

Columbia Games

Expanding into the Spanish-Speaking World



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Columbia Games is a small internet-based business that sells wood block military and action board games. The company is based out of a small home office near Bellingham, Washington. The company promotes the sales of its games on the internet using its website, www.ColumbiaGames.com. The company offers a wide game selection ranging from historical board games to role-playing and fantasy games. Each game is created and published by Columbia Games and is sold into a niche hobby market. Currently the company operates their website in a single language, English, and markets primarily to hobbyists in the United States, Canada and various global markets. Other than a small number of distribution channels abroad, Columbia Games does not have a focused international strategy to sell their games abroad. It merely responds to international orders. During a preliminary feasibility investigation, it was deemed that large, untapped market existed in the Spanish-speaking world. It is for this reason that we have been working to develop a market entry strategy for Columbia Games in the Hispanic World, notably Iberia and the Americas.

Part One: Building a Landing Page

As the company operates primarily as an internet-based business, we felt that it would be necessary to use their pre-existing capabilities and resources as an e-business to further grow into the Hispanic market. One of the primary capabilities that Columbia Games possesses is the ability to design and implement a successful English-language website, which the company uses to sell its games. Another capability that Columbia Games possesses is the ability to market their games using web-based interface. Much of the company's marketing is done using the free press provided on the internet through venues such as www.boardgamegeek.com, a site used for the consumer evaluations of board games. Similar to this is the resource of having a pre-existing web URL and hosting space online. For these reasons, we decided to build a Spanish-language landing page. This landing page was to consist of a basic website in the Spanish language that would be used to attract the attention of Spanish-speaking consumers and direct them to the more informative English-language website. The landing page is currently uploaded to the internet and can be visited at www.ColumbiaGames.com/Espanol. In the subsequent paragraphs, we would like to describe the facets of the landing page and their importance in marketing to the Hispanic World.

We felt the necessity of an attention-grabbing slogan was imperative. Thus, at the top of the landing page, we chose to use the slogan: "¡Tu tienda por juegos de estrategia y simulación de fantasía!" This slogan literally translates as: "Your store for games of strategy and fantasy!" We felt that this slogan grabs the attention of the reader and also briefly introduces them to the concept of the website. By doing internet research, we discovered that it would also be necessary to provide the reader with a brief synopsis of what Columbia Games is. We felt that we needed a brief introduction that answered all of the questions of who, what, when, where, and how. This style of brief introduction can be seen on other vending sites such as www.cafepress.com and www.atlanticajuegos.com. The current introduction on the landing page states:

"En columbiagames.com se ofrecemos la mejor selección de juegos de mesa de buena calidad a través de la red. Especializamos en las ventas de juegos de estrategia y simulación de la fantasía. Tenemos la mejor

selección de juegos sobre las guerras históricas además de nuestra colección de juegos de fantasía medieval. En nuestra web, podrá comprar cualquier juego que quiera y tenemos la capacidad de enviar los juegos dondequiera en el mundo.”

“At columbiagames.com, we offer the best selection of board games of the best quality over the internet. We specialize in the sale of strategy and fantasy games. In addition to our collection of medieval fantasy games, we offer the best selection of historical war games. On our website, you can buy whichever game you would like and we have the capacity of shipping it anywhere in the world.”

Another feature of the landing page is an offer to play the game “Hammer of the Scotts” online for free. This is a very important feature for the landing page. In the United States, the internet has become more of a necessity rather than a luxury. As the internet is still in the introductory stages of use in many parts of the Hispanic World, the consumers accordingly use the internet more as a luxury entity. For this reason, it is important to use this type of feature to grab the attention of the Hispanic reader. Also, internet purchases are not extremely common in many parts of the Hispanic world and if the consumer has a chance to play the game before he/she buys it, they may be more apt to make the decision to buy it.

On the main landing page, there is a section devoted solely to the games offered by the company. This section is broken down into three subsections, each devoted to a category of game: historical war games, Harn and Wizard Kings. Each subsection has a short introduction and the links direct the reader to the English-language section for further elaboration about the number of games and types of games offered.

The final notable feature on the landing page is the static horizontal navigation bar at the top of the page. The navigation bar links the reader to four different sections: Quienes Somos (About Us), Ofertas Especiales (Special Offers), Preguntas Frecuentes (FAQ’s) and Contáctanos (Contact Us). We felt the necessity of an “About Us” section imperative. If the reader were even slightly confused about the nature of Columbia Games, they would simply have to click on the “About Us” button to be directed to a section that fully describes the company. The “Special Offers” section is important because it will attract the readers’ attention and keep them interested in the games that

Columbia Games offers. We felt that an FAQ section would greatly help the reader in understanding the fundamental questions of who, what, when, where and how. We brainstormed possible questions that readers might have and then formulated answers, posting them in FAQ form. The final button on the static navigation bar is the “Contact Us” button. This button links the Spanish-speaking reader directly to the “Contact Us” page on the English-language site.

Part Two: Critiquing the Landing Page

Although the landing page is up and running and quite aesthetically pleasing, we feel that there are some differences that could be made to make the page more oriented toward the Hispanic consumer. Phase two describes was in which Columbia Games can improve the Spanish-language landing page to conform more easily to the interests and tastes of consumers in the Hispanic World.

In order to fully understand much of the consumer tastes in the Hispanic World, it is first necessary to look at the current internet paradigms in the United States. In the United States, the current paradigm for internet design seems to follow what the consultants at www.ecshelpdesk.com refer to as the “97% of nothing paradigm.” What this paradigm means is that, on US websites that are considered “good” by web designers, the most notable feature is literally nothing. Good examples of websites that conform to this paradigm are www.google.com and www.microsoft.com. Looking at Microsoft’s website, it is possible to note that although there is very little white space, there is very little content on the homepage as well. This is due to the fact that in the United States, a preferred website is designed to look like a tall tree if all the links were mapped out graphically. However, in other parts of the world, such as the hispanosphere, “good” websites are designed to function like short shrubs rather than tall trees. That is, in the Hispanic World, websites are designed to be full of links on the first page and less links on subsequent pages. It is possible to see this web layout by visiting various Spanish-language websites such as www.elmundo.es or www.jornada.unam.mx. For a graphical example of the idea of website design trees, please see Appendix One.

Therefore, with this paradigm in mind, it is easier to look at the landing page to make suggestions about the layout. Currently on the landing page, there are pictures of three games; each game serves as a link on the English-language site. If Columbia Games were to conform to the “short shrub” paradigm of web design in the Hispanic World, the pictures of every game could be placed on the landing page. This would not confuse the Hispanic reader; it would actually make the reader feel more comfortable. Rather than

providing a few links on the landing page to serve many games, Columbia Games should have many links on the landing page that serve few subsequent pages.

After reviewing the information in the brief information summary of the company on the main landing page, it has come to our attention that the summary should be shorter on the main landing page. We think that the middle sentence should be removed due to the fact that the games are described more in-depth directly below the informational summary. It may also be important to allude to the Spanish-speaking reader that some of the information on the site is in English. A recommendation for the new informational summary should look something like this:

“En ColumbiaGames.com se ofrecemos la mejor selección de juegos de mesa de buena calidad a través de la red con mucha información en español además de la información en inglés. En nuestra web, podrá comprar cualquier juego que quiera y tenemos la capacidad de enviar los juegos dondequiera en el mundo.”

“At www.ColumbiaGames.com we offer the best selection of board games of good quality over the internet with much information in Spanish in addition to our information in English. On our website, you can buy whichever game you would like and we have the capacity of shipping it anywhere in the world.”

The information that is deleted from the informational summary should be placed in the “About Us” section. We think that there should also be more information placed in the “About Us” section. As it is a novelty that Columbia Games creates and Publisher its own games, this should be explained in the “About Us” section. One final suggestion for that section is that it should have a link to the Preguntas Frecuentes (FAQ) page.

There are just a few more suggestions for the landing page. We think that the offer to play Hammer of the Scots online for free should be flashier with brighter colors and animation. This would attract the attention of the Hispanic reader. When the special offers section is clicked on, it should prompt a special offer. The discount should be offered in Spanish and have a discount code that they use at time of purchase. And finally, we think that there should be a link on the Spanish-language landing page to the English home. That way, a Spanish-speaking user comfortable in using English, could just jump to the English page for easy navigational purposes.

Part Three: Differentiating Markets

Due to the fact that the Hispanic World is very large—stretching from Iberia into Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas—we feel that in order to capture full potential of the market, it would be necessary to differentiate the landing page to suit the needs of several Hispanic markets. We felt the best way to do this would be to create three similar, but differentiated, landing pages—one each for Spain, Mexico and Argentina (the three largest Spanish-speaking single-country markets). This would be a simple task, as much of the language need not be changed. Many of the language differences in Spanish are highly regional and for this reason, most official or widespread documents are written in Castellano, the most basic form of Spanish from central Spain. The major language differences between Mexico, Spain and Argentina are their usages of pronouns, which for most intent and purpose does not concern Columbia Games. All pronouns used in the landing page are basic pronouns accepted in all Spanish-speaking countries.

A benefit of doing this is that the consumers in each single-country or regional market would feel more comfortable navigating the landing page. Another benefit lies in the fact that by having different landing pages, Columbia Games can track where in the Hispanic World its customers are coming from. For example, if the Argentine and Spanish landing pages are getting plenty of hits and the Mexican landing page is getting very few, it may be an indicator that the company needs to improve its marketing in Mexico.

Mexicans are very nationalistic and are thus more responsive to national symbols such as the eagle and serpent of their flag. For this reason it may be beneficial to design a landing page that uses a green and red color scheme that represent Mexico's national colors. Mexicans are also more in-touch with their indigenous roots and for this reason, there is much usage of indigenous symbols in contemporary Mexican life. For example, www.jornada.unam.mx uses an Aztec symbol on their website to evoke national pride. Columbia Games could use similar designs to attract the attention of Mexican consumers. In Argentina, unlike in Mexico, the people are very in-touch with their European heritage. Therefore, the use of indigenous symbols would not evoke the same type of feelings as in Mexico.

In Argentina, unlike in Mexico, the people are very in-touch with their European heritage. Therefore, the use of indigenous symbols would not evoke the same type of feelings as in Mexico. The Argentine people, however, are extremely nationalistic. Many Argentine websites use a blue and yellow color scheme representing the national colors of Argentina. This can be viewed at www.eldiariodeparana.com.ar and www.lanacion.com.ar. Argentineans also regard themselves as very cultured and elegant. For this reason, Columbia Games could create a simpler, elegant design on the Argentine landing page. Argentineans and most South Americans are extremely familiar with the War of Triple Alliance. There are still harsh feelings felt among social groups in South America as a result of this war. One idea would be to create a board game with a War of Triple Alliance theme. This would grab the attention of not only consumers in Argentina, but Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil as well.

The Spanish landing page would be more difficult to differentiate. The Iberian Peninsula is a very diverse place with many languages, heritages and consumer tastes. Spanish people are more proud of the Comunidad Autonomia in which they live rather than in the Spanish Union itself. However, a simple Spanish flag could suffice at the top of the landing page to let the Spanish users know that they have been differentiated from other Spanish-speaking countries. The “About Us” section on the Spanish landing page could have a simple apology that laments the inability to translate the page into Basque, Catalan or Galician. This would let the Spanish readers know that the company recognizes the cultural and language differences even though it does not have the capacity to offer services in these distinct languages.

Part Four: Analyzing Strategy

There are many sources available that provide for independent research for small businesses, e-commerce and how to make them work in-tandem successfully. We found information from several case studies that Columbia Games might find useful.

✓ Customer Preferences

In e-commerce, some factors that customers rank as high priority are price, delivery time, reliability (delivery and product matching), and security of data transfer.

As for price, this pertains to a several things: shipping and transfer costs as well as retail costs. International customers are used to paying high prices for shipping, which is why many customers will bundle products from retailers when they buy – less per item charge. Bundling products, rather than buying single items, provides for shipping efficiencies and saves money. The second part of cost is the retail costs. When buying products from abroad, it's important to consider exchange rate and shipping costs in comparison to retail price. Customers won't rationalize buying a product that will cost \$40 retail and then pay \$30 shipping, then take into consideration exchange rate – the customer ends up paying twice the amount of the retail price.

Delivery time and reliability of delivery are also important e-commerce factors to customers. As for delivery time, if customers don't expect to get products for several weeks, USPS and FedEx are sufficient carriers. However, if you have customers that are more demanding, UPS Worldwide Express and Worldwide Expedite, while more expensive, provide for rushed shipment and technologically advanced tracking measures to ensure reliability. The services of these carriers may be something to consider if Columbia Games returns to retailing with hobby stores or distributors when they expand into new markets.

Security of data transfer is often more of an issue in markets where the internet is newer and not as wide spread, such as Latin America. While the internet is expanding faster and becoming safer in Latin America, Business to Business commerce and information transfer is often more secure and safe, as businesses have more resources to protect their

and customer's information. Business to Consumer e-commerce does not provide for the same level of protection in areas where e-commerce is a newer occurrence.

✓ Business Preferences

Success factors that businesses rate as critical in the success of e-commerce include both internal and external business environment factors. Internal factors seem to be primarily associated with measurable and incremental changes to the business. This includes changes to the store "shop front". Continually updating and editing websites is crucial to customer satisfaction. If websites are hard to traverse, customers will get frustrated and often won't be return buyers.

Allocating time and resources wisely is an imperative factor for small businesses. Time and resources are already spread thin, so if resources are not allocated to business units properly, they will often be spent on non-value added activities. It is also important to remember that the business bottom line is profitability. A crucial business activity that many internet based firms were found to have focused too much on, was trying to get more market share and alienating profit. Trying to expand into markets too fast and too much can be a non-value added activity and can harm profitability.

Changing business practices depending on retail market is also imperative to internet sales success. E-commerce is not a direct transfer from "brick and mortar" activities to "brick and click" practices. More planning, technological expertise, e-commerce safety concern, marketing and customer service are critical to an e-business, as your website represents who you are. If there are problems with your website, aesthetically or with information security, those problems will transfer to the customer's opinion of the business.

Knowing the customer's demographics, buying patterns, demand, advertising appropriateness, etc. is imperative to effective and efficient customer service. The more feedback you can get from your customers, the easier it is to continually produce new and innovative products as well as renew the business structure and strategy.

External factors which need to be ascertained include business environment changes, both with entering a new market and changes to market in which the business is currently present. Building and maintaining relationships with suppliers, delivery systems and retailers is also a crucial element – don't burn bridges.

Other failure factors, which Columbia Games already has an advantage over include: firm size, no college educated employees, low retention rate for employees, no control over finances, younger firm age and sporadic constituencies.

More than anything else, continual analysis, revision and improvement to business activities, the website, customer demographics and service will be some of the biggest challenges to an e-business, but will be key in succeeding in the e-commerce world.

✓ Administrative Heritage: Where Columbia Games has been and gone

Starting off as a brick and mortar retailer in an extremely niche market means that Columbia Games has dealt with volatile markets since their establishment in the 1970's. They decided to move the business to the States in the 1990's as the mom and pop hobby stores started to lose popularity, and because ninety-percent their business came from the U.S.

Columbia Games originated as a brick and mortar hobby store business and as their sales expanded in the years after they were established, they began to work with distributors in Europe, Australia and Asia. The onset of e-commerce led them to expand their brick and mortar establishment to brick and click retailers as well. But some business relationships began to deteriorate with distributors and stores, so in 2003 Columbia Games decided to go 100% mail order and e-commerce. This strategy worked for a while, but many of their customers preferred personal relationship commerce over the hassles of the mail order, e-commerce. In 2005, Columbia Games added the distributor retail market to their business activities again, and has been more successful this time, as they have chosen their distributors carefully.

Today, Columbia Games is working hard to react to the changing hobby market and to provide solutions for their customers hobby needs. E-commerce has made it easier for Columbia Games to expand their visibility as they now advertise and sell games on Amazon and to a lesser extent EBay. The distributors have helped provide service to their international customers as well.

Columbia Games is now looking to expand into new markets, specifically Latin America. With this in mind, there are several strategies for how they can expand their visibility and sales in the new markets.

✓ Specifically, Columbia Games

Fortunately, in such a small business (~3 full-time employees), it is easier to articulate expectations and values. One suggestion along these lines would be to decide what the best way is for Columbia Games to enter Latin America or any new market in the future. Do they want to stick with e-commerce advertising, do they want to get in contact with local hobby stores and market/sell their product through them or, do they want to find a distributor to represent them. The answer to this question will most likely depend on the market.

For example, in Latin America, private internet access is not as wide spread and hobby store contacts or finding a distributor may be the best strategies. In Asia, however, especially Japan, there is a huge internet and local based hobby market. In Asia, Columbia Games could probably focus on e-commerce and be more successful than using a distributor. Regardless, Columbia Games should pin-point their strategy before entering a market, then identify measurements of the success of that strategy to ensure their attaining goals.

This also insinuates that Columbia Games will be thinking globally and do research on different markets before entering them. It is important to understand the culture, expectations and retail markets in different regions as they vary depending on culture and region. Product, strategy and relationships with suppliers and delivery systems must also

be varied depending on the markets. Columbia Games has an extensive database with information of their customers, however, discovering information about the people who are not yet their customers is also important.

The more web presence you have, the greater your credibility and ability to gather feedback from customers becomes. The more you can organize and streamline customer, and potential customer feedback, the better you will be at responding to their needs.

Part Five: Preventing Myopia—Looking at Other Markets

We decided to look into other markets for Columbia Games to continue to move to. Four markets were selected; three of them are English speaking, and the fourth is Japan. We have selected the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan to move to next. This was done for two main reasons; first Columbia Games speaks English very well and will therefore have an easier time developing the landing pages. Also, Japan fits a lot of the requirements listed below and is a large market.

The general consensus is that gamers across the world fit a certain profile. This profile includes a higher level of income, a college education, and they must have a certain amount of free time. Along with that they must use the internet because of the current marketing strategy. To meet these requirements the country that is being targeted should have a relatively high GDP per capita; a fairly large population, and a good education system.

The UK has a GDP per capita of \$30,900 and 38 million internet users. This means that there are a lot of people that are making pretty good money. Also, the UK has quite a few good universities producing a lot of the types of people that will be targeted. The UK also seems to have a lot of interest in games of all types. Shops, clubs, and gamers can be found very easy searching on the internet for them. The handout has a couple such websites that may be a good starting point. Australia and New Zealand were the next two picked.

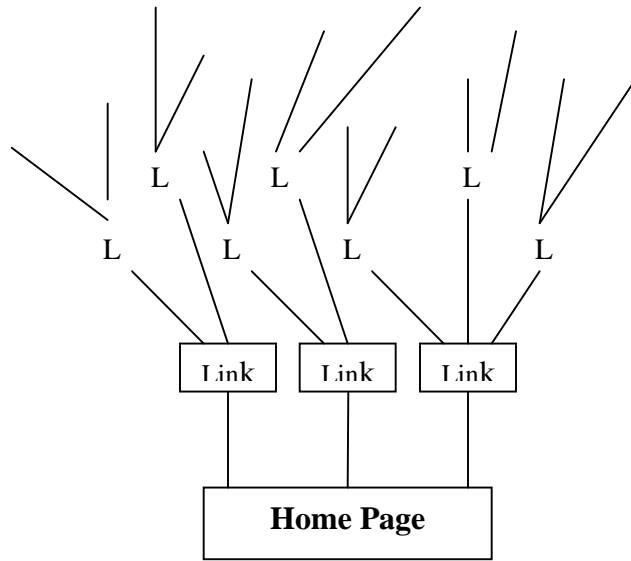
Australia and New Zealand are two countries that were once part of the UK and therefore share some of the same preferences as the UK. Looking into these countries a little more it is apparent that board games are one of these likes. Australia and New Zealand both meet the criteria for being a perspective market focus. With GDPs per capita of \$32,000 and \$24,000 respectively they both have plenty of income. They both speak English and have a good university system. Along with these good demographics a strong interest in gaming exists in these countries. New Zealand has a website <http://www.pixelpark.co.nz> that has a very large listing of games, gamers, clubs, and shops. This would be a strong

lead into these countries. Now stepping out of the Anglo sphere of influence one more market is on the list.

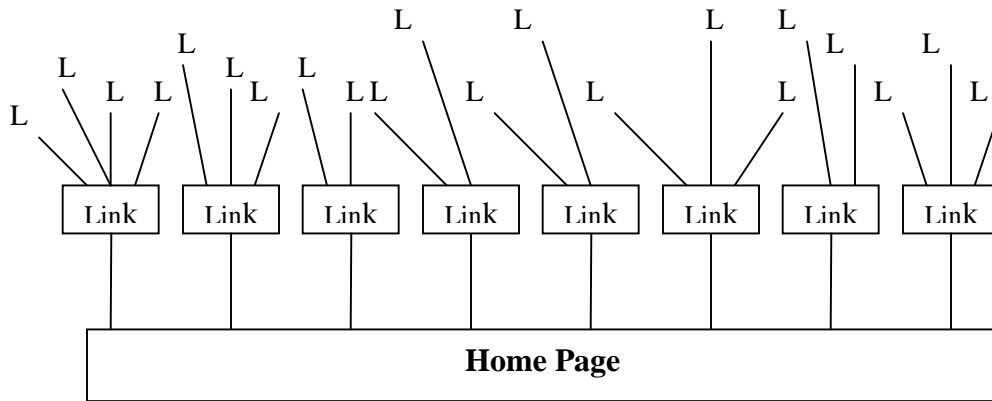
Japan is the fourth recommendation for alternative markets. It is selected because it fits all the criteria for a market, plus it is very well established economically and would therefore be a safe place to market to. It has a GDP per capita of \$30,400 which is one of the highest in the world. Also, it has a large population using the internet with 86 million internet users. This is very important again because all the current marketing is being done through the internet. One website in particular that may be of interest is <http://www.atouchofsensai.com/wargames/english.html> where there are 65 clubs and gaming shops registered. There seems to be a very large gaming culture in Japan and one study done by STAT USA concluded that there is 10m hobbyists in Japan spending \$3.2 billion a year. For all these reasons this seems to be a very good potential market.

Appendix One
Website design Mapping

US Websites (“Tall Trees”)



Hispanic Websites (“Bushy Shrubs”)



Appendix Two

Independent Suggestions (Andrea)

After looking at all of the independent research, and giving Columbia Games some priorities, there were still a few lingering issues that I want to reiterate.

First, I think that Grant should consider hobby stores in foreign markets, especially where the market is not e-commerce fluent. Studies show that the value of Business 2 Business commerce in Latin America greatly surpasses the Business 2 Consumer commerce.

Where there are high concentrations of people, there are often more hobby stores: hobby stores will usually be more successful when they are located in areas where there is a higher concentration of people and a bigger market – people will have more access to the internet, business commerce and post/shipping stores. This is also where people will go to do their browsing, shopping and shipping. Starting out in local retail markets, where there is a store that carries your product, infers that anyone who is interested in hobbies in that region will see your product in the stores that hobbyists frequent. Also, by shipping products in bulk (assuming the hobby stores would order many games at once to put on the shelves) this would also save in shipping costs for the producer, retailer and ultimately the customer. For international orders from individuals, you could consider retail discounts for purchasing multiple games, which would level out the price. Also, offering more shipping carriers (UPS, USPS, FedEx, etc) and different methods of payment (pay-pal and credit cards) would give customers more options.

Once Columbia Games establishes a market and a reputation in a foreign market, they can return to their e-commerce business for that area. Columbia Games could also create an alliance or seek local representation in foreign markets through distributors.

Another option is for Columbia Games to create a catalog or informational brochures advertising their products – they can send these to hobby stores instead. Even though this strategy was not historically fruitful, it may be different in different markets. This would allow for shop owners to decide if they want to carry Columbia Games' products or would allow for customers to take information home with them and be able to look it up on their own computers at their leisure.

On the local front, I think Columbia Games could benefit from attending trade shows. Visibility and marketing are immensely important factors in the niche market that is classical hobby gaming. Columbia Games needs to do all they can to get their name out. Trade shows are also beneficial to see what other products are available and who their competition would be.

One way they could find out about these trade shows, among many other things, is through the U.S. Commercial Service with the Department of Commerce. Export.gov could provide them with a lot of resources and information about potential markets (FYI: information about international hobby markets, currently en-route).

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The Seattle U.S. Export Assistance Center (USEAC), a partnership of the Small Business Administration, the Export Finance Assistance Center of Washington (EFACW), and the U.S. Commercial Service

Appendix Three Independent Suggestions (Owen)

I have noticed, by working on projects in the past, that there are certain trends in China that make it a market worth looking into for Columbia Games. Although China is a developing economy, the economy is growing extremely rapidly. One point to make is that although China's GDP per capita is a mere \$5,000 US (PPP)*, this does not mean that *all consumers* in China make only \$5,000 (PPP). This figure is only an average, which means that there is a number of consumers in the country which make enough money to purchase luxury goods such as the games offered by Columbia Games. With a population of over 1.3 billion, this consumer group could actually be quite large. Another point concerning China is their internet penetration rates. According to the Nielsen//NetRatings,** internet penetration in China is only nine-percent, which means only nine-percent of the population has access to the internet. However, with a population of 1.3 billion, nine-percent is a market of 120 million—a market the size of Germany and Canada combined!

*Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) refers to the buying power of the Chinese GDP per capita. Source: CIA World Factbook

**Source: Internet World Statistics <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm#asia>