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Case Study
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The *Dune* Series

The focus of this case study will be the relative success of two PC games, *Dune 2* and *Dune 2000*. The series of games is based on the acclaimed series of novels written by Frank Herbert. Herbert's novels, some of the most popular science fiction ever written, are set on the desert planet Arrakis. The first book in the series, entitled *Dune*, tells the story of Paul Atreides, who protects his family from a perfidious plot against his family in which control of the planet is taken from his family, and he is banished to the desert. The novel successfully combines aspects of adventure, mysticism, and politics to form a compelling novel that has been read by millions. In addition Herbert wrote five successive novels that continued the story that was started in the original. Recently, working off some of his father's files that he found, Brian Herbert, with help from Kevin J. Anderson, wrote a prequel to *Dune*. The first book will be the story of House Atreides and a second book will tell the story of the evil House Harkonnen. A movie, which was mildly successful, was made in the mid-1980s. In addition a six-hour *Dune* miniseries was also created.

The *Dune* video game series began in 1992 when both *Dune* and *Dune 2* were released by separate companies. *Dune 2* was a hit, as it was one of the first modern real-time strategy games. Previously computers were not fast enough and computer games not sophisticated enough to support real-time strategy. *Dune* was one of the first games to allow users to make decisions on the fly instead of taking turns with the opponent. *Dune 2* was successful because it was somewhat complicated for its time but was easy to

learn and fun to play for long periods of time.  Because of these factors, it is sometimes referred to as the beginning of the real-time strategy genre.  6 years later *Dune* 2000 was released amidst much anticipation that resulted from the success of the original, but it was not nearly as successful.  This case study will show that the discrepancy in the success of the two games resulted from the fact that *Dune 2* was a trendsetter while *Dune 2000* was a small variation on a familiar theme.

*Dune 2(1992)* and *Dune 2000*(1998) were both released by Westwood studios, a medium-size company well known for the *Command and Conquer* series.  Westwood studios is a developer and publisher of entertainment software.  The company develops games for the PC, Nintendo 64, and Playstation.  Established in 1985 by Brett W. Sperry and Louis Castle, Westwood was one of the first companies to have a strong presence on the Internet.  The first game released by Westwood was entitled *Temple of Apshai Trilogy*, an early real-time strategy game released in 1986 for Epyx.  Some of the fledgling company's other early releases were *Mars Saga, Battletech, DragonStrike and Eye of the Beholder*, which was the first game to bring Westwood widespread success at home and abroad.  It wasn't until 1992 that Westwood became a software publisher in its own right when it published two games that would become classics over time.  Those titles were *Kyrandia Book I* and *Dune 2: The Building of a Dynasty*, the game that is credited with defining the real-time strategy genre.  Later came the *Command and Conquer* series, which has set sales records and redefined the real-time strategy genre in the process.  Later they released the Monopoly CD-ROM, which was a bestseller and also the first commercial game with Internet support.  In 1997 Westwood released *Blade Runner*, which broke ground with its unprecedented graphics technology and depth of

storytelling.  In 1998 Westwood studios became a part of Electronic Arts, Inc., which has led to increased exposure because of EA's reputation and global publishing network. Over the years the company has released a wide range of games, including real-time strategy games, several types of sports games, and some family games.  Westwood's most recent release was another installment in the *Command and Conquer* series entitled *Command and Conquer: Red Alert 2*, which was released late in 2000.  In just over 15 years Westwood studios has gone from a company started in a garage by two ambitious men to one of the foremost names in the gaming industry.

*Dune 2* pioneered the real-time strategy genre when it burst on the scene in 1992. It blew its predecessors out of the water by correcting their inadequacies and introducing its own innovations.  The main designers were Joe Bostic and Aaron E. Powell, and the programming was done by Joe Bostic and Scott K. Bowen.  *Dune 2* was successful because it was a trendsetting game; it essentially changed the real-time strategy genre and created a mold from which many subsequent games were created.  *Dune 2* was trendsetting because of its redefinition of the real-time strategy and because of technological aspects, such as graphics and sound.

*Dune 2* was not the first real-time strategy game, but it marked a new step in the evolution of the genre.  The game was quite different from the series of books that it was modeled after.  The user could choose House Harkonnen, House Atreides, or House Ordos with which to play a campaign.  Each house was unique both in background and in actual function in the game.  House Harkonnen was evil, House Atreides was noble, and House Ordos was described as insidious.  In addition the different houses had a few unique weapons.  The three houses had the same basic weapons, but at the higher levels

the houses possessed different technologies.  The basic premise of the game was to mine spice, build structures and units, and conquer the enemy.  This is a format that would later be used in a plethora of other real-time strategy games.  At the user's disposal was a variety of soldiers, tanks, and special weapons.  In addition to the actual opponent the user had to also deal with the fremen, a desert-dwelling people that would attack the user periodically on higher levels.  An interesting feature was the sandworm, which would show up from time to time and devour vehicles and soldiers that were in the sand.  All of these features made quick decision making imperative to success in the game.  What set real-time strategy games apart from other games is the fast decision making that is required in order to play the game.  It's much more realistic when one has to quickly make decisions on the fly instead of taking time to ponder the next move.  This game was so popular because it was one of the first to successfully combine so many features with an interesting storyline to create a fun game.

Another reason for the success of *Dune 2* was the graphics.  For its time the graphics were exceptional.  One technological advance that aided the game was the development of VGA graphics, which were relatively new at the time.  While many other games still used CGA graphics, *Dune 2* employed VGA graphics, which gave the game a much more dynamic look.  Having better graphics was an automatic plus that drew people towards the game.  The improved graphics technology allowed the game to feature better detail and color than previous games.  Elie Arabia, Aaron E. Powell, Ren Olsen, Judith Peterson, and Eric Shultz were in charge of the graphics and artwork featured in the game.  They definitely played a big part in the games popularity.  The

graphics, while somewhat cartoonish, were clean and clear and far superior to those of contemporary games.

In addition *Dune 2* had advanced sound capabilities for its time. The background music was high-quality and appropriate for the moods and situations of the game. The soundtrack for the game has garnered a lot of praise over the years, especially with it being better than most anything else out at that time. Frank Klepacki was in charge of the sound and music for the game and deserves praise for creating the music and sound effects for the game, which were another feature that intrigued people about the game. The sound effects were appropriate for the actions they described and were actually quite a new innovation for the time. When buildings were built and subsequently placed an appropriate sound was made. In addition there were sounds for gunshots and explosions. These sounds were effective while not being overkill. Perhaps the most effective component of the sound package was the speech in the game. When one selects a unit it responds as if the player is talking to it. After you give them an order it also confirms that it is carrying out the order. There is also a voice that tells the user when construction is complete, a unit is destroyed, or that a sandworm or death hand missile is approaching. Perhaps the last two are the most important because both the sandworm and the death hand, a Harkonnen special weapon, can approach very suddenly and unexpectedly and wreak havoc on one's forces.

Fast forward six years and the real-time strategy genre has been well established and redefined by several successful games that took the format laid out by *Dune 2* and enhanced it. The sequel to *Dune 2* was eagerly anticipated, and in 1998 Westwood released *Dune 2000*, which was developed by Intelligent Games and published by

Westwood. *Dune 2000* was not nearly as popular as *Dune 2,* and many people were disappointed by it. It was still a fun game for neophytes, but serious gamers expected much more. The main reason why it was not as successful because is because it was not a trendsetter and did essentially nothing to set itself apart from other games on the market. While technological advancement played a key role in the success of *Dune 2,* this was not the case for the sequel.

*Dune 2000* was basically a recreation of the original with better graphics and comparable music. This is good in some ways, but bad in others. It reminded people of the original, and it was extremely easy to play, especially if one had played the original, but people wanted more. There were very few new options, and by then the game was quite simple by the new standards. The programming was done by Sunlich Chudasama, Simon Evers, Martin Fermor, Neal Kettler, Richard Parret, David Parsons, Kevin Scruggs, Phillip Veale, Maria Del Mar, and McCready Legg, a completely different group than the one that programmed the original. The game needed to have more new options and more features in order to keep up with the games that were being made at that time. Many of the people that bought it were people that enjoyed the original game, and they ended up not liking the remake. The group that did the artwork was also new. Margo Angevine, Kevin Becquet, Jerry Boucher, Mike Elliot, Tim Fritz, Dan Lyons, Bob Marker, Jack Martin, James Mason, Jason Redway, and Miles Ritter collaborated to create adequate graphics, but nothing special. One thing they did was make the graphics look a lot less cartoonish. The colorful soldiers and vehicles-which were colored based on which house they were from-were replaced by much more subtly colored units. This was an improvement, but not enough to make up for the game's other shortcomings. For

instance the game still employs the same inefficient select, command, and point method of moving units. Other games had developed much more efficient procedures for moving units, but *Dune 2000* did not evolve with that technology. The only holdover on the development team was Frank Klepacki, who once again did the music, while Paul S. Mudra and Dwight K. Okahara did the sounds. While the sounds and music in the original game was innovative and unique, it was only adequate in the sequel. It was not superior to the music in other games at the time, another reason why the sequel did not live up to expectations.

*Dune 2* greatly benefited from recent advances in technology and the fact that real-time strategy was a relatively new genre, but *Dune 2000* did not have those luxuries. The original was created very soon after the introduction of VGA graphics, so it had better graphics than most games around. On the other hand the sequel had no such advancement to aid it. It used the same graphics packages as the other games, so it was not set apart by its graphics quality. *Dune 2* was also released at a time where sound capabilities were very primitive, and thus its sound quality and innovation blew most other games out of the water. *Dune 2000* once again didn't have this luxury. When it was released all games and sound effects and music, so it was much harder for it to stand out on the strength of these features, especially when they hadn't improved significantly from the first version. In these ways technology played a significant role in the success of the two games.

The business and cultural aspects were very closely related in determining the relative success of the two games. In the case of *Dune 2* there wasn't a huge market for real-time strategy games because the technology was not good enough to support a

quality RTS game. If the technology developed to the point where a quality RTS game could be made there would be a market, because it was a clearly superior type of game from the ones that existed. Dune came along at the perfect time, and it was instantly in a class by itself. With few games on its level everyone wanted to buy it, so from a business standpoint it was very successful. It was unlike any RTS game that had preceded it. Culturally, the game was important because so many people thought the game was important. It redefined the real-time strategy genre. *Dune 2000*'s case was completely different. The real-time strategy genre was firmly established, so from a business and cultural standpoint it was much more difficult to create a game that stood out from the rest. There were many other real-time strategy games out, and the first person shooter genre had also gained a strong following. Because of these factors there were many other games out that were alternatives to *Dune 2000*. After not getting a great initial response from *Dune* followers its sales fizzled.

Technology, culture, and business all played significant roles in the overall success of *Dune 2* and its sequel, *Dune 2000.* The former took advantage of recent technological breakthroughs to create a game that stood out from the rest. The latter did not have this luxury, as there weren't any significant advances in technology that would give it an edge. The original was also more successful because it was a pioneer in its genre. Because of this it was successful from a business standpoint, with it being the only game of its kind. At the same time it created a culture because it was so much better than the other games like it. When the sequel came around the RTS genre had been established, which precluded it from achieving as much success and becoming a cultural

icon. *Dune 2* was synonymous with real-time strategy in its time, while *Dune 2000* was just another game.