



## Brave new world: Video games that teach you to relax

Sure, there were proto-video games developed as early as 1951, but video games didn't reach the average computer user — few as they were — until 1972 with Atari's Pong. Since then, video games have become part of life, transcending language and connecting cultures. They have provided a very powerful way for people to let off steam, cultivate and channel competitiveness, and entertain people cheaply and efficiently at home and in public spaces. Video Gaming is a US\$42B global market which rivals the size of the music market.

Now, technology and the pace of life have given video gaming a whole new charter: Make people's lives better and healthier.

If it seems foolish to suggest that video gaming can provide a path to zen acceptance, stress reduction, and awesome mental performance, then you are stuck in a past stereotype of amped-up teens overworking their joysticks and shouting at the console.

### **Enter the Wii**

The Nintendo Wii is now a household word as well as, for 50 million people, a household reality. It broke through the screen and got people up off their couches and chairs by introducing a new, body movement-based interactivity.

The sweat on the brows of avid gamers used to sitting hunched over a game morphed into all-body sweat of all-age family members using the Wii as a workout tool, indoor fun with a physical dimension. People use the Wii to play golf and tennis, do aerobics or ski, or even play carnival games that require tossing, throwing, hammering and other lower-impact physical gestures — losing weight and becoming more fit.

That is a significant, game-changing (pun intended) transformation for gaming, but it's just the beginning.

### **Gaming with a dedicated health purpose**

Since 2005, the Games for Health Conference has brought together researchers, medical professionals, and game developers to share information about the impact games and game technologies can have on health and health care. They're a pretty wonky group, with a focus on health care policy, but a big

Technology and the  
pace of life have given  
video gaming a whole  
new charter: Make  
people's lives better  
and healthier

part of their mission is to organize and accelerate the adoption of computer games for a variety of challenges facing the world today.

They're not alone! Companies like Wild Divine and Somatic Vision have been pioneering fun and engaging video games that focus on stress reduction as a primary health objective in today's world.

Wild Divine has partnered with prominent natural health and stress-busting gurus Andrew Weil and Deepak Chopra to provide a platform for guided meditation and stress reduction that uses physiological measurements — heart rate coherence and skin-sweat — collected by finger sensors and delivered into the video game environment to enable users to control the gameplay with their own minds.

And Somatic Vision has on its team a leading expert in biofeedback who has worked with global clients creating programs and approaches that reduce stress but also enhance mental clarity under pressure. Having worked with the French Ministry of Defense and the Israeli Defense Department, Yuval Oded has helped shape software that is effective in making audio-visual games and workshops complete with a virtual coach — that are specifically targeted to high-pressure executives, veterans, harried working parents and children facing change and uncertainty.

Somatic Vision's newest offering, *Alive*, includes Oded's 8-Week Program of on- and offscreen techniques for stress control that extend the gaming benefits beyond the computer — another wave of the future in gaming.

### **Purposeless vs. purposeful gaming**

With video gaming being a familiar and cherished part of life for so many, it makes sense that the cutting edge in the space is to replace purposeless gaming with gaming that helps us easily address issues and problems in our lives. Widespread obesity, stress, sleep disruption, and a growing reliance on pharmaceuticals, as well as increasing expectations of effective multi-tasking, have made it "a natural" for gaming to embrace purposefulness and give people ways to improve their health and ability to face complex mental challenges. Watch gaming move into brave a brave new world of physiology-based health and performance enhancement!

Engaging games and  
video environments  
focus on stress  
reduction as a primary  
health objective