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## Comment: What does Chrome OS mean for PC gaming?

Will it invigorate casual gaming and kill off the hardcore?

by Duncan Geere published on 10 July 2009

Picture a future that's a few years away. A future where Chrome OS has been released, has gained some decent market share, and is having an impact on Microsoft. A future where Windows 7 hasn't really taken off and most laptops run Chrome OS and not Windows.

What will that mean for PC gaming? What will Chrome OS be like as a platform? What are the implications of a browser-based computing experience on the world of gaming? If Chrome OS is able to get a foothold in the market, then lots of questions are raised.

First things first, casual games. Figures state that 40% of PC gamers are female, and the majority of those play casual games. You've only got to pop over to [games.yahoo.com](http://games.yahoo.com) to find out that there's a vast market of gamers who won't care one jot about what OS they're using, as long as it supports the relevant plugins for their casual games platform of choice.

In fact, the vast majority of PC gamers probably wouldn't call themselves gamers. They play the odd Flash game when they're bored at work, or if a friend emails it to them with a challenge to beat their high score. That market won't be affected one bit.

But what about the equally important more hardcore chunk of the market? The 11.5 million people (equivalent to the entire population of Greece) who play World of Warcraft. The huge numbers that play Battlefield 1942, Crysis or Call of Duty. They're left hanging by a future where Chrome OS gets a significant chunk of market share.

Already, retail PC games are dying. Go and look



...cont.

in your local HMV - the single PC shelf (between racks of Xbox games) consists of half re-released titles from 5 years ago, the rest being ports of Xbox games, Sims expansions and World of Warcraft.

You could argue that as Windows loses marketshare, developers will stop funding big-budget game titles that require hyperfast machines to run, and go elsewhere. That's sorta already happening - the world of PC games has seen a dramatic reduction in triple-A titles over the last few years, with those going to consoles instead.

In its place, the PC gaming market has exploded with the creativity of indie titles, which - as marketing budgets recede from the equation - are able to gain greater prominence. Those indie games - World of Goo, Darwinia, Braid, etc - have considerably lower system requirements. It wouldn't be tough to port them so they run in a browser.

Already there are a number of relatively complex browser-based games. EA's Battlefield Heroes recently launched, which is a free-to-play game based on micropayments. There's also Quake Live - a recreation of 1999's Quake III Arena. High-profile developers have seen the trend towards cheaper, lower-power machines and want their games playable on any platform.

The piracy factor can't be ignored, either. If you're running a browser-based title, it's almost impossible to pirate because it runs in the "cloud". The PC is the platform where video game piracy is currently most dominant, and shifting to a browser-based setup would kill that dead.

So Chrome OS could be a powerful shot in the arm for gaming on the PC - just not in its current form. The consoles will become the area where big-budget shooters set in grey-brown landscapes and featuring musclebound mercenaries dominate.

Meanwhile, the PC could shift its development cash away from chasing the best graphics and frames-per-second into making browser-based titles that are free to play, are funded by micropayments and sponsorship, and aren't affected by piracy.

Perhaps, if Chrome OS is able to gain significant market share, that'll be its legacy for PC gaming. Or maybe, Chrome OS or not, that's the direction that PC gaming is going in anyway. Whatever happens, it's going to be interesting to find out.