

## How Call of Duty is ruining gaming

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Call of Duty is easily the most popular video game franchise around. The series has sold over 55 million copies worldwide. The latest instalment, Call of Duty Black Ops, sold 7 million copies in the first 24 hours of its release. There have been seven major Call of Duty games released over the last ten years and almost every single one has received critical praise.

So how can such a critically acclaimed and financially successful game ultimately change the gaming landscape for the worse?

"Activision, the company that publishes the Call of Duty franchise, has churned out a new Call of Duty title every year since the release of Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare, cycling development of each game between Treyarch and the at one point almost employee-less developer Infinity Ward."

Although each subsequent release is slightly different and introduces, new weapons, locations and plot lines, every game's single and multiplayer experience is basically the same - a simulation of an explosion-filled romp through an action movie.

The massive financial success of the franchise has inspired other video game developers to attempt to create their own Call of Duty-esque first person shooter games. Medal of Honor, Battlefield Bad Company and the terrible Sniper Ghost warrior are a few of the first person shooters that have been released since Call of Duty 4 became so successful in 2007.

Although Activision didn't start the industry's current first person shooter frenzy (games like Halo actually did at the beginning of the decade) the company seems intent on stagnating the genre. Little innovation, creativity or any kind of massive change can be found between each release in the franchise.

The games are still fun to play but each one has gotten progressively worse, a mere rehash of its predecessor. Still, each title in the franchise has become increasingly more popular and has, in turn, made ridiculous amounts of money - the formula is clearly working for Activision. But, will it continue to work?

John West and Vince Zampella, co-founder and president of Call of Duty's development studio, Infinity Ward, were fired from the company in 2010 for what Activision called insubordination. The rumour was that they were unsatisfied with the way their multimillion dollar franchise was being managed. There are even unsubstantiated reports that they intentionally sabotaged the development of glitch filled Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2.

Activision began this yearly trend of video game releases with the Guitar Hero franchise, inherently over-exposing the once financially and critically successful brand and running it into the ground with almost twice yearly releases. The company recently announced that they are completely discontinuing the series, signalling the untimely death of the music genre.

With the Call of Duty series, Activision seems intent on leading the franchise to a similar fate. Other companies have followed this trend. The creators of Final Fantasy, Square Enix, have released a barrage of Final Fantasy titles and spinoffs on a yearly basis. This causes gamers to lose interest in the brand. Rushing title after title out the door to turn a greater profit doesn't exactly result in quality games - both Final Fantasy XIII and XIV were terrible games because of this. Call of Duty is slowly going down the same path.

In contrast to Activision's approach, Bungie's Halo series has managed to remain fresh with each release. The franchise has been around almost as long as Call of Duty, but there have been only four major games in the series. Each title has brought a new innovative feature to the first person shooter genre. The first title in the franchise, Halo Combat Evolved, introduced massive environments and vehicles, Halo 2 created an innovative online matchmaking system and the third game, Halo 3, added a slew of new features to the franchise. Some gamers felt that the third title in the franchise was rather underwhelming and far too similar to the first two titles.

Bungie's most recent release, Halo Reach, according to Bungie the final Halo game they will ever develop, managed to reinvigorate the series. The innovative load outs feature and the game's return to simplicity, garnered it critical praise from many hardcore gamers. Activision could learn some valuable lessons from this approach.

First person shooters have defined this decade's video games, just like 2D platforming titles like Super Mario Bros. defined gaming in the '80s and early '90s. With a slew of shooters on the way (Resistance 3, Brink, Killzone 3 and The Darkness II), first person shooters won't disappear any time soon. Gamers will continue to buy Call of Duty games regardless of how similar each title is to the last one in the series.

This strategy may work with casual video gamers but hardcore gamers are already noticing how uninventive the franchise has become - soon casual

fans will too. If Activision continues on this path, the Call of Duty series may run out of steam. Innovation is a key to long-term success in the video game industry.