

Staying in the

game!

JOHN BECK

is the President of the North Star Leadership Group, a management consulting firm, and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Southern California's Annenberg Center for the Digital Future, a policy and research center devoted to studying new communication technology and its impact on individuals, communities and societies around the globe. He graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in East Asian studies and sociology from Harvard University, where he also earned his doctorate in organizational behavior. In addition to the Gamer generation, his research focuses on global leadership, e-commerce, media and entertainment, strategy development, group psychology and the impact of the Internet.

Beck stumbled across the importance of video games and the Gamer generation while working on his book *The Attention Economy*, where he discovered that Web sites with a game component capture and hold people's attention better than any other.

After a survey of more than 2,000 professionals and hundreds of interviews, he is convinced that video games are not an insignificant pastime played by spike-haired nerds but a

generation-shaping activity that, over time, will reshape behavior patterns, beliefs, arts, business, institutions—the entire culture. His book, *Got Game*, which he co-authored with colleague Mitchell Wade, explains the impact the Gamer generation will have on society.

Consultant and author Marc Prensky, who has written *Digital Game-Based Learning*, agrees that video games are changing the rules. "Today's average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games. Today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors."

Hollywood directors have noticed the impact of games as well and are giving them star treatment. To attract the gamer generation to the movies, video game characters are finding their way into movies, such as Lara Croft appearing in *Tomb Raider*.

How to create environments for Boomers and Gamers in your library

In the next five years, Gamers will be the dominant demographic for your libraries. Nonetheless, you don't want to do anything that will offend or chase Boomers from the stacks.

The key to securing and retaining these growing segments is giving each one what it wants. To serve and attract both Gamers and Boomers, Beck suggests:

Create zones in your library

Gamers are technologically savvy and can take in multiple streams of information while they socialize. They multitask! They need a space with all kinds of simultaneous activities—music, television, video streaming, computers. They thrive on all of the commotion. The Boomer zone should be much quieter. They need technology and service but not the noise.

Expand your AV collection

For Boomers, that means movie DVDs and audiobooks, as well as the traditional books, magazines, newspapers, videotapes, books-on-tape, CDs—the “staples” of your collection. Start adding video games and their strategy guides—the Gamers' cheat sheets—to the mix to get Gamers in the library more often.

Know each culture Can you “power up” or “level out?” That's common video game lexicon. Are you up to speed on the hottest new game? Try a few games to see what they are like and why they are so compelling. How well-versed are you on the latest trends in health care and financial planning? Those are common Boomer interests. Research and study both of these generations. Know their interests and characteristics.

Go global You can feed that global curiosity of both generations with information from your print collection that helps them understand the world. Most of the high quality international resources in your collection are not digitized, so users can't get them from the Internet.

Be a guide Leaders and bosses are not to be trusted is what Gamers learn while playing video games. Boomers also have a healthy distrust for authority. Position yourself as strategy guides and not gatekeepers to help Gamers and Boomers win, something that's important to both.

Personalize your Web site

This is very important to the Gamer generation but also will serve Boomers well. Update your site often; Gamers are drawn to constant change. A search experience at your digital library that's as exciting and as personal as the experience in video games will attract them. In addition, Boomers also are becoming accustomed to personalized online services due to their experiences with search engines and Amazon. Create an area for Boomers with topics that

interest them. Develop interactive capabilities to allow Boomers to connect with each other.

Be attentive This is easy for librarians, where service and open access are part of their core values and everyday practice. Gamers and Boomers both demand attention. Don't hide behind the reference desk. Take a retail approach. Proactively approach Gamers. Ask if you can offer them materials to supplement what they are using or reading. For Boomers, show them the range of electronic resources you have that can complement their needs.

