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## Game Styles, Innovation, and New Audiences: An Historical View

[DiGRA 2005: Changing Views: Worlds in Play, 2005 International Conference](#)**Author:**[Costikyan, Greg](#)**Date created:**

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**Abstract:**

Any observer of games will note that they tend to cluster into recognized styles: the first-person shooter (FPS), the real-time strategy game (RTS), the mass multiplayer online game (MMOG), and the platformer. A priori, the natural assumption is that these are similar to the sorts of genres with which we are familiar in other media: science fiction, the film musical, and so on. Yet game styles are defined by their play, rather than thematic elements; perhaps they should be viewed as quite different from conventional notions of genre. Conventionally, genres are viewed as arising from conditions that make certain themes compelling to contemporaries. This pattern of game styles, by contrast, arise from the invention of a particular game mechanic, and that when a game which introduces a new play style that is compelling is introduced, it quickly spawns a whole category of games that modify the original mechanics. In other words, game design advances by the introduction of new game styles, followed by slow evolutionary changes in play. Indeed, this pattern can be viewed again and again from the earliest history of games. Examples include positional games with differentiated pieces (a category that includes the ancient Indian game of Shaturanga, and including Chess, Shogi, and Stratego); board games (deriving from the Royal Game of Ur, and including the Roman Tabula and modern Backgammon); track games (deriving from The Royal Game of Go, and including most of the popular commercial boardgames of the late 18th and 19th centuries); the board wargame (deriving from Roberts's Tactics); the tabletop role-playing game (& Arneson's D&D); the trading card game (TCG) (Garfield's Magic); the FPS (Wolfenstein); the RTS (Westwood's Dune 2); the MMO (from Bartle's

MUD); etc. The fact that the pattern recurs over the entire history of games; this is no mere epiphenomenon of the current industry, but something fundamental to games: unlike other media, particular aspects of gameplay, rather than the content, are what players find important and compelling. Moreover, since the advent of commercial games (in the mid-18th century, possibly with the publication of *Journey Through Europe* in 1759), the discovery of a successful game style has been linked to a commercial boom and an expanded audience. Consequently, we argue that however difficult the development of a whole new game style may be, in comparison to development of games of well-understood types, long term success is more likely to be achieved by striving for innovation.

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