

Reduce stress and make friends by playing games

By Bruce A. Love

Last weekend, I observed Labor Day the way that many small business owners observe holidays – by working. That is not to say I did not find some time to barbeque some brats and have a little fun. In fact, I found time for a spirited game or two of backgammon prior to tackling the projects of the day.

Many PC users discover that playing computer games can be a nice (temporary) diversion from the stresses of the day. If you are new to computers, solitaire (available on all PCs) can actually help you develop your mouse manipulation skills (an essential function for PC users) and help you learn some PC basics such as locating, opening, and exiting programs. If you have mastered solitaire and you are comfortable with the Internet, you may want to try playing some other familiar games online.

There are several excellent websites that allow visitors to play all sorts of games. One such website is Pogo (www.pogo.com). Pogo lists nearly a hundred different games, including many classics. For those of us who grew up playing games in an age when board games and card games were popular, Pogo offers bridge, checkers, chess, dominoes, hearts, cribbage, spades, and (my favorite) backgammon. There are also many new games to hold the interest of younger audiences. Unlike solitaire, which is a very solitary gaming experience, Pogo allows you to play many of these games against real people, and “chat” online with your opponents! This is a fun way to stay in touch with friends and relatives who live in other parts of the country or world.

The first time you visit Pogo, you will have to set up a login name and password. The purpose of establishing your free “account,” is to allow you to keep track of your wins and losses and develop a

“friends list” so that you can easily find and play opponents with whom you have previously enjoyed pleasant gaming experiences. While most gamers seem to be very friendly people, you will occasionally come across a grump. Fortunately, conversations in gaming areas are filtered, so the few unpleasant opponents that you may play will be unable to use the colorful dialog that we associate with grumps and poor sports.

When you are ready to play, choose a game and a skill level. Novices should choose “Beginner.” Next, pick a “room” in which to play. After the room loads, you will see many tables. You can either watch a game, or click an open chair to ask permission to play the seated player. Don’t be offended if someone turns you down. Sometimes they are waiting for a special friend to join them.

Once you start playing games on the Internet, you will discover that opponents can be playing from just about anywhere in the world. Recently, I “sat down” to play a game and attempted to exchange pleasantries. I thought my opponent was a grump, or just avoiding conversation. After a minute or two, he finally responded in broken English and indicated he was German. I surprised myself, when I recalled some conversational German from High school and began to chat with the German. I enjoyed our talk almost as much as I enjoyed whipping Bernhard.

The nice thing about playing games online is that computers enforce the rules of the game. Pogo sets the board, deals the cards, prohibits illegal moves, and keeps track of the score. Whether you play games to socialize, or play for the competition, online games can be a fun way to meet new people and stay in touch with old friends.

Love Consulting
600 Oakmont Place
Roaring Spring, PA 16673
814-224-2651

articles@loveconsulting.com

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