

## The Stand-Up Arcade Video Game and Evolution



Stand-up arcade games were an icon of the early 80's. You could not go anywhere without a few meeting you at the entrance of any establishment. Grocery stores would have several lined up at the front, fast food restaurants offered them to all dining patrons, and gas stations became local hang-outs. Arcades were found easily in neighborhood strip malls, hotels created game rooms, restaurants used them as a theme to attract amusement, and airports made room to keep travelers entertained. It was an obsession of the era's pop culture.



I can remember my first stand-up arcade experience. My dad was travelling to Oklahoma for work and we would fly there to visit and/or prepare to move while staying at a hotel. I was about 8 years old, in 1981, exploring the hotel, I found a large room filled with electronic devices and vending machines. One machine called out to me as it's bright yellow encasing engaged me. There was a stick topped with an enticing red round knob. The screen showed abstract graphics of blue and pink, totally foreign to me. Everything was mentally delicious. I slid my first quarter into the slot and it generated an audible computerized acceptance of the coin. I press start, and I heard an [ensemble of electronic music](#) introduce what was about to happen. There was a bright yellow circle with a mouth that I now had complete control of. This was an absolutely amazing feeling and I was hooked. I was more than hooked, I had it bad.

Why did these video games appeal to everybody?

1. It was new, people were having their first electronic interactive experience
2. The games were not niche, they were made simple and appealed to everyone
3. They were just plain fun and didn't require a lot of knowledge to jump in and play

At the same time, the video game became a staple in the common household with consoles such as the Atari 2600. However, due to the greed of the video companies, we began to see quantity vs. quality (and rushed due dates, *jerks*), especially on the home consoles. The games began to lose their luster as people grew tired of spending money on that next great game and coming up short. That, or Bon Jovi was a bigger distraction than I thought.

The arcade machines had its up and downs since then, but mainly became too complex to appeal to the average person and the video game niches began to take hold. Home video games also found a resurgence with Nintendo and Sega in the later 80's, but again lost mass appeal as a "better game" became confused with graphic complexity and added complexity. I always say user experience is about creating the smallest learning curve, but with video games an opposite approach was taken and learning curves were exceeding an hour. Most people simply don't have the patience for that, they want that "casual game".

Casual games are experiencing a resurgence in the mobile space. Games people can simply pick

up and play. It seems the market has found its players again, and that's why Angry Birds became a blinding success over night. Was it wrong to get overly complex with games? No, with Halo 4 topping \$220 million dollars in a single day of sales last month, they are not missing an audience. We just need to recognize the different audiences. And Nintendo has done a fine job of that. I am really digging New Super Mario Bros U.

Tell me about your first video game experience.

-Adam