

WAS CD PROJEKT RED'S CYBERPUNK 2077 MARKETING CRIMINALLY
MISLEADING?

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CD Projekt Red's Cyberpunk 2077 Marketing was Criminally Misleading

Businesses and organizations have used a variety of marketing methods to entice consumers to purchase their products and services. Businesses come up with catchy jingles and attribute their products with a song. Firms that offer services would come up with short videos showing how they work and share testimonial accounts from their customers. Others even try to incorporate sexual thoughts with their products in hopes that this would grab their customer's attention. For the Polish video game developer, CD Projekt Red, they launched a marketing campaign that used various marketing methods to sell the game Cyberpunk 2077. This, however, backfired after the launch of the game. The things that they showed and said during the long marketing campaign were missing in the final product. This led gamers who bought the expensive AAA game to feel cheated and misled. Though some law firms have filed class-action lawsuits against the video game company, there are still people defending them. CD Projekt Red should face criminal charges due to the scam-like misleading actions they exercised through Cyberpunk 2077's marketing campaign.

Covertly Changing Genre

CD Projekt Red revealed the game Cyberpunk 2077 in 2013 through a short game trailer. Since then, fans of the Polish developers were excited about the game and have looked forward to more trailers and game information. The developers initially classified the video game as an "RPG" or "role-playing game". This sparked the interest of role-playing video game fans and enthusiasts. As their marketing campaign continued the company continuously emphasized that Cyberpunk 2077 is an RPG. A trailer that the developers released a few months before the game's initial release even

claimed that Cyberpunk 2077 is the future of role-playing games. However, in June 2019, the Twitter page of the game changed its description from “role-playing game” to “open-world, action-adventure story”. The company did not give any warnings or announcements regarding the sudden change. The RPG fans were still excited about the game since they have no idea about the genre-change CD Projekt Red just made.

This is a great example of misleading consumers into buying a product through the use of false advertising. Changing a game’s genre changes a big part of the product. It is similar to buying a crime novel and realizing that it was actually a book of poetry. The fact that CD Projekt Red chose to change the genre but failed to tell their consumers about it should be a criminal act. Since 2013, CD Projekt Red marketed Cyberpunk 2077 as a role-playing game and they should have notified the public about specific changes that affect the consumers’ decisions.

Misleading Advertisement

Misleading In-Game Clips

The marketing campaign for Cyberpunk 2077 involved a series of videos detailing in-game features that the player can experience. These included player abilities that were shown to the players and certain scenes that emphasized an extensive narrative. Though the videos had disclaimers stating that they are an early build and some aspects of the game may change, the final product revealed the misleading nature of the clips. The narration in the clips explained various mechanics and insinuated that players will be able to do exactly what the clips showed. Players who saw the disclaimer assumed that only the visual aspects of the game might change.

When businesses and organizations show a product to their customers, they should avoid using misleading materials. Materials that offer false information and false identity of a product blurs a customer's perception. Customers use marketing materials to decide if the product fits their interests and needs. Using misleading materials should be an imprisonable offense and businesses practicing it should pay for the damages done.

Misleading Trailers

The trailers for Cyberpunk 2077 were the biggest and most impactful marketing tool CD Projekt Red used. The Polish developer released weekly trailers in events they called Night Wire where they showcased the different aspects of the game. The video Night Wire: Episode 2 (Cyberpunk 2077, 2020) showed how players can choose a “Lifepath” that can greatly change the story’s progression and outcomes. A “Lifepath” is the player character’s origin. The player can choose from three different paths which were the Nomad, Street Kid, and Corpo. From watching the trailer, one would assume that each path will offer a unique experience that is vastly different from the other. However, after the release of Cyberpunk 2077, players began to investigate how the Lifepaths worked. They quickly realized that it only changed the first 40 minutes of gameplay. The different Lifepath scenes that they showed during the trailer were the only scenes that were unique to each Lifepaths. The decision did not affect the story’s progression and endings. The Lifepaths also offered additional dialogue lines but choosing those lines does not affect the gameplay in any way.

Weeks later, the video Night Wire: Episode 4 (Cyberpunk 2077, 2020) repeated the same misleading video format. The episode contained a trailer about in-game

vehicles and fashion. The Episode 4 trailer showed players that they can purchase a large variety of vehicles and customize the purchased cars. However, players who have bought the \$60 game later realized that they have no option to customize their in-game vehicles. Certain types of vehicles featured in the trailer were also unavailable for purchase. The Episode 4 trailer also talked about fashion and how it can affect the player experience. The trailer suggested that the game's AI would react to what the player character is wearing. Certain gangs may become friendly or hostile depending on the player's clothes. Like what happened with the other trailers, gamers debunked the idea right after the game's release. The clothing only provided the player character protection against incoming damage and had no other unique effects.

Some trailers also suggested being able to buy a house and saying that Cyberpunk 2077 will have a believable in-game world. Games 10-years older than Cyberpunk 2077 proved this to be untrue since some had better designs than the latter. There are many more misleading statements available in the other trailers but the ones stated above are some of the most blatant. When releasing a trailer for any media or product, it should not show the viewers contents that are unavailable after purchase.

Cyberpunk 2077 is an expensive game that costs \$60. Laws should prosecute companies for misleading customers into buying through the use of false information in their marketing campaigns.

Marketing to Consoles

Another case of false advertising was CD Projekt Red's marketing towards console players. Gaming consoles include the PlayStation 4 and Xbox Series X. Trailers were released specifically to show how the game performs on these gaming consoles.

The trailers showed smooth gameplay with no lags or stuttering. However, upon the release of the game, people who bought the console copies for the PS4 and Xbox Series X found themselves unable to play. The gamers experienced continuous crashing and bad system performance. They were unable to play the game until the developers released a fix that players can download online. Upon reviewing the trailers for the console copies, gamers realized how slow the person controlling the character was going. The slow pace was probably to maintain good system performance since games tend to run poorly when there is a lot of data to be processed.

Before the game was released, CD Projekt Red provided streamers and YouTubers early copies of Cyberpunk 2077. The copies were only for the PC version.

When the streamers and youtubers released their reviews, they were explicitly told that they cannot use the actual footage from their playtime. The game received a positive review from most of these streamers and YouTubers. But when the game was released, players encountered all sorts of technical problems. The streamers and YouTubers who praised the game also began exposing their bad experience with Cyberpunk 2077.

From sending out PC-only copies and refraining reviewers to use their clips showed that CD Projekt Red was aware of the technical problems the game has, especially on consoles. This, however, did not stop them from releasing the game and charging a \$60 price. They kept information and used a misleading video to persuade console players to purchase the unfinished game.

Conclusion

The actions of CD Projekt Red show how they value profit more than customer satisfaction. They launched a marketing campaign filled with misleading trailers and

information. They made drastic changes and decided to tell their consumers about it. They gave players a false idea of their game to increase expectations and interest. They released a bad-performing game and charged an expensive price for it. What happened with Cyberpunk 2077 was not an accident or an oversight. The false advertising was present at the early stage of their marketing campaign. It was a methodical process of constructing a false identity for a product to drive consumer interest. This type of action should be illegal as it is a form of scam. CD Projekt Red should receive legal repercussions for their criminally misleading marketing.

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