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Join the U.S. National Gaming Day @ Your Library

Scott Nicholson

This year, on November 13th, 2010, the American Library Association (ALA) is promoting the third annual National Gaming Day @ Your Library. One purpose of this program is to raise awareness of library gaming and encourage more libraries to try a gaming program. Through marking of the event, both on a national level and through word-of-mouth, many more library users become curious about how libraries are using gaming. In addition, this day allows the ALA to reach out to game companies and get large numbers of game donations for participating libraries.

In 2009, over 1300 libraries signed up to participate in National Gaming Day and over 30,000 people played games in libraries. Both of these numbers are about double the participation numbers in 2008. One of the sponsors of the event is Hasbro, who has donated and shipped about over 50,000 games to every public library across the United States over the last two years. North Star Games has shipped several thousand copies of their excellent party trivia game, *Wits and Wagers*, and other companies are getting involved for 2010.

Other aspects of this event include national video gaming tournaments. The Wii allows players to connect directly over the Internet to compete in library vs. library battles in games like *Mario Kart Wii* and *Super Smash Brothers Brawl*. Eli Neiburger has taken on the challenge of coordinating this national event using a tool created and hosted by the Ann Arbor District Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, called GT System (<http://wiki.gtsystem.org>). Any library can sign up and use GT System for free as a way to coordinate local video game tournaments, and as it is good for any size event, it also works as the coordination tool for these live national tournaments. On National Gaming Day, patrons compete at local libraries to represent their library in the national tournament, and then libraries are paired up through GT System to determine which libraries have the best players. There have also been high-score tournaments for music games like *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Rock Band* where libraries report the top score of the day to see who has the best players.

One of the reasons the program has been successful with the companies is the scope of the marketing and the number of engaged libraries. The ALA can approach the companies with a voice that individual libraries do not have, and can develop a marketing presence and brand for the day that libraries can join in with. In addition, since all of the libraries are getting the same game, the Games and Gaming Members Initiative Group, part of the ALA, has been able to create training videos that teach libraries how to play the game and how to use it in library programs. The result of marketing, free games, and training materials makes it much easier for a library new to gaming to try their first gaming program.

One intriguing progression of National Gaming Day is to turn it into International Gaming Day @ Your Library. There were some libraries outside the U.S. that participated last year, and the tools are in place to allow libraries from other countries to participate this year. While the offers for free games are by companies in the United States, and therefore for U.S. libraries only, the model could hold true for game companies in other countries. Interested libraries can visit the National Gaming Day site at <http://ngd.ala.org/> to register as a participating library. With enough international involvement, it becomes easier to get the attention of other publishers and grow the event worldwide!