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Yu-Gi-Oh! Marketing History

Yu-Gi-Oh! first appeared in 1996 in a comic series (manga) by Kazuki Takahashi. It was carried in Shonen Jump, Japan's largest weekly comic magazine. Shonen Jump is published by Shueisha Inc.

A 27-episode television series accompanied by a collectible card game was a great hit in Japan in 1998.

Yu-Gi-Oh it is currently a popular TV series in Japan on TV Tokyo and is produced there by NAS (Nihon Ad Systems).

Konami, a Japanese company, controls Yu-Gi-Oh trading card and video game rights worldwide. Their company is well known here for its work with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles video games in the 1980's and 1990's as well as its 1981 U.S. video arcade game, Frogger. In April 2002 Konami started shipping Yu-Gi-Oh! Gameboy video games. Konami of America, Inc. is Konami's U.S. presence.

4Kids Entertainment obtained the U.S. merchandizing and television rights to Yu-Gi-Oh! from Konami in Japan on 8 May 2001. Since then it appears a wider license has been granted to them. 4Kids is no stranger to this business as they similarly brought Pokeman from Japan to the United States. 4Kids Entertainment rapidly partnered with Warner Brothers. and Yu-Gi-Oh! premiered on Kids' WB television network in September 2001.

On December 21, 2001, 4Kids Entertainment granted Mattel exclusive worldwide license (with the exception of Asia) to manufacture and market Yo-Gi-Oh action figures and accessories, board games, puzzles, vehicles, playsets, activity sets, role playing products, youth electronics and ViewMaster products.

Mattel began shipping its production in April 2002.

Upper Deck Entertainment, well known in the collectable trading card arena, is the distributor of Yu-Gi-Oh trading cards. In the toy industry, Trading Card Games are often called/abbreviated as TCG.

A few other game abbreviations you may encounter are:

- RPG Role Playing Game - you essentially become and emphasize with one of the characters
- CCG Collectible Card Game - game that is enhanced by collecting cards to tune your deck. They are often sold in packages called starters, boosters and other names.
- TCG Trading Card Game - game played with trading cards
- TTG Table Top Game - typically a board game

Well Known Firms

Yu-Gi-Oh's success appears to be no accident. All the firms involved are well known and have considerable experience and expertise in the portion of the market they are directing. Plus many of them already have experience working with one another. The world wide movement appears to be very well orchestrated.

Intellectual Property

Much of the money trading hands in the electronic gaming and trading card gaming market is based on licenses surrounding the intellectual property of the games. Konami owns hundreds of U.S. Patents predominantly focusing on electronic games. A few of those patents focus more specifically on Yu-Gi-Oh. Those patents include:

- U.S. Patent 6,267,678
- U.S. Patent 6,375,566
- U.S. Patent 6,398,651
- U.S. Patent Application US 2002/0002071
- U.S. Patent Application US 2002/0013168

U.S. Patents above can be viewed from the U.S. Patent & Trademark web site.

Yu-Gi-Oh is also protected by several Japanese Patents and U.S. Copyrights and Trademarks.

Many of the licenses surrounding Yu-Gi-Oh were announced in [Press Releases](#).

Wizards of the Coast

Wizards of the Coast, now a Renton Washington subsidiary of Hasbro was instrumental in bringing the Pokemon Trading Card Game to video game format. Wizard's U.S. Patent 5,662,332 is strongly referenced by Konami's more recent patent, U.S. Patent 6,398,651 covering Yu-Gi-Oh video games. Wizard's patent includes many elements and concepts now present in Yu-Gi-Oh.

Wizards of the Coast (WotC) had the Pokemon card license and was recently awarded the Star Wars trading card license. Some were surprised the Yu-Gi-Oh license went to Upper Deck instead of WotC. Reports indicate the decision may have been made by Hasbro (they own WotC) to go with Star Wars to fill out some of their existing Star Wars licenses, vs. Yu-Gi-Oh. That decision may have placed WotC in poor position. Pokemon continues to slide downhill and Yu-Gi-Oh may have been a more attractive property of WotC than Star Wars.

Wizards of the Coast, the U.S. firm behind Pokemon, says they planned it for kids 8 to 11 years old. Yu-Gi-Oh! The Gathering is designed for 11 and older with many kids 16 or over playing the game. The wider age range (5 years vs. 3 years) provides a large audience of potential users.

Online message boards include some comments from advanced gamers who wish Wizards of the Coast had won the Yu-Gi-Oh license. They think the game would have been more jazzed up and better received by older teens and adults.

Cards, Cards, Cards

Upper Deck, the U.S. card licensee runs tournaments around the country. They forbid the use of any cards not printed by them (including Japanese Cards printed in English). There are perhaps 500 cards printed in English (by Upper Deck and Others) and about 1,000 printed in Japanese.

New cards are frequently added by the firms producing Collectible Card Games. Over time the game grows, evolves and strategies change. This makes them different from static games like Chess, Risk and Monopoly.

A few examples of the way the game was "toned down" in translation for the U.S Market were provided by an [Epinions Reviewer](#).

Japan-English

Black Magician-Dark Magician

Dragon Egger-Ryu-Ran (an attempt to look authentic)

Dark Knight Gaia-Gaia the Fierce Knight

Sacrifice-Relinquished

Killer Tomato-Mystic Tomato

Cyclone-Mystical Space Time (one of my least favorites)

This reviewer feels since few very young children play the game, it could have been more interesting to the older children if the Japanese version had been more closely followed.

Pokemon Set the Stage for Yu-Gi-Oh!

Yu-Gi-Oh! is actually a "spin off" of the virtual pet concept. Pokeman originated in Japan as a Nintendo Game Boy game. The purpose of the game was to train, fight and collect monsters. Pokemon then moved to television and then to trading cards. Yu-Gi-Oh! originated in Japan as a printed comic (Manga), moved to television, trading cards and then to game consoles. Both games involve fighting monsters with various abilities and traits. Yu-Gi-Oh currently uses "static monsters" (they cannot be trained) but is considerably more complex and requires strategy vs. just training monsters.

Its obvious that Pokemon set the stage for Yu-Gi-Oh. Both games came from Japan and while they share no story line or components, a huge audience was introduced to the concept of collectable monster card games by Pokeman. Having been once introduced, it is much easier for them to move across to Yu-Gi-Oh. Its somewhat like being familiar with CD Rom players and moving over to DVD disks. If DVD disks had followed 8 track tapes consumers would have been pretty confused and their adoption would have been much slower. The same is true of Yu-Gi-Oh!. It owes a great debt to Pokemon.

Another Yu-Gi-Oh predicesor was Digimon, a fighting, linkable key chain pet. Built by Bandai, Digimon was a monster training and fighting game. Bandai borrowed heavily from Pokemon in the creation of Digimon. Yu-Gi-Oh is now the benefactor as Digimon also helped prepare many children around the world for fighting monster games.

The Future of Yu-Gi-Oh Marketing

Right now they are really getting all the formats up to steam (trading cards, electronic games, music, board games, plus toys, action toys, keychains, etc). Plus they are continually adding new cards, some through special tie ins, like the recently announced "Ultra Rare Card" to be released with in the first U.S. Issue of Shonen Jump (the Japanese magazine that first carried the characters). Plus Top Deck Entertainment is staging tournaments around the country and posting the results online.

Three special holographic silver foil embossed cards were bundled with the intial release of the Game Boy version of *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Immortal Duelist Soul* and will not be available elsewhere. Future releases of this Game Boy game will be packaged with three other cards (seemingly less desireable cards).

Its easy to envision special cards release with movies, fast food places, airlines and other product tie ins. We would anticipate Yu-Gi-Oh! to follow the trends set by other virtual pets. They are rapidly ramping up in the rest of the world (translating and localizing the game for other countries).

We can foresee:

- The use of special media in the cards (holographic cards, lenticular cards, stereo viewed cards, cards that glow in the dark, etc.) They have already issued some holographic cards.
- Smart cards - cards with imbedded chips, cards that make sounds, cards that know when they are placed near other cards, etc.
- Custom cards from third parties with issues - Others may (or probably already are) creating their own cards for introduction into Yu-Gi-Oh decks. Some cards introduced by others might promote education, health, acceptance of diversity, being kind to animals, political causes, abortion / pro life, save the whales, gun control, etc). They could be sold or distributed online for free (print off on card stock). They might even be distributed at trade shows.
- Alternative sets of instruction that create other games using Yu-Gi-Oh cards.
- Seedier cards similar to some of those in Japan may be introduced to the U.S. by third parties.
- Online gaming - it is easy to see this game going online in various formats. Your deck could be determined by random or you can actually key in the card numbers as done in some of the Game Boy versions, or scan a UPC code on the card to keep you honest. We have already seen some online Yu-Gi-Oh card games.
- Mobile phones / wireless gaming could also be exploited.
- They may add some sort of training function to their monsters, especially the game console versions.
- Counterfeit cards and knock-off games are already out there. We would anticipate them to proliferate with the immense popularity of the game.
- Where are the girls? - Keychain virtual pets started out as a boys game, then several versions were introduced to attract the girls. They may try to increase the female crowd by the introduction of special cards, rules, special versions of the game, etc.
- Local tournaments may spread out to the "boonies" They could be ran by third parties, organizations, even city leagues trying to keep local kids off the street and out of trouble.
- Local art contests might spring up for kids to submit their Yu-Gi-Oh art for display and awards.
- Bundling special cards with everything from cell-phones to DVD purchases and movie premiers.
- When things start to slow a bit, we might see live characters (like Ronald Mc Donald) making appearances in the field. Right now they are too busy trying to meet demand.
- Commemorative decks for special occasions or to commemorate certain people or characters.
- The accessory market (pencils, lunch boxes, t-shirts, etc) will eventually be swamped.
- Its pretty easy to imagine "card like" images projects on large flat walls at kid gatherings (theme parks, youth concerts, etc). They would create a "buzz" among the kids talking about them.
- Anytime there is a big movement like Yu-Gi-Oh, there is often opposition. It ss easy to imagine an anti-Yu-Gi-Oh movement with people burning cards, banning the game from certain areas, speaking out against the game, saying it is a cult, spreading rumours about the game and the companies that make it, etc.

The bottom line is we anticipate continued and rapid diversity on all fronts. At some point in time the game will go into a declining mode, they all do. But even when it begins to go down, it will still have many followers and future generations for a market. Plus they have blazed the trail for other games in the future. Just as they built upon Pokemon, some game will build upon them.