



## Video-Game Analytics Track Players' Behavior

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A video game software maker wants to look over your shoulder while you play, and the company is developing software that will [monitor](#) and analyze every move you make.

Sound Orwellian? Some privacy advocates may think so, but the [data](#) revealed could help developers and publishers make better games.

Emergent Game Technologies is working on analytics software that will let video game developers and publishers glean information on peoples' behavioral patterns as they play, a company executive said Friday.

More than 15 years in development, Metrics Element, a tool to collect, analyze and distribute game data within a Web-based user interface, will ship around the first of the year.

The software would provide answers to many questions, from what players do in the game and how long it take to reach level 20, to where they spend their money and how many people saw the Pepsi product pitch in the game, for example.

Not only answers, but details on the number of people who viewed the ad, and how long they stayed to either look or interact with it, said Larry Mellon, Emergent vice president of engineering and systems architect.

"Massive multiplayer online games like War of Warcraft are hitting some of the major problems in computer science," Mellon said. "Scale is one."

Mellon said Blizzard Entertainment Inc.'s World of Warcraft has more than 6 million players. That means potentially you have 6 million PCs connected to 30,000 servers exchanging information in a real-time 3D virtual world where there are security and internal in-game economic implications, and social-network analysis required.

A probe-package inserts in the video game to collect and transmit data to Emergent's servers. It aggregates and displays the information in charts to view. The technology is written in a combination of Java, Flash, and [C](#) + +.

Users can customize the data collected. Engineers might choose to measure frames per second on the client to make sure the games proceed smoothly. Or measure [latency](#) between [client](#) and [server](#) to make sure the interactive game isn't bogged down by slow responses. Developers could measure how players spend their money to optimize ad placement.

The software can even look inside the online network as gamers play to help identify connection points within a game, providing insight into how information moves from one group to another.

"You can see how your marketing network moves, and how news propagates across the virtual world," said Michael Arrington, senior analyst at Acacia Research Group, Vancouver, Wash. "There are privacy concerns, but if you're playing in a MMOG world you've probably already given authorization for the site to collect data in aggregate, as long as they don't identify you as an individual."

Peeking into a live online game as people play will become more important as publishers ad more in-game advertising. Imagine being able to see what gamers do when they first enter a virtual world: Perhaps buy swords, potions or horses.

Knowing what players do in fantasy or sports games would assist developers to determine ad placement for in-game ads. "There aren't many tools that can measure in-game ad performance, and anything that can track users more accurately would help companies justify the motorization of advertising in games," said Colin Sebastian, senior research analyst with Lazard Capital Markets LLC

The analytics software may answer questions for game makers, but it also could create privacy issues.

"Players hate being measured surreptitiously, but as long as you're upfront with them it's typically not an issue," Mellon said. "For MMOGs, where you're continually improving the game over years, it's invaluable to see how people play the game today, when you're trying to plan for tomorrow."



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