Is PC gaming dying? No, and here's why

There was a time when PC gaming meant little more than World of Warcraft and Microsoft Solitaire as developers steered towards the booming console market. However, as technology advanced, internet speeds increased and custom PC builds became more accessible, the once niche platform became a thriving community once again.

Popular distribution service Steam currently averages 20 million active users in a 48 hour period (information correct as of 01/08/2021) and has seen a huge bump in active users in the past year with no signs of slowing.

Then came the next generation of consoles.

The PS5 and Xbox Series X|S borrowed a few tricks from the PC gaming community, implementing AMD Ryzen chips and SSD storage resulting in benchmarks that could leave even high-end gaming PCs in the dust. The developments led some critics to declare that PC gaming was on its last legs, as no-one would be interested in building a new gaming rig when these new consoles could do the same thing or better straight out of the box.

Are the critics correct? Is PC gaming really dying out?

For the last few years, PC gaming has had an edge on the console market. Regular technology advances meant consoles were quickly left in the dust when it came to specifications and performance. However, critics are now pointing out that there seems to be less reason to stick with PC now the consoles boast features some PC gamers can only dream of.

The first consideration for anyone looking to get into gaming is budget. Consumers are always looking for the best value, which immediately puts PC gaming at a disadvantage. Consoles offer a one-time payment; with everything you need to play games included in the box, but if you want a good gaming PC it's not quite that simple.

Unless buying through a trusted custom PC builder, gamers have a huge list of components to sift through and buy. For a good gaming PC, you need to individually buy:

- Motherboard
- CPU chip (e.g., AMD Ryzen or Intel)
- RAM sticks
- Graphics card
- Data storage (SSD/HDD/NVME)
- Power supply unit
- Cooling system (fans/water cooling)
- Tower/case

Prices of these components range wildly, depending on specification, but the average cost of a high-performance gaming PC is around $1000. Building a PC to roughly the same specifications as a PS5 was estimated to cost about £1200 ($1600), whereas the PS5 Digital Edition costs 4x less at a mere $400.

Now, let's say money isn't an issue. You buy all the parts you need; everything gets delivered and you're ready to game... Well, not quite. It's time to piece all the parts together.

For a newcomer, the build process can be a terrifying prospect. Tech guides often talk about anti-static gloves, tricky thermal paste application and more cables than you could ever need. Not to mention the possibility that you may have bought parts that aren't compatible with each other. This lack of being able to just plug and play, like you can with consoles, is one of the biggest arguments against PC gaming alongside the pricing.

Critics of PC gaming are often quick to bring up the "hassle" of upkeep. New components come out every year which can quickly render your parts outdated, meaning repairs are difficult and keeping your rig the best it can be turns into a costly experience. Why go through all this hassle and expense when you can get a similar enough experience on a console?

This may seem like a lot of negatives, but by no means does it mean the end for PC gaming.

Why PC Gaming is NOT Dying

Cost:

In August 2020, DFC Intelligence published a report which stated that there were over 3 billion gamers worldwide and many play across a range of platforms. The report shows 48% of gamers use a PC to play, while shockingly, only 8% were found to exclusively game on console with that group taking the top spot when it comes to spending per-user. So, maybe PC gaming isn't the most expensive option after all.

More often than not, games on PC tend to be priced lower than their console counterparts. This can be for a number of reasons, usually attributed to the lack of physical copies being produced, but there are other factors involved.

Consoles are often sold at a loss, meaning the likes of Sony or Xbox have to rely on the games to recoup their losses. Physical copies of a game are also likely to bring in more money to the second-hand market than the publishers, so while a store like Gamestop can profit from a game late in its cycle, the publisher gets a cut of the first sale and nothing after that.

With the PC market, games are almost exclusively digital copies with no second-hand market to compete against. This means publishers can afford to offer lower prices for their games to PC users, knowing that consumers can only obtain a title through their approved outlets.

Sales are huge within the PC gaming market, with consumers flocking in droves to the regular Steam sales events that can see prices slashed by an insane 90% off the RRP. Time it right and you can buy 4/5 games for the same price as one title on a console.

The number of games available on a PC is dramatically larger than a console. Say you pick up a PS5, you're limited to the titles available on that platform and nothing more. With a PC however, you have a vast range of titles thanks to software, emulation and the internet. Most consoles offer limited backwards compatibility to try and address this issue, but for PC gamers, there isn't a next gen edition ready to make old titles obsolete.

Then we come to the biggest advantage of PC gaming. Performance.

The newest generation of consoles pushed performance into the spotlight, offering console gamers the ability to game at 60FPS in 4K with ray-tracing. Fancy stuff indeed, but nothing the PC gaming

community hasn't already seen. High end PC's could offer the same thing years before the next-gen consoles were announced.

Now the new generation of consoles are here, they're already being out-performed by the new generation of CPUs and graphics cards. While console gaming offers amazing accessibility, it's the PC gaming community that will always see the best technology and gaming performance as manufacturers push the boundaries far more than console manufacturers in a shorter space of time.

Finally, we look at customization.

By design, consoles are a "one size fits all" solution to gaming. They are designed for gamers that just want to sit back and play the newest title rather than the hardcore gamer who prefers to mix and match to create a rig that suits their playstyle. You are given a controller and games are tailored towards that controller's capabilities and that's the end of it.

On the flip side, PC gaming offers a huge range of input options. There are a number of different controllers on the market to suit all needs, but more importantly, gamers aren't just limited to controllers. Players can go switch from controller, to VR, to the more traditional mouse and keyboard setup with very little hassle, providing a level of versatility and accessibility console gamers can only dream of.

There are virtually no limits to how much you can customize your gaming PC and with a little help from our amazing ScreenWorks staff, it's never been easier to get a custom gaming PC that's tailored specifically to your needs.