



## 'Bible Games' instead of 'Grand Theft Auto?'

**Christian video games market Jesus as an alternative to guts and gore**

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BURBANK, Calif. — Transcending the blood and violence found in many popular video games, a small band of believers want to forsake guts and gore for God, trade bloodshed for the Bible.

They are Christian video game developers, like Tom Bean, President and CEO of Digital Praise.

"Some of the games that are out in the mainstream market right now introduce a lot violence, blood, guts and gore," Bean said. "We found there is a need for an alternative, for families to be able to find fun and entertaining games that reinforce positive images."

Digital Praise is one of the leaders in developing Christian-themed video games. Bean and other faith-based gamers say many, if not most of the games on the market now tend to focus on "too much evil and not enough good."

### **Clean, wholesome video games**

Consider Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The game originally had an "M" rating for mature, meaning it was suitable for players 17 and older. But when a gamer discovered how to uncover hidden sex scenes buried in the game, the rating was changed to adults only. Bean says this is exactly the reason why there is a need for clean, wholesome video games.

"It is difficult to find games that are appropriate," Bean said. "And even those that are rated E for everyone may not really be appropriate for children."

Victoria Tolin, for one, wants these kinds of videos. The 11-year-old loves the games, but doesn't like violence.

"I play a lot of Christian video games," Tolin said. "They don't have fights. You just have to follow Jesus and pick up little crosses for points."

Bean and other Christian game developers are looking for more gamers like Victoria. Right now, the market for Christian titles is small. According to Bean, Christian games represent less than one percent of all games that are out there.

"We are trying to change that and make a positive impact and create some alternative for families," Bean said.

### **Creating niche market**

Currently Christian video games are mainly sold in Christian bookstores, mixed among the Christian books and music. Game developers want to change that by breaking into the mainstream market, and that was topic number one at this year's 4th annual Christian Game Developers Conference in Portland, Ore.

Developers from all over the country gathered to share ideas and hand out awards for the best

Christian games of the year.

Insiders, like game producer Kathy Bucklin of Crave Entertainment, said the industry is close to breaking into the mainstream market with the release of Christian titles for popular gaming consoles like the Playstation and Xbox.

"Our game is called the Bible Games and it's coming out on the Game Box advance, Playstation 2 and Xbox," Bucklin said. "It's Bible trivia. The Playstation and Xbox game is a game show. So it's really just understanding Bible trivia and see what you know and hopefully learning a little too."

Bucklin compares the Christian gaming market to the Christian music market. Christian rock has become a powerhouse in the industry, selling roughly 43 million albums in the U.S. last year.

Bucklin is quick to point out that Christian rock was not an overnight top seller.

"Instead of saying Christian music and people going ugg, now it's acceptable and people are a lot more accepting," said Bucklin. "I think Christian video games are going to have the same kind of road to go up."

### **Fun, not Sunday school**

The challenge for Christian game developers is two-fold. First the games must be fun, filled with action and adventure and second the games must be able to visually compete with the popular mainstream games.

"I think for Christian video games to really carve out a piece of the market, the games will have to look like they are truly competitive in terms of quality with the mainstream secular games," explained gaming expert Adam Sessler, who hosts X-Play on G4 TV.

And Christian Game developers hope it won't take a miracle to convince consumers Christian games are more than a Sunday school lesson in the living room.

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