

Microsoft's World of Warcraft development workers are unionizing

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Gamers test out computer games at the Gamescom in Cologne, Germany, on Aug. 22, 2017. More than 500 workers behind the popular video game franchisee “World of Warcraft” are joining the Communications Workers of America, the union announced Wednesday, July 24, 2024. Microsoft subsidiary Blizzard Entertainment, World of Warcraft's publisher, has recognized the union. Credit: Oliver Berg/DPA via AP, File

More than 500 workers behind the popular video game franchisee "World of Warcraft" are unionizing.

The game's development team employees—which include designers, engineers, artists, quality assurance testers and more—are joining the Communications Workers of America, the union announced Wednesday. CWA says Microsoft subsidiary Blizzard Entertainment, World of Warcraft's publisher, has recognized the union.

The World of Warcraft Game Makers Guild—CWA Union is the first wall-to-wall union seen at Activision Blizzard and the largest of this kind at a Microsoft-owned studio to date, according to CWA. It also builds on an expansion of organized labor seen among Microsoft video game workers since the tech giant's \$69 billion purchase of Activision Blizzard last year.

Gaming workers have been able to organize thanks to a "labor neutrality" agreement that took effect with the acquisition. In an unusual arrangement for the industry to help address concerns about the merger made back in 2022, Microsoft pledged to stay neutral if Activision Blizzard workers in the U.S. and Canada seek to organize into a labor union.

With Wednesday's World of Warcraft news, alongside other recent organizing efforts, CWA says more than 1,750 video game workers at Microsoft now have representation with the union.

"What we've accomplished at World of Warcraft is just the beginning," Eric Lanham, a World of Warcraft test analyst and member of the newly-formed guild said in a statement—noting that the next step is a strong contract. "We know that when workers have a protected voice, it's a win-win for employee standards, the studio, and World of Warcraft fans looking for the best gaming experience."

Tom Smith, senior director of organizing at CWA, added that Wednesday's news "marks a key inflection point" in the broader industrywide efforts to organize video game workers.

Also on Wednesday, CWA announced that a group of 60 quality assurance workers at Blizzard Entertainment in Austin, Texas, also joined the union and were recognized by Microsoft. These quality assurance workers—who work on franchisees like Diablo and Hearthstone—and World of Warcraft's development employees both had their unions confirmed by a neutral arbitrator after a majority signed authorization cards or cast support through an online portal, CWA said.

In a statement to The Associated Press Thursday, a spokesperson for Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft said the company continues "to support our employees' right to choose how they are represented in the workplace" and will negotiate with the CWA in good faith to work towards a collective bargaining agreement.

The World of Warcraft workers' [union](#) representation marks a "[significant milestone](#)" in a journey that dates back to a 2021 employee walkout at Activision Blizzard's headquarters, CWA noted Wednesday. That protest was in response to a sweeping sexual harassment and discrimination lawsuit brought forth by California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing, which was settled following the Microsoft acquisition last year.

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