

eFootball fiasco symptom of growing rush to bring out games

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Konami's eFootball 2022 has received scathing reviews from gamers.

The scathing reviews of the "grotesque" eFootball 2022 and its "horrible" graphics are a potent illustration of the risks posed by increasing pressure to rush video games to market, experts say.

The latest edition of the game previously known as Pro Evolution Soccer was meant to offer something to compete with undisputed football game champion FIFA, with maker Konami opting for a free-to-play model to attract fans.

But the release was almost universally panned, with just a 10 percent positive rating on game platform Steam days after its release.

With players crying foul, Japanese gaming giant Konami last week apologised and promised to take the criticism into account as it updated eFootball.

It was all too reminiscent of the outcry that followed the disastrous launch of Cyberpunk 2077, which was riddled with bugs and was withdrawn from Sony's PlayStation store just a week after its release.

"This kind of thing is becoming more prevalent, sadly," said Mia Consalvo, Canada research chair in games studies at Concordia University.

Part of the issue is simply the increasing sophistication of video games, "leading to many more chances for bugs to emerge", she told AFP.

"Some can be really difficult to fix, while others may not appear unless certain conditions are met and possibly were missed in official game testing."

Developers and publishers face increasing financial pressure to get games out "so they can start generating revenue, particularly if they have already been in development for several years", Consalvo said.

That pressure may have been especially acute for a free title such as eFootball, which relies on in-game purchases including upgraded strips

for revenue.

Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto is said to have declared that "a delayed game is eventually good, but a rushed game is forever bad", but experts say that maxim may no longer hold.

"Since the appearance of hard drives on consoles, it's become possible to 'repair a game'. You can do patches, you can make important changes," said Daniel Andreyev, an author and journalist specialising in video games.

'You can only launch once'

That has created an environment where developers and publishers know they can go back in and fix problems after release—a risky gamble.

"Sometimes, they cut corners to finish on time and hope nobody will notice the flaws, but occasionally, they miss badly," said Michael Pachter, an analyst at Wedbush.

"It's likely that all games are rushed out, but only a handful are flawed enough to trigger controversy."

That's what has happened with eFootball and Cyberpunk 2077, said Serkan Toto, an analyst at Kantan Games in Tokyo.

"These games were brought to market broken beyond repair, with management totally ignoring the production side, which of course always knows if their titles are not ready for release yet," he told AFP.

Putting out a buggy game is a risky move, particularly at a time when fans have more avenues than ever to vent their discontent.

"You can only launch every game once, and you need to nail that," added Toto.

"If not, everything after that is pure damage control, which costs nerves, money and resources."

And while pre-orders aren't affected by post-release griping, there can be a reputational effect that impacts future business, Consalvo said.

That's what happened with WWE 2K20, which was released in 2019 and is among the 100 worst-rated games on Steam, with eFootball currently at the bottom.

The reception was so bad that the game's publisher decided not to bring out another version the following year.

But a buggy launch is not always a death knell for a game.

Cyberpunk 2077 returned to the PlayStation store six months after its debut and now has mostly positive reviews on Steam.

And survival and space exploration [game](#) No Man's Sky, which was missing promised features such as multi-player mode at its launch, has gone on to surpass initial expectations with a significant community of players and mostly positive reviews.

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