

Happy Aquarium Review

Game Name: *Happy Aquarium*.

Game Platform: Facebook.

Game Overview

Happy Aquarium is a Facebook game created by CrowdStar in which the player has a virtual tank of fish. The player can choose to furnish the aquarium with a variety of fish as well as customize it to his or her likings with various coral and other tank decorations. The player can feed the fish when they are hungry, clean the tank when it is dirty, and mate the fish to create new ones. As the player does these actions, he or she levels up and unlocks more options, including new breeds of fish, different decorations, and the ability to have multiple tanks. New things have been added to the game such as achievements, a treasure hunt mini-game, and a fish training mini-game.

What did this game do that was different from its predecessors?

I'm not aware of any predecessors that *Happy Aquarium* may have. Additionally, I don't personally know of any non-Facebook games whose main gameplay feature is maintaining an aquarium. I know that *Happy Aquarium* is a predecessor for Zynga's *FishVille*, which features similar mechanics but is much more popular.

Favorite Part about the Game (and why).

There are a couple of things that the game did well. The interface is very straight forward. There's nothing to get confused about in terms of what there is to do and how to do it. All of the game information, such as level, progress, money, and whatever else, is displayed clearly at the top. It definitely makes itself understandable and usable by the casual market, who it was clearly intended to appeal to.

Also, the game features a lot of thematically suitable graphics in it. The art felt bright and cheerful--fully supporting the idea of a happy aquarium, as the title suggests. The artists definitely spent some time trying to make the artwork look and feel a certain way to portray the cute, gleeful theme that is present in the game. The colors throughout the art and UI are all vibrant without being too obnoxious or painful on the eyes. The customizations are also a benefit to the game. It's nice being able to have the option to design the tank and have it look a certain way. It's better than having a plain aquarium or one that was pre-decorated.

Least Favorite Part about the Game (and why).

Perhaps my least favorite part of the game was the imbalance of leveling up. It's part of the reason why I became disinterested in the game myself. Upon reaching level 30 of the game, I found that leveling up suddenly felt like much more of a climb. The previous 20 or so levels had been very easy to get through. It wasn't like a steady incline, as it should have been.

Also, the new mini-game additions to the game didn't really add to the gameplay very much and felt out of place compared to the main part of the game's experience. It was very shallow, basic flash game type of action, simply clicking and moving the mouse to dodge or catch things. For the casual market, this probably works as a mildly entertaining way for the player to spend their time on the game. Although, some players may find that part of the game insultingly easy to the point of boredom and apathy.

How would you change the game to make it better?

If I were to make some decisions on how to better the gameplay satisfaction, I would probably fix the issue with the uneven leveling up by increasing the amount of experience gained from mating the more expensive fish, which can only be purchased at higher levels. That way, the player doesn't feel like he or she has hit a wall. Since the casual gamers like their rewards quick, it would do well to decrease the amount of time and effort needed for leveling up. Players will feel more motivated to play that way.

Secondly, I would probably just remove the mini-games. They have the potential to confuse new players into thinking that those are critical parts of the gameplay, when they're truly not. As I said before, they also don't add anything significant to the aquarium and seem to be there to just waste time. If the first problem with leveling up was fixed, gamers would probably spend more time playing the actual game, making the mini-game gimmicks even more unnecessary.