

Patricia Vance, President - ESRB, takes "Her Turn" in GameDaily on April 19, 2004 to provide a summary of the ESRB and the steps taken to inform parents and others about the rating system and working with retail and media partners.

The ESRB was launched in 1994 with one central mission: to provide consumers with the information they need to make informed computer and video game purchase decisions. When creating the rating system, ESRB founders worked closely with a broad spectrum of child development, academic and other experts and conducted extensive consumer research to determine what would be most useful and informative. What they heard repeatedly was that parents wanted both an age-based rating system and, equally if not more importantly, they wanted objective and detailed information about what's in the game. Having this kind of detail empowers parents to make informed purchase decisions, based on their personal preferences and expertise as a parent of their own child's readiness for different kinds of game content. Based on this feedback, ESRB created the first entertainment rating system with two equally important parts: rating symbols, which provide general guidance for age appropriateness and content descriptors, short, standardized phrases that provide insight into why a game received a particular rating and may be of interest or concern.

Although the rating system has received high praise from a wide range of constituents, including U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) who called the ESRB system an "industry model" and the "best entertainment rating system in existence, we must work harder to raise consumer awareness and use of the rating system, by parents in particular, and encourage its enforcement at the point-of-sale.

There are two challenges that we face in succeeding on either front. First, we must ensure that parents not just know about the rating system, but they know how both parts work, and where to find the ratings information on game packaging. The second challenge is getting retailers to educate and remind parents at the store-level through the display of ratings signage, sales associate training, and enforcement of store policy.

With these challenges in mind, we launched the *Ok To Play? – Check The Ratings* campaign last fall. To date, support of the campaign has exceeded all expectations. For example, media partners from consumer and game enthusiast magazines have been running our PSA ads, TV networks and local affiliate stations have aired our PSA spots, industry partners and others placed our PSA banner ads and ratings information on their sites. Since last fall, the *Ok To Play?* campaign has generated more than 565 million gross consumer impressions from media vehicles that, by in-large, reach parents.

A key objective of the campaign is to work with both large and small retail organizations. Early on, we recognized that distributing ratings posters and brochures wasn't going to be good enough. Instead, we created partnerships with all of the major retailers and identified opportunities to integrate the *Ok To Play?* campaign into their existing signage and displays. We also provided training information for sales associates and identified other marketing channels that retailers can use to communicate ratings information to their customers. The initial results are encouraging. For example, 85% of the top

retailers including Best Buy, EB Games, CompUSA, GameStop, Trans World – FYE and other retailers re-launched their ratings education program in November '03 while Toys R Us, Wal-Mart and others will re-launch their programs this year, all using elements of the *Ok To Play?* campaign. A significant step forward in enforcement of the rating system occurred in December 2003, when the major retailers, in conjunction with the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association, announced that they will implement a carding and identification check process for the sale of games that carry an M – Mature rating this year.

While this shows excellent initial progress, we must also recognize that these efforts can't and won't stop anytime soon. Parents need to understand the importance of making informed purchase decisions and take responsibility for bringing home appropriate games for their families. And retailers must accept their pivotal role through their daily interaction with parents and children in enforcing their store policies of not selling M-rated games to minors and educating their customers about the rating system. When publishers, retailers, and parents each do their part to make sure that kids are playing the games that are right for them, we'll all be winners.