

Video game makers aim for new users as costs rise

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Europe's biggest computer games fair enjoyed a sharp increase in attendance on its first public day but the mainly German visitors showed no signs of being ready to spend more despite obvious enthusiasm.

The organizers of the Games Convention in the German city of Leipzig reported 28,000 visitors on Thursday, 75 percent more than on last year's first day, and expect at least 110,000 -- a record number -- by the fair's end on Sunday.

But, although the attendees appeared to come from a broader social spectrum than last year's mainly teenaged boys -- most of whom have little money to spend -- exhibitors and organizers are still battling an image problem in Germany.

Only around one in 10 households in Germany, Europe's biggest but slowest-growing economy, has a games console -- compared with around one in three in the United States, the world's largest video-games market.

"We have some way to catch up, to put it mildly," the fair's director, Josef Rahmen, told a news conference. "It's a very important industry and we shouldn't leave it all to our American, Japanese and English friends."

Organizers said Germans had spent 466 million euros on video games last year, 15 percent more than in 2003 but still a tiny proportion of the estimated \$25 billion spent globally on games software and hardware each year.

Gerhard Florin, European manager of the world's biggest games software publisher, Electronic Arts, said a battle still had to be fought with older people against the perception that computer games made young people stupid.

"It's not bad to read books but it's just as good to play games."

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