

Australian retail giants pull Grand Theft Auto V after protest (Update)

December 3 2014, by Martin Parry



This publicity photo released by Rockstar Games shows a screen shot from the video game, "Grand Theft Auto V." (AP Photo/Rockstar Games, File)

Australian retail giants Target and Kmart said Thursday they will stop selling controversial crime-themed blockbuster video game "Grand Theft Auto V" over concerns that it glamorises violence against women.

Target, a popular department store chain, acted after a petition authored by three former sex workers, which has been signed by more than 40,000 people, called it "sickening".

"Games like this are grooming yet another generation of boys to tolerate violence against women," the petition said.

"It is fuelling the epidemic of violence experienced by so many girls and women in Australia—and globally."

Target's general manager for corporate affairs Jim Cooper said the decision was made following extensive community and customer concern.

"We've been speaking to many customers over recent days about the game, and there is a significant level of concern about the game's content," he said.

"We've also had customer feedback in support of us selling the game, and we respect their perspective on the issue.

"However, we feel the decision to stop selling GTA5 is in line with the majority view of our customers," he added.

Cooper said Target, which has some 300 stores in Australia but is not connected to the US retail giant of the same name, would continue to sell other R-rated games, suitable for over 18s.



This Sept. 10, 2013 file photo shows the "Grand Theft Auto V " billboard at Figueroa Hotel in Los Angeles. Target Australia said Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2014, it is removing "Grand Theft Auto V" from store shelves after an online petition signed by more than 40,000 individuals asked the retailer to stop selling the video game because they said it encourages players to murder women for entertainment. (AP Photo/Nick Ut, File)

"While these products often contain imagery that some customers find offensive, in the vast majority of cases, we believe they are appropriate products for us to sell to adult customers," he said.

"However, in the case of GTA5, we have listened to the strong feedback from customers that this is not a product they want us to sell."

Kmart, which like Target is owned by diversified conglomerate

Wesfarmers, said it too would pull the game. The company has 190 outlets in Australia and New Zealand.

"Following a significant review of all content in Grand Theft Auto Games Kmart has taken the decision to remove this product immediately," a spokesperson said.

Not without controversy

Grand Theft Auto has won legions of fans around the world, and as many critics, for game play in which winning depends on acts such as carjacking, gambling and killing. It also includes simulated sex with prostitutes and drunk driving.

Despite its huge success, the series has not been without controversy, mainly due to the violence and its depiction of women, which some reviewers have called misogynistic.

Several real life crimes have been linked to the game. More recently actress Lindsay Lohan sued the creators, Rockstar Games, over a character she contends is an unsanctioned virtual version of herself.

One person who signed the petition, Peter Nichols, said "abuse should not be trivialised, let alone encouraged or rewarded".

"It's beyond time that we as a society say enough is enough."

But not everyone was happy, with some claiming the petition was an over-reaction.

"This game is rated 18, meaning that only adults should be playing it," said one comment left on the change.org website.

"If any young boys are playing it and it's 'grooming them to tolerate violence against women' than that is the fault of their parents for letting them play an adult's game."

The latest instalment in the series is set in a fictional city of Los Santos based on real-world Los Angeles. Versions of GTA V hit the streets in September last year for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 as well as on computers powered by Windows software.

It raked in more than a billion dollars in a record-shattering first three days. It was released for the beefed-up PlayStation 4 and Xbox One consoles in November.

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