

Media Firms Learn New Game Online

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Conscious that an increasing number of adults are going online to play games and do puzzles, a growing number of traditional media outlets are adding games to their Web sites, hoping to boost traffic and ad dollars.

In the latest example, Hearst Corp., publisher of Cosmopolitan, Esquire, Good Housekeeping and Harper's Bazaar, has struck a two-year deal with an online game developer, Arkadium Inc., to add an array of customized games to its magazine Web sites. Cosmopolitan's site, for instance, is adding a game called "Boy Toy" while Esquire's Web site is expected to add casino-style games, without a gambling component.

Other media companies, such as [CBS Corp.](#), have taken similar steps. Behind the shift is a realization that the stereotype of online gamers -- teenage boys whittling away their nights in front of the glow of a computer screen -- is out of date. Nearly half the people playing online games are aged between 30 and 59, according to Boston-based Forrester Research, and they play everything from mahjong to Sudoku, word games and solitaire. The games appeal to men and women almost equally, Forrester says.

"We don't think of it anymore as two kids in the garage with tattoos listening to [the band] Fall Out Boy," says CBS Interactive President Quincy Smith, who says parlor games appeal to a much broader audience.

Until now, online game players have frequented special gaming sites such as [Yahoo Inc.'s](#) Yahoo! Games, which drew 21 million unique visitors in January, according to comScore Media Metrics. Most media properties, in contrast, offered little in the way of games. One exception was Hearst's teen titles, CosmoGIRL! and Seventeen, which for the past couple of years have offered generic board, arcade and card games. The publisher noticed that these games were drawing between 5% and 10% of the traffic to the sites. With Hearst in the middle of redesigning its Web sites -- many of which had been run until recently by the female-targeted Web concern iVillage -- it decided to add gaming across the board.

"It's a growing source of time for people online. ... Gaming is one of the things you can do in the Web environment that you can't do offline," says Chuck Cordray, vice president and general manager for Hearst Magazines Digital Media.

Arkadium is starting with the teen magazines -- adding games tailored to the specific sites. Seventeen's site, for instance, will have a game called "Editor's Assistant," where users play the role of an assistant to Seventeen's editor in chief and have to complete certain tasks to win. In coming months, the developer will move to Hearst's adult-skewing titles. Cosmopolitan's "Boy Toy" allows players to control a virtual "boy toy" and try to keep his girlfriend satisfied. The game ends when the girlfriend breaks up with her boyfriend or stays in the relationship for one year.

Arkadium hasn't finalized the games for the other titles, but each magazine will add games targeted to its audience. Good Housekeeping -- whose readership has a median age of 50.7 -- might host customized word games popular with that age group, for instance.

Hearst hopes the gaming offers will help boost ad revenue to the sites. One of the new games on CosmoGIRL's site requires players to watch a four-second commercial; one recent ad was for MTV's teen drama "The Hills." Down the road, advertisers also will be able to buy their own games for users to play on the magazines' different sites. CBS, which has sold advertising to [Michelin SA](#), [Philips Electronics NV](#) and [Dell Inc.](#) on its games section, offers the Michelin Man Kicking Challenge game that lets players maneuver the character to kick a goal.

"Overall, Hearst's expansion of our capabilities online is driven primarily by the growth in ad dollars online. We are growing to offer new solutions to advertisers," says Mr. Cordray.

Moving in the same direction is CBS, whose CBS Sportsline Web site already offers 30 games and plans to expand games across all its Web properties in coming months. CBS is also building a gaming group within its CBS Interactive division to focus on developing games for all audiences.

Several TV networks are using games to both lure traffic to their Web sites and promote their TV shows. [Walt Disney Co.](#)'s ABC hosts a game on its Web site for fans of the series "Lost" to find their way off the island, and [General Electric Co.](#)'s NBC lets visitors play blackjack and poker with cards featuring the cast of its show "Las Vegas." [Comcast Corp.](#)'s E! Networks recently launched a game to promote its new series, "Paradise City," about young adults in Las Vegas. In the game "Paradise Spin Slots," players spin a slot machine featuring Paradise City stars. If the player lines up three of the stars in a row, they will "win" gossip about the show.

Media executives hope to lure advertisers who wouldn't normally be interested in online gaming sites. Marketers have hesitated to enter this realm because of the stereotype of the typical gamer, says Suzanne Kolb, executive vice president, marketing and communications for E! Networks. "It is amazing how many female gamers there really are. I'm just not sure they would call themselves gamers," she says. "Now, it's definitely an avenue for advertisers to play in."