

People often ask where the innovation has gone in the games industry. I have been guilty of it on the past. In fact, this article was going to be titled with that exact question.

However, the more I drafted the piece and the more I thought about it, the more I realised that innovation is still alive and kicking in our industry, albeit sometimes quietly. What is missing now is courage.

When I first really got into games, everything seemed innovative. People were really beginning to understand what games could be. This was back in the Days of the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64.

The industry was still fresh. It had hardware that could really be pushed and it had the foundations laid by the arcades and home consoles like the Atari 2600. These had given the world a new form of entertainment media, one where it seemed that every new game strived to be different from the last. The only way to stand out was to innovate and have the balls to get it published. Of course the game had to be good as well. Again though, these were the days of small development teams working in bedrooms. They were creating games that they were passionate about. They wanted to create things no one had seen before and believed with all their heart they were going to make a great game.

All too soon though, people started to make real money. Large publishing houses, like Ocean, became more and more prominent. Whilst games were still being produced that tried to push the boundaries - to think outside of the box - they became fewer and further between.

It took me a long time to realise what was happening, but it all clicked into place after I had played my umpteenth terrible movie tie in. The trouble was that the games industry was trying to mould itself based on the film industry.

As we head to the present day, this is much easier to see than it was then.

You see, it is all about money. Everyone wants more of it. The more you have, the more you want. In any industry this tends to mean you are less and less willing to take risks if you have found a successful formula or brand.

Take Call of Duty. This started off as a bit of an underdog. A World War II FPS, which was launched into a market that was already having a love affair with Medal of Honor. It took courage to release such a game at that time, but someone somewhere at Activision was convinced it would be a success. Of course, we all know it was.

Activision had found its formula. Call of Duty worked. It made money, it got great reviews and people loved it. So Call of Duty 2 was released. Again, people loved it. Really it was little more than an update to the first game. Better graphics, tighter narrative and more involved multiplayer, but still not greatly different at its core. Just like in the films, sequels became the main stay of the industry.

With games like Call of Duty Modern Warfare, reviewers kept giving good scores and people kept spending millions on the games - so more sequels got made. However, I have to ask. During all of this, how many games didn't make it out of Activision (or any other publisher for that matter) that were stopped by a man in a suit holding a calculator saying that they just couldn't make money off that idea.

Innovation is still there in the big companies. Games like [Heavy Rain](#) and [LA Noire](#) prove that. But they took courage to release. They were not obvious choices for a publisher to make. It paid off though. Both were critically well received and made lots of money.

Another problem is how innovation is viewed. I shudder when I see a press release that tells me of the latest iPhone game that has an innovative control system. Normally that just means it's a bit weird and you probably won't like it. Different for the sake of different is not always a good idea.

That said I did say that about the Wii and Kinect. How wrong was I?

But the point is, innovation does not mean a game is going to be good. I get fed up of seeing publishers complaining that reviewers just didn't get their game. Normally this is because the game was just plain broken at the time it was released to the press. That however, is another blog post. All I will say, next time you see a publisher complain about getting 8s (which I might add is a bloody good score in anything else, A at A-Level, 1st Degree - again another article there) and saying reviewers just didn't get it, check to see if there is a release day patch fixing everything the reviewers didn't like!

Anyway, back to my point here. I am sure there is one. Innovation is there, you just have to look at all the great indie development that is going on. But it is also in the major releases, you just have to look hard for it at times.

When you next get to a point in a game where you just go "wow, that bit was great. I wish they had explored that idea more", just think of this. There was probably a developer or a game designer that originally tried to pitch the idea as a whole game, and a man in suit carrying a calculator said no!

Whilst Innovation may not be Dead, where is the Courage in the Games Industry?

Finally, take a look at the games chart and ponder my thoughts. Count how many games are sequels or spin offs. Especially next weeks - the week after [Modern Warfare 3](#) is launched, see how many in the top 3 or 4 contain the number 3 in the title!

Originally posted on [Yet Another Review Site](#)

Please wait...