

An Exclusive Tour of Mad Catz Interactive, Inc.



By Bruce Pechman, *The Muscleman of Technology*SM
www.mrbicep.com
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Inside the World's Number One Third Party Video Game Accessory Manufacturer

Entering the Threshold

The non-descript exterior of the white building bears no resemblance to the impeccably managed, yet frenzied daily routines taking place inside the world's number one third party video game console accessory maker. Perhaps just the clean Mad Catz logo brandished atop the main doors lets only the well-informed gamer know a very special blend of magical creativity lurks inside the confines of these walls.



Mad Catz Product Managers, Matt and Vincent

My tour of duty begins with the Product Management team lead by my gracious host, Vincent Tucker. Vincent instantly introduces me to his dynamic duo, Matt Bennion and Richi Wang. Although the three share many similar responsibilities, each has their own

respective specialties. Matt, for example, is hard at work on a newfangled Dance Pad for Xbox's upcoming title *Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix*. A Dance Pad sounds like an amusing product, but bringing it from design to market is serious business for Matt and the Mad Catz team. The Pad requires co-branding and direct communication with the game's publisher and producers. Contemplate getting those blinking light patterns in sync with a step-sensitive pad and you realize this is anything but child's play (with a nation of plump offspring, I praise Dance Pads). Adjacent to Matt's cubicle, I see Richi hard at work manipulating a mock-up for a yet to be announced accessory for Nokia's soon to be released N-Gage handheld gaming system. Richi seems a bit jumpy...kind of like Mike Tyson getting ready to enter a Spelling Bee. I never get to question him about the N-Gage or see him again.



*A Sneak Peak Inside Richi's Cube; Brand New PS2 & Xbox LumiCON's—
Yes, the controller buttons illuminate for play during darkness*

Certification, Quality, Support, and Warranty

We started talking product quality amongst the Product Managers when Matt began explaining the certification process and what it means. Bennion details the battery of tests products must go through in order to be blessed with the "Official Compatible Seal" (on the packaging). This certification demonstrates each product is produced under the rigorous requirements passed down by the console maker. This costs Mad Catz big bucks, but it is necessary in order to produce quality licensed parts. Microsoft, for example, has very stringent tests and objectives to which Mad Catz must adhere prior to being granted certification—you cannot legally produce licensed Xbox hardware without it. Make no mistake Bennion emphasizes, "The Xbox is a hi-tech device that requires high grade components." Matt elaborates how it works. The part is outsourced to an approved independent testing facility. The lab tests the part for several criteria such as FCC electrical emissions, continuity stress tests, verifying communication frequencies are precisely on target to eliminate latency, and scores of other tests to ensure nothing falls outside the upper and lower thresholds of the specification. Most Mad Catz products carry a 5 year warranty (essentially the life of a console). I personally visited the support area where three to four full time employees help consumers with any problem or question they may have. More impressive is that Mad Catz's support line is an 800 number. Vincent assures me even if problems arise outside this limit, "Mad Catz will make you a happy customer—Mad Catz stands by the consumer and their products." Now you start to understand why Mad Catz in numero uno in their field.

Lights On...For the Light Gun

Matt tells me the advantages of working closely with Microsoft on the certification process—it spills over into collaboration opportunities...such as the Xbox Light Gun. Mad Catz played a crucial role in making the Xbox Light Gun happen. Because of the storied relationship Mad Catz has with game companies, they were instrumental in not only convincing Microsoft to have a Light Gun, but assisting them with the specification as well. Xbox owners pay attention—dust off them light guns because House of the Dead is not the last title you trigger happy trolls will be blasting. Vincent tells me plans for support include “Starsky & Hutch,” “Silent Scope,” and “Dead Man’s Hand.”



Mad Catz PS2 Light Gun



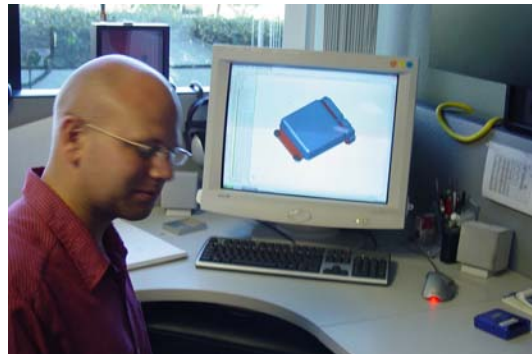
Mad Catz Xbox Light Gun

Talented People Equals Successful Products

Vincent succinctly explains to me how the Mad Catz design methodology process begins as we start our walking tour through the maze of various departments. As we stroll, Vincent explains how every controller and wheel Mad Catz produces, regardless of platform, incorporates a Printed Circuit Board Assembly. He states “Who do you think designs and engineers these things? We do.” But before we have a chance to talk technical, Vincent knocks on a stylish office door and introduces me to Darren Richardson, Mad Catz COO. Darren is a down to earth businessman who keenly understands the nature of the video game peripherals business. We exchange light industry talk before heading down to Tom Roberts’ office. Roberts, the Senior VP in charge of Product Development, boasts about the close knit relationship between the Research and Engineering organizations. Both are tightly integrated like woven fabric at the San Diego headquarters. Constant feedback and open communication channels between the groups are essential and required to produce timely world class console peripherals. Making our way down a short corridor, we land in the Mad Catz brain trust.



Tom Roberts, Sr. VP pretending to look calm



Industrial Engineer, Dave Morelock

We arrive at “R&D Central,” home of legendary Industrial Design Engineer Dave Morelock. Mr. Morelock’s designs have been nominated for several industry awards in

various categories including the GBA Flip Light, RetroCON, and PS2 Double-sided remote. Today, Dave shows me a 3D CAD arm he designed on his monitor for a newfangled device being developed for the GBA SP. Dave blows up the detail which depicts the arm's range of motion—it articulates over the entire SP body without obstruction. Precise measurements of the Nintendo GBA SP are entered meticulously and methodically by measuring the device and entering the data into the CAD program.

How Do They Do That?

As my tour continues, we next enter the domain of Doug Shepherd, Engineering Specialist (and all around very cool dude to hang with). Doug demonstrates for me how the “articulating arm” Dave is working on could possibly be used on a mock up product. I'm instantly blown away and immediately ask “how do you guys do that?” Doug lovingly smiles at me, and says “if he tells me anymore, they would have to kill me.” We peek over at Chad's cube (PhD and newest member of the team) and converse about the challenges presented when designing circuit boards in minuscule spaces. Making our exodus from the intellectual trust, I can assure our readers the Mad Catz engineering and development team are well steeped in brilliance, talent, and experience with the best products yet to come!



*Left, Doug Shepherd, Engineering Specialist – Very Sharp Dude!
Right, Jacob Robinson, Sr. Producer...That's Mr. GameShark to You*

Shark or GameShark?

Vincent guides me over to the new GameShark (www.gameshark.com) area. As if you didn't know, Mad Catz acquired the GameShark brand from InterAct (now defunct) in January 2003. In a nutshell, GameShark software enables players to take advantage of the secret codes, short cuts, hints and cheats incorporated into video games by their creators. Sean Parry, Director of Marketing, is overseeing the expansion of the GameShark brand. I'm introduced to Jacob Robinson who is responsible for the GameShark web site—that's a lot of content. Next, I meet Chris Carroll, who works alongside Jacob. Chris has got to have one of the best jobs in the world—his official title is “Hacker, GameShark.” Yup, you guessed it...he plays the latest video games all day long looking for cracks and exploits to incorporate into GameShark products. Chris has been playing video games since he was 6. I can't show his picture for security reasons...he knows too much! Keep your eyes peeled for new GameShark harvests hitting store shelves soon. Alright...I will tell you. A new GameShark Media Player will allow you to enjoy your digital media on your television and home entertainment system through your networked PS2. The new products are based on “Game Saves.” A CD will be made available for PS2, Xbox, and GameCube containing the most popular games and all the games saves. Take the Cube for example. Let's say you're stuck on a level of Eternal Darkness you just can't get past. The GameShark CD

will have the completed level! (Handy, if you just want to skip past the level, see the cut scenes, or just move on.)



Main Lobby Showcase—just a small sample of the over 100 products Mad Catz creates

Think Creative, Be Creative

Afterwards, we enter a jovial group of artistic and imaginative folks known as the Creative Department managed by Johnny Schmidt. This is where the bulk of the packaging, boxes, ad slicks, and collateral materials for marketing/shows get designed and produced. I inquired about advertising. Vincent explains at Mad Catz the packaging and advertising go hand in hand. “The advertising is on the packaging—we try to win the battle at the retail level.” Johnny’s group spends an inordinate amount of time ensuring the packaging is as attractive and informative as it can be. The primary Mad Catz advertising strategy is accomplished by meeting with media and press in the form of product reviews. The Mad Catz Marketing and PR departments assemble with the various industry syndicates in what are known as “Media Tours.” This ensures the word gets out on the latest product introductions.



Johnny: “Can you please make some room on the table”



The sculpture for the Console Gods

Time for Vincent to Spill the Beans

My time was running short and I knew it. I had one last opportunity to pump my congenial host to cough up the info on hot new Mad Catz products. Vincent crowed like a blackbird on live power line! Universal 7" monitor. Tell me about it: "It's a hi-res TFT LCD which will fit PS2, Xbox, or Cube all in one identical box." Retailers love it as one package serves all three next gen consoles. Vincent says the screen will be larger than many competitor products (most are a paltry 5"). The same can be said for the new enhanced Universal Wheels. Wheels are big boxes and retailers save oodles of shelf space with one package serving all three consoles. Vince says all the adapters are included in the box ...just plug in the one for the console of your choice! Then there's RetroCON, scheduled for release in early October. No cheese here—the controller contains a metal housing, twin analog sticks, analog buttons and two vibrating motors. I have touched and handled this product and can tell you it's amazing! Xbox is getting the officially licensed Mad Catz Mic & Mic Adapter. It was designed exclusively for Microsoft's Xbox Music Mixer (scheduled for release on November 1, 2003). Vincent says forthcoming Memory Cards featuring exclusive content direct from developers such as "game saves" will be made available shortly.



The sleek new RetroCON for PS2



Mic & Mic Adapter for use with Xbox Music Mixer

The Mad Catz Way

You don't become the world's number one producer of accessories to the video game industry without great leadership, and committed employees. I ask Vincent point blank how an idea comes to be, and then executed upon? The idea can come from a buyer, a customer, or an employee Vincent explains. Mad Catz then refines and evaluates the idea for viability. Next the feature set is agreed upon and a concept is created. A meeting of the minds is next to generate a "Preliminary Market Data Sheet." This explains what the features are for internal feedback. Once the feedback is complete Dave starts working up the industrial design. After Dave completes his design process, they take the rendering to customers for feedback (along with the preliminary sales pitch). If the feedback comes back favorably, then the product is further refined and fleshed out. The product is now finalized. Now starts the tooling—or the cutting of steel (takes 60-90 days to make one product) which can have up to 36 different pieces such as in a steering wheel. At this point, they can start injecting plastic into the steel mold to make the part. Afterwards, the Market Data Sheet is created with the final specifications along with the business plan of competitor products and price points. The process concludes by providing a sales spec sheet and packaging sample to the Sales staff for final approval from customers. At this point, orders are taken and the product is ready to ship to your local stores. Keep all this in mind when you pick up your smooth new RetroCON controllers in October!

It Hard to Say Good-Bye

As we wrapped up and headed for the doors, I asked Vincent about how future technologies may impact the products Mad Catz builds. “Radio technologies have really increased and expanded in the last couple years—Bluetooth is certainly a possibility down the road.” As Vincent shoves me out the door I shriek—what’s the new slogan this year? Vincent shouts back: **CONTROL YOUR GAME, CONQUER YOUR OPPONENT!**



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