com/tech/gaming/2007-05-24-wii_n.htm. Accessed July 20, 2007.