

Grand Theft Auto: built for the long haul

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Rockstar Games has steered clear of 'loot boxes' in Grand Theft Auto online play, instead letting users spend money on digital content or personalization that they could earn through gameplay.

In a video game industry known for cranking out sequels, Rockstar Games has cashed in big by making "Grand Theft Auto" fans painfully wait for their next fix of the shoot 'em up blockbuster.

It has been a decade since GTA V hit the streets and Rockstar's earlier-than-expected release of the first trailer of the game's sequel sent fans into an ecstatic online frenzy.

Awaiting the 90-second video, a member of a Reddit forum devoted to the game posted a modified photo of Pope Francis reverentially holding up Rockstar's trailer message.

"It feels like I don't deserve to witness such a monumental moment," wrote another of the Reddit forum's 193,000 members.

Still, according to the trailer, they will have to wait until 2025 before living out the gangster life in the game's fictional Vice City.

Rockstar fuels player fervor by keeping quiet on everything about an upcoming game's progress as well as staying mute on details like setting, characters or features.

The company also has a history of letting the creative development of the game dictate when it is released, rather than promising a specific date that teams have to scramble to make.

"They've never announced a date for their games, which also saves them from eventually having to reschedule them" if development doesn't progress as planned, Moody's Investors Services vice president Neil Begley said of Rockstar.

"They have this freedom, and it makes sense to avoid damaging the brand," he added.

Installments of GTA and Rockstar's Read Dead Redemption are among the best-selling games of all time, bringing in billions of dollars.

Rockstar parent Take-Two Interactive reports having sold nearly 79 million copies of Red Dead Redemption and more than 400 million copies of GTA over the lives of the franchises.

More than 190 million copies of GTA V have sold worldwide since its release in late 2013, a sales volume second only to Minecraft.

Part of the success is that both franchises are set in open worlds where players can adventure as they please rather than having to follow scripted storylines.

"There's always something to discover, something strange or interesting to interact with," said Rockstar North studio head Aaron Garbut.

"It's not a huge empty world; we think about the positioning of every single tree."

Some analysts expect GTA VI to use [artificial intelligence](#) to make "non-player characters" more realistic and interactive, something that seemed possible given the improved graphics seen in the trailer.

Multiplayer magnetism

A turning point in keeping players loyal to Rockstar games has been an online multiplayer option that lets people cavort together in virtual worlds.

Online play is free with the purchase of a game, and Rockstar continually adds missions and more.

"There is a lot going on between launches, a lot of downloadable content; things that renew the game on a regular basis," Begley said of GTA.

Players can also spend money to personalize in-game content, like a snazzy car.

In GTA, players know exactly what they are buying as opposed to games in which players take a chance to buy "loot boxes," only finding out what is inside after opening them.

"They've stayed away from [loot boxes](#), which is probably a smart thing to do," said IDC research director of gaming Lewis Ward.

"Once you get towards something that approaches gambling, there are a lot of laws that come into play."

GTA V has brought in more than \$8.5 billion since its release, according to earnings results posted by Take-Two.

The updates are credited with bringing in \$500 million in revenue annually, according to data published as part of a lawsuit filed by a former Rockstar executive disputing royalty payments.

ActivePlayer.io estimates that nearly 22 million people monthly tap into GTA Online servers.

And most of the money spent in the game is profit for Take-Two given their low cost to produce digital loot.

In the end, everyone "can get the same goods over time—it is just a case of earning it through hard work or purchasing it," Wedbush video [game](#) analyst Nick McKay told AFP.

"One of the Golden Rules in gaming is you don't separate the haves and have-nots."

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