SUMMARY

The Maxis marketing department recently studied customer expectations of Maxis Sim games. The study revealed seven descriptions of what the Maxis Sim player thought a Sim game should be. While the "Seven Points of Sim" descriptions reflect customer expectations, they are not all necessarily the ingredients for a Sim game. To understand why Sim players perceive Sim games the way they do, we can look at the key factors that make a game a "Sim".

REQUIREMENTS FOR A MAXIS SIM GAME

Dilemma

Players must always grapple with difficult decisions. In SimCity, pollution may be a problem, but there might be a strong industrial demand. In SimTower, condo-dwellers will need elevators heading down, while office workers will need elevators heading up.

Crisis

Crisis can also mean disasters. Players occasionally need to abandon long term strategy in favor of short-term success. If a fire is burning in SimCity or SimTower, players might need to destroy all their creations in the surrounding area.

Budgeting

The amount of funding a player has acts as both a limiting factor and a kind of score. Every action by the player costs money - even mistakes - and there are no refunds. "Cheats" to gain more money are the most popular cheats.

Aesthetics

Artwork is important for players to admire their creations. Also, the ability to place buildings, zones, crops, etc. in various places that may not have relevance to the Sim, fakes players into believing that their city or tower designs are "better" than other's. Finally, aesthetics are a form of reward for the player. In SimTower, an aesthetic reward for reaching the 100th floor is the ability to place a cathedral. This is akin to "winning".

Change in Rules over Time

Rule changes cause players to change their playing strategy. In SimCity, demand for Industry is high at first, but then swings to Commerce. In

SimTower, the placement of condos is important at first, but nearly irrelevant after the 3rd Star.

Visual/Graphical Feedback

A Simulator is nothing but formulae operating on a data set. The player's main interpretation of the change in data is graphical, in the form of tall buildings in SimCity, and long elevator lines in SimTower. An example failure in graphical feedback is Outpost from Sierra, where player feedback is in the form of numbers in a dialog box.

Cause & Effect are not Immediately Apparent

Because of the interleaving data sets in the simulators, players may not initially understand why certain actions have unexpected effects. One of the compelling reasons to play is to discover and understand various causes and effects.

Players are allowed to destroy their Creations

Who says there is no violence in Sim games? A favorite activity of the Sim player is to save a "masterpiece" copy of their creation, then unleash disaster after disaster, and bulldoze like crazy.