

Testimony of Randolph Walker
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Dickerson Monitoring bill, HB 2595
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Good morning. My name is Randolph Walker and I am the Director of Marketing for the Entertainment Software Rating Board. I want to thank you for providing the opportunity to offer testimony regarding the Monitoring bill.

I joined the ESRB in May 2003 and am excited to be part of the organization for two reasons. First, I am the proud parent of two sons who play video games and I discovered as a parent and consumer how effective the rating system is, and second, I've devoted my career to retail marketing. I worked for 11 years in the marketing organization at a nationally recognized athletic footwear retailer and another 4 years at a TV-retail network. I understand how to work with retailers and implement successful marketing programs.

As many of you know, the ESRB's mission is to provide parents and consumers with the information they need to make informed computer and video game purchase decisions. As part of our commitment to achieve this goal, we launched a multi-channel consumer marketing campaign featuring the slogan "Ok To Play?". The campaign launched in the fall of last year and it encourages parents to use both components of the rating system: rating symbols that suggest age appropriateness and content descriptors that indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating and may be of interest or concern.

Before reporting to you on the campaign's progress, it is important to note that past research has shown that real-world incidence of minors buying video games is relatively infrequent. A September 2000 FTC report found that parents are involved in the sale or rental of games 83% of the time. The ESA has found in similar research that parents are involved 92% of the time. This underscores the importance of reaching out to parents to increase awareness of the rating system as the first and potentially most impactful means of making sure that appropriate games are being purchased for and played by children.

To date, we've been very encouraged by the enthusiastic support of the Ok To Play? campaign from retail, media and other partners. Early on in the development of this campaign, we realized how critical retailers could be in terms of getting our message out to consumers of computer and video games. But it was not good enough to utilize brochures and posters as the key in-store communication vehicles, as we had in the past. Instead our new communication strategy focuses on 3 key elements:

1. Getting the OK to Play? campaign integrated into display point of sale signage,
2. Providing training for sales associates so that they understand the rating system and how to enforce their store policy and,
3. Identifying other effective promotional opportunities retailers utilize to communicate with their customers.

Working with the IEMA and VSDA, we identified the top retail accounts that generate 80% of all sales of computer and video games. Then, we created individual retail accounts and customized programs based on these retailers' specific requirements. This means that retail organizations are now able to:

- Display ratings education and store policy enforcement signage that are designed for their fixtures,

- Include what we call “ratings legends” in their Sunday newspaper inserts,
- Create online links on their websites to our “Ratings Definition Page,” and
- Leverage other opportunities that are unique to their store environment to provide information about the rating system to parents

To date, 85% (12 out of 14) of the top retail chains that rent or sell video games in the United States have or will re-launch by the spring of this year their ratings education and store policy enforcement programs based on our new model.

Beyond the retail partnership program just described, the ESRB has been working hard to get broader media placement for its campaign to raise consumer awareness and use of the rating system. For example:

- Our new print ad has been published in magazines reaching parents like TV Guide, Entertainment Weekly, Redbook, Ladies Home Journal and others with a combined readership of nearly 15 million. Virtually all-game enthusiast publications have also published our PSA ad.
- Our 30-second TV spots featuring Tiger Woods and Derek Jeter were aired on TV stations around the country, including three in Seattle – KSTW, KTWB, and KCTS. We also secured national exposure on ABC-TV, Biography, Cartoon Network and others.
- Ok To Play? banner ads have begun appearing on numerous retailer and publisher websites, providing a link back to our website, ESRB.org, which in 2003 hosted nearly 5.8 million visitors and performed 1.7 million searches for game ratings.
- Our holiday media tour this past December, featuring interviews with Patricia Vance, President of the ESRB, on

national and local TV, radio and print outlets, reached an additional 20 million consumers.

As you can see, ESRB is making extensive efforts in support of its mission to provide accurate and useful information about the content of computer and video games so that consumers can make educated purchase decisions. And these efforts go far beyond ensuring that ratings information is prominently positioned on game packaging and in all game advertising. With the help of the IEMA and VSDA, we will continue to forge partnerships with retailers and media outlets to help raise awareness of the rating system, with particular focus on getting parents to use the tools that ESRB provides.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our efforts and activities.