

Video game titans earnings climb as people play at home

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US video game titans Activision and Electronic Arts on Tuesday reported strong earnings as people staying home due to the coronavirus pandemic turn to games such as "Call of Duty."

Activision said an average of 102 million people played its games online per month in the first quarter of this year, with "Call of Duty: Warzone" racking up more than 60 million players since its launch in March.

"Our goal to connect the world through epic entertainment is more important to our players than ever before," Activision Blizzard chief executive Bobby Kotick said in an earnings release.

"In the face of so many difficulties, our employees have made certain that the joy, the engagement, and the benefits of gaming remain an effective way to help keep our 400 million players around the world connected and safe."

Play of "Overwatch" and "World of Warcraft"

continued to climb, and the popular color-matching smartphone game "Candy Crush" held firm as the top-grossing franchise in US mobile app stores, according to Activision.

Activision reported profit of \$505 million on revenue of \$1.8 billion in the quarter.

Electronic Arts reported that its net income doubled to \$418 million on revenue that grew to \$1.4 billion in the first three months of this year.

The latest installment in the popular "FIFA" soccer [video game](#) franchise boasted more than 25 million players, and the "Madden NFL 20" title—devoted to US pro football—saw the highest online engagement numbers in franchise history.

A freshly released "Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order" title boasted more than 10 million users.

"We're humbled to see people around the world connecting through our games during this unprecedented period," EA chief executive Andrew Wilson said in an earnings release.

Uncharted terrain

California-based EA warned, however, that the full effect of the crisis on its business remained tough to predict.

People without jobs might have time for play, but might be more interested in finding work or saving money. Working remotely could take a toll on game company productivity.

Meanwhile, new players might stick with video games after restrictions on movement lift.

Activision Blizzard shares climbed some five percent in after-market trades, while EA shares slid by about four percent as investors toyed with how they might navigate the uncharted terrain.

Spending in the US on [video game hardware](#), software, accessories and game cards in March totaled \$1.6 billion, up 35 percent from the same month last year, according to industry tracker NPD.

NPD said that freshly-launched "Animal Crossing: New Horizons" from Nintendo was the top selling game in the US in March, making a stellar debut during the pandemic.

"Call of Duty: Modern Warfare" was the second best-selling game in March, and the top selling video game in the US to date, according to NPD.

Nintendo Switch hardware sales more than doubled when compared to a year ago, while PlayStation 4 and Xbox One console sales each grew by more than 25 percent, NPD reported. © 2020 AFP

Cloud play

Spending on digital video games globally hit a record high \$10 billion in March, according to market tracker SuperData.

"Individuals are turning to games as a reliable entertainment option during the COVID-19 crisis and are using online multiplayer to keep in touch with others," SuperData said in a blog post.

Spending rose 15 percent on mobile games, a lot of them played on smartphones, reaching \$5.7 billion in March, SuperData reported.

Among other leading titles, "Pokemon Go" saw revenue for the mobile game grow 18 percent in March after maker Niantic modified features to make it easier to play without needing to be out and about, according to SuperData.

New-generation Xbox and PlayStation consoles along with games tailored for the hardware are to launch by the end of this year.

Consoles face a potential threat from the advent of cloud gaming, however.

Google early this month made its Stadia online [video game](#) service free to provide an escape for those hunkered down at home because of the

coronavirus pandemic.

Launched late last year, Stadia is crafted to let people access console-quality games as easily as they do email on an array of internet-linked devices.

"Keeping social distance is vital, but staying home for long periods can be difficult and feel isolating," Stadia vice president Phil Harrison said in an online post.

"Video games can be a valuable way to socialize with friends and family when you're stuck at home."

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