

DLC In The Video Game Industry

DLC in the gaming community and the industry as a whole is at a crossroads. With poor reception to expensive DLC adding what the players consider to be an insufficient amount of content for the price and that the developer and publishers are greedy in what they expect their players to pay for minimal effort. The opposite side of the pendulum is that a developer and publisher such as CD PROJEKT RED going out of their way not to put paid DLC in single-player games. This is a stance held by CDPR and is said in an article by MSN in which Nielubowicz says quote "We do not see a place for microtransactions in the case of single-player games,". This would come with the caveat that was added afterward about multiplayer/live service games, "But we do not rule out that we will use this solution in the future in the case of multiplayer projects." This is a normal stance held by the publishers in the game industry as they see multiplayer games as a long-lasting source of income, with the player counts generally staying higher for multiplayer games over time. The question is this, what is the state of DLC in the industry and more importantly, is the fan reaction to DLC changing anything or impacting how much profit that these DLC make for the developers and publishers of the game and what are those fan reactions like for the most part.

So before we dive deeper into DLC and its impact on the game industry we need to ask the question, *what is DLC?* Well, starting off DLC is at its most basic form exactly as the name implies, **Downloadable Content** which can be installed alongside the game to add more content into the game after launch or even at launch. Now this used to be pretty cut and dry in what was expected of DLC which was generally free or inexpensive content that would add on to the experience and that Expansions would be the more expensive additions to the game that would

cost more but give an incredible amount of content that the game is better with than without. This was the case at least with most games with DLC having it at launch and with a paywall with the DLC almost being crucial at times in order to truly enjoy the game. This is most prevalent with the disasters in DLC and microtransactions such as Star Wars Battlefront 2 (the EA one) and the release of Fallout 76 a few years ago. Now I think I should explain why Battlefront 2's were so bad. You could pay to unlock a character and get to play who you want or you could grind to get said character in the game. Now the problem with how EA did it was that it took literal days to unlock a character, somewhere around 40 hours to unlock one character. But what if you want to pay to get all the content or grind for it? A ScreenRant article says, "It has been discovered it would take 4,528 hours of play to unlock all the content in the game or 2,100 dollars (on top of the purchase of the game)." This was, to put it lightly, not taken well by the gaming community, with the funniest reaction at least to me being a post by a Reddit user named xiofar with the post saying "You can literally run a 5k before unlocking the main character in the game." The response that was given by EA to the situation would go on to become the most downvoted post in Reddit history and would eventually lead to EA conceding after a while to making the grind for the characters easier and the costs of acquiring cheaper and eventually making every character unlocked for everyone near the end of the games run.

Fallout 76 had a similar reaction to Microtransactions in the game though that was compiled on top of the, to put it lightly, the worst release of a game maybe ever recorded. With issues making the game unplayable and the response to the game's unplayable state being awful at best. Now what does this have to do with Microtransactions? In an amazing video done by the Internet Historian it says ([9:16](#)), "But to Bethesda, it's worth selling the thing at a price close to \$0,

because it brings people into the Atomic Shop (which is where the real margins are), and it inflates the poor sales figures.” What is the Atomic Shop? It is where all of the game's microtransactions are done and if you want anything that can't simply be found in the game, you have to come and buy it here. Now this wouldn't have been an issue if the prices hadn't been ludicrous and they hadn't just taken assets straight from Fallout 4 and put them in there and then sold it to you for \$10. There were a lot of problems with Fallout 76 and definitely more than just microtransactions, but when you're game barely works at launch and there are already hundreds of microtransactions you are bound to wound up a player base that is already ready to pounce on your for every single mistake you make. This isn't to say you can't have microtransactions in a game, just look at Fortnite for an example of a game having microtransactions and no one really cares. Because the game works, and the content is original mostly and is purely cosmetic, and changes nothing about gameplay. The game is also Free-to-play, which usually means players have an easier time accepting microtransactions. So what is the complete opposite end of the pendulum that is DLC and who has done it “best” in the industry?

Well, let's take an example of a recently developed, and released game by none other than the earlier mentioned CD PROJEKT RED, who had their own catastrophe of a game launch with Cyberpunk 2077. A game that, to put it lightly, was completely unplayable at launch and had so many issues that CDPR came out and said anyone who wished to have a refund would get one, no matter how long or how much they played the game, it was that bad. Now a lot of game developers and producers wouldn't have allowed that even if it is the right choice from a PR perspective. But what about the DLC for Cyberpunk, how was the DLC managed for this game? The amount of free content in Cyberpunk is astonishing but before that, they had to fix the game,

which they spent two years doing so, then they released as much free content as possible to give the players new things to do and use in-game which is great for players and also slowly built the reputation of CDPR back up. Then they announced a special project that was in the works, a Cyberpunk 2077 anime called *Cyberpunk Edgerunners* that was being released and this exploded, IGN's Matt Kim had this to say in an article about Cyberpunk Edgerunners, "Cyberpunk: Edgerunners doesn't overtake Cyberpunk 2077 so much as it expands upon it. But for the best version of Night City this side of the 21st century, consider diving into Studio Trigger's madcap vision of the famous tabletop RPG. It's a wild ride, but worth every blistering second, choom." I know I'm talking a lot about everything surrounding the game but why? Because after the PR disaster that was the release of Cyberpunk, they had to spend a long time rebuilding their reputation, instead of dumping paid DLC like a lot of the former companies talked about they decided to fix the game and rebuild the image it and the studio had. Then they announced their one and only expansion to Cyberpunk 2077. Phantom Liberty, a \$30 expansion that not only added an entire sub-story that was hours and hours long but also a complete overhaul of the systems that governed the game and was almost a complete change in how the game felt with upgrades and new content added across the board. Do you know what the best part about this DLC is? It's that all of the game changes and some of the content added was an update not added by the expansion. So if you didn't buy or can't buy Phantom Liberty for some reason you aren't just out of luck. Ted Litchfield from PCGAMER said, "Still, I'm extremely pleased with Phantom Liberty—CD Projekt can hang with the big dogs when it comes to cinematic storytelling, with a quality of writing and worldbuilding that I prefer to the likes of Sony's vaunted first party lineup." This is suffice to say a pretty highly rated expansion amongst more than just PCGAMER and is one of the best-received expansions ever released and you

know what? They didn't need a million micro-transactions to make it possible, instead, they committed to making players experience the most important part of the game they were making rather than just another way to bring in cash for the shareholder's pockets.

So what is the conclusion about DLC in the game industry? Well it's tough to simply say this way is better, some games do microtransactions well such as Fortnite where they don't really make anything that becomes a need-to-buy DLC or microtransaction, it is all cosmetic. On the other hand, you have games like Fallout 76 and what feels like anything EA touches having an extremely predatory practice with microtransactions and almost forcing the player into spending more money after they have already bought the game in order to get everything they want. Devs like CD PROJEKT RED aren't common in the industry in having a DLC practice that isn't predatory towards the player base that they serve. Games like Witcher 3 and Cyberpunk both made by CDPR have really been shining examples of what good DLC practices and good community relations can bring you and in both cases, it has brought not only amazing PR but with it came all the revenue for the expansions added to those games because the community actually wanted to buy those games and would pay the prices they demand because they know what they are getting is quality and if it isn't they aren't just going to be hit with an "oh well we tried" CDPR will back their backs to make their games good and the community around the game and the industry as a whole really appreciate that. Another good example is pretty much anything FromSoftware touches, only DLC is expansions that are close to the original game's length. Say what you want about the work conditions there and there is criticism to be made but they care and at the end of the day, I think that is what the gaming community really wants.

Citations:

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