Cultural Analysis

Razer USA Ltd.: For Gamers. By Gamers.

Michele Zorrilla

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Razer: For Gamers. By Gamers.

**Introduction**

Since their onset 40 years ago, video games have been a growing industry worldwide. Appealing to every age group, they span multiple genres and immerse players in fantastic storylines. Video games debuted to the masses with the arcade boom in the 1970s, featuring games like *Pong* and *Space Invaders*, before turning to consoles, computers, and handhelds as the platforms of choice starting in the 1980s continuing through today (Online Education, 2011). The advent of the Internet allowed video gamers to span time and distance playing games like *Doom 2* and *Quake*, and people’s passions for video games brought them together for tournaments such as Deathmatch ’95 and Red Annihilation (Millington, 2005a, 2005b). It is in this industry that Razer USA Ltd. found, and created, its niche: providing high-end gaming peripherals to gamers across the world.

This cultural analysis focuses on the themes inherent in Razer through an exploration of the organization’s website and social networking outlets. The company’s history and mission are provided as background. A working definition of culture precedes the themes and provides the basis for this analysis. Last, the author reflects on the process of this analysis.

**The History and Mission of Razer**

In 1998, Razer was founded in San Francisco, California by Min-Liang Tan, Robert "Razerguy" Krakoff, and other designers, gamers, and engineers. Tan began as the company's lead designer and in-house gamer; Krakoff started as the General Manager. Their first product, the Razer Boomslang, was introduced as the world’s first gaming mouse and created their niche market of high-end gaming peripherals. The early 2000s were punctuated by large struggles and successes: the company’s sponsoring of pro-gamers and the creation of eSports worldwide, and their financial struggles due to the bursting of the dot com bubble combined with the loss of their
manufacturing plants and inventory in the wake of a devastating earthquake in Taiwan. Razer continued to release gaming mice and introduced a new gaming peripheral, gaming grade optical surfaces (mouse mats), in 2003. The following year, the company’s financial troubles drove off upper management; this left Min-Liang Tan and Robert "Razerguy" Krakoff to step up to the plate, and "[f]or the first time ever, the gamers [were] in charge of their own destiny" (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, Interactive Timeline). Krakoff assumed the position of President, and Tan was appointed Creative Director. Under new management, Razer released three new products throughout the next year. In light of new products' success, 2005 marked a turning point. The company confirmed a new philosophy, For Gamers. By Gamers, and the board of directors appointed Min-Liang Tan as CEO and Creative Director. Through the latter half of the 2000s to present day, Razer continued to release high end gaming products, expand their product base through in-house research and development, collaborate with other companies (such as Microsoft and Belkin) to produce licensed gaming products, and sponsor eSports worldwide. Today, the company employs over 300 people with offices in seven cities across the world, including San Francisco, Hamburg, Seoul, Shanghai, and Singapore (see appendix for excerpts from interactive timeline).

As seen on their website, Razer’s mission today is the same as it was when the company was founded in 1998, “Our vision from the very beginning was to be the world’s greatest gaming brand and we’ve set out to achieve that by designing the best gaming products that any gamer has ever seen” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, para. 3). They pride themselves on in-house research and development, collaboration with and feedback from professional gamers, and not releasing a product until it has undergone extensive testing and design. Their community focus is expressed through their pioneering of and continued support for the worldwide eSports movement by
sponsoring eSports athletes, teams, and tournaments; these same athletes are the ones Razer uses to beta-test their products. While not athletes in the traditional physical sense, eSports athletes may represent themselves as individuals or in teams at organized tournaments and other competitions. eSports athletes often receive sponsorships that may include apparel, tournament and transportation fees, and even gaming salaries (Razer USA Ltd., 2011c). Every decision, move, and product the company makes is based on their 2005 philosophy, For Gamers. By Gamers.

**Definition of Culture**

As video games have grown, they have transformed from a favorite pastime to a way of life for many. They’ve become more popular and pervasive than movies in 2006 and even music in 2009, as noted by Min-Liang Tan in his interview with NewsAsia (Razer USA Ltd., 2010). Razer and its members are a prime example of gaming as life and lifestyle. Not only do they create products for high-end, competitive gaming, but they work with gamers and their workers are gamers. They game to live and live to game, as described in their philosophy, For Gamers. By Gamers, and as mentioned on their Why work at Razer? page (Razer USA Ltd., 2011f). Culture, then, for Razer USA Ltd. is well defined by Schwartz & Davis (1981) as “...a pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organization’s members” (cited in Modaff, Butler, & Dewine, 2011, p. 93).

With this definition of culture also comes two root metaphors lived by Razer, the team and the cult. The Careers section of their website invites a user to Meet the Razer team (Razer USA Ltd., 2011e) while they sign off their About Razer section with “Team Razer” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a). They have a great focus on working with one another in the organization and with other gamers (eSports athletes) on product development worldwide, denoted by their worldwide
offices and their own description as a “Global Team” as an answer to *Why work at Razer?* (Razer USA Ltd., 2011f). The team metaphor extends past the employees of Razer to their sponsorship in eSports. An entire section of their website is dedicated to *Team Razer* and the athletes and competitive teams that they sponsor, providing player bios, interviews, pictures, and awards (Razer USA Ltd., 2011d). The same section of the site includes an application to *Join Team Razer* by applying for sponsorship (Razer USA Ltd., 2011d).

While the team metaphor is reserved for members of the organization, such as employees and eSports athletes, the cult metaphor is used for fans and followers. If a person seeks to be a part of Razer’s organization but doesn’t have the means or ability to join the Razer teams, the company welcomes them as part of the Cult of Razer where members are kept up to date with the cult blog and access to the various social networking sites. The idea of the cult exemplifies gaming as a lifestyle because they espouse living out one’s values rather than attending to them. Razer’s Community section is headed *Cult of Razer* and their blog provides members with updates regarding eSports athletes sponsored by Razer, conventions that Razer is attending, and new product videos (Razer USA Ltd., 2011b).

Razer’s lived culture and team/cult metaphors provide the backbone for the organization. The themes inherent in the company stem from its culture and metaphors and will be outlined in the following section. Each theme was developed based on textual analysis from Razer’s *About Razer* page (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a) and is supported by Razer’s Twitter (http://twitter.com/#!/CultOfRazer) and Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/razer?ref=ts) postings.
For Gamers. By Gamers.

Razer’s philosophy is not only an espoused value, but it also represents the company’s lived culture and first theme. Textual analysis resulted in 120 instances of the word “game” in various iterations (gaming, gamers, pro-gamer, gameplan, etc.). While this is not as many as two of Razer’s other themes, Competitiveness and Research & Design, only one word was included in its analysis; game titles and lingo were excluded. Comparatively, the other themes include 20 to 30 words and phrases that represent them. This many instances of a single word compared to 20 or 30 possible words is significant in and of itself – it demonstrates how gaming undergirds Razer’s identity and how the other three themes are connected. Their philosophy itself is found not only on their website, but an entire post was dedicated to its translation into other languages on Facebook (Razer, 2011, Nov. 10), demonstrating the company’s dedication to gaming.

Immediate support for Razer’s philosophy is found in the company’s two foremost heroes, CEO Min-Liang Tan and President Robert “Razerguy” Krakoff. They are featured on Razer’s About Razer page (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a) in both biography format and within the interactive timeline that details the company’s founding, struggles, and successes after the two stepped into upper management. Tan is referred to as Razer’s “Chief Gamer,” as seen on his own Twitter account ([http://twitter.com/#!/minliangtan](http://twitter.com/#!/minliangtan)) and the company store’s Twitter account (RazerStore, 2011, Nov. 14). Tan exemplifies the For Gamers. By Gamers. lifestyle through his dedication to gaming hardware design by “obsessively iterating the smallest details” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, Personalities) and his Twitter posts, such as being “…half tempted to call in sick for G-Star in Korea to play Skyrim instead” (Minliangtan, 2011, Nov. 7). Krakoff’s bio describes him as “…playing World of Warcraft way too much” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, Personalities); elsewhere on the same page, his number of characters is mentioned followed by the statement,
“he will even take you on a raid [in World of Warcraft] in the middle of the work day” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, About Razer).

Tan and Krakoff aren’t the only gamers described as members of Team Razer. Razer employees, including their scientists and engineers, game at all levels from casual to tournament (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a; 2011f). Pro-gamers are consulted for feedback and beta-testing of products (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a). An entire page on Razer’s website is dedicated to their sponsored eSports athletes (Razer USA Ltd., 2011d) with many of them being featured via Twitter and Facebook updates or shared posts (Razer, 2011, Oct. 22; CultOfRazer, 2011, Nov. 26; Team SlayerS, 2011, Oct. 29; see appendix for individual posts). Team Razer even signed up for a 24-hour gaming charity marathon with the statement “What is gaming marathon? What is 24 hours? What is sleep? We don't know what these words mean, we won't bother looking them up in a dictionary. We already game for extended periods of time, so much so that our bodies are mere husks of our former selves, our souls more connected to our PCs than our physical bodies” (Children’s Miracle Network Hospitals, 2011; see appendix for full post).

**Competitiveness**

Razer’s mission statement of being the “world’s greatest gaming brand” by providing high-end gaming products to gamers worldwide lends itself to the second theme of competitiveness (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, para.3). Including words such as “leading”, “dominance”, and “first”, textual analysis revealed 131 instances of competitive vocabulary. Razer “pioneered the eSports movement with the world’s first $100k tournament” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, para. 8), created the “world’s first laser gaming mouse” (Razer USA Ltd. 2011a, Interactive Timeline), and solidified their “dominance in the gaming audio space…with the launch of the Razer Megalodon” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, Interactive Timeline). The company
seeks to be the best and the first with their products and will only develop a product that “[enhances] the gamers [sic] experience in their chosen game” (Sahinovic, 2008, July 30). As seen in an interview with Krakoff, “It is crucial that we own the mouse, mouse surface, keyboard and audio categories before we expand too far and too fast. Those categories are crucial in providing gamers with an edge in their game” (Tairi, 2008, Mar. 11). Razer’s focus on internal research & design and outside collaboration attribute to their competitiveness, “[separating them] from the pack….That way all the OEM makers and copycats have to constantly play catch-up” (Sahinovic, 2008, July 30). Validation and confirmation of Razer’s competitiveness comes in the form of numerous awards for their hardware products, such as the Razer Switchblade receiving the T3 Innovation of the Year (Razer|TechnoKat, 2011) and the Razer Blade receiving “Best of Innovations Honoree for Gaming Hardware and Accessories at CES 2012” (CultOfRazer, 2011, Nov. 10).

Besides their competition in the hardware market, Razer strives to be the best through its sponsored eSports athletes. One of the requirements to join Team Razer is to “have placed in top 3 positions in at least 3 live events over the past year” because “winning is in our blood” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011c, para. 6-7). This requirement is supported through athletes featured on their social networking sites such as SlayerS MMA, October champion of the Global StarCraft II League (Razer, 2011, Oct. 22), and Cypher and Av3k, 1st and 3rd place finishers at DreamHack’s 2011 QuakeLive tournament (CultOfRazer, 2011, Nov. 26). The company also promotes competitiveness in its followers, offering them chances at tournament invitations through online contests (Razer, 2011, Nov. 3) and annual votes for their favorite Razer teams (Razer, 2011, Nov. 23).
Research and Design

Razer’s third theme, research and design, has been a key element from its inception. As mentioned in their mission statement, their route to being the world’s leading gaming brand is by “designing the best gaming products any gamer has ever seen” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, para. 3). Identifying words such as “technology”, “precision”, and “proprietary”, textual analysis found 148 occurrences that related to this theme. Razer prides itself on obsessive, extensive research and design before they will release a product. Starting in 1998, their first few product launches focused on gaming mice and included only one other gaming peripheral, a mousemat, through 2006 (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, Interactive Timeline). Since 2006, they have continued to release mice along with mousemats, keyboards, audio equipment, and console peripherals. This slow expansion into other hardware peripherals illustrates Razer’s dedication to extensive design, testing, and redesign, and is echoed by CEO Min-Liang Tan. Tan’s bio “…describes his design vision as ‘obsessively iterating the smallest details’” and focuses on “…extensive experiments in materials, production and tooling processes” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, Personalities). On his birthday, Tan was commended as “…the man who lives and breathes Razer’s design, technology philosophies and who has continuously pushed the team of scientists and engineers over at Razer – HARD – to create kickass gaming gear for gamers worldwide” (Razer, 2011, Nov. 5). One research and design example cited on Razer’s Interactive Timeline is the Razer Mamba wireless gaming mouse that went through “…close to 10 years of development…” and had “…over 80 models and 3 versions in mass production phased before being axed each time” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a). This focus on research and design has paid off in the form of innovation awards (as mentioned under the theme of competitiveness), their features becoming industry standards.
(Razer, 2011, Oct. 18), and their technology “[proving] to be generations ahead of other potential copycats” (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, *Interactive Timeline*).

**Collaboration**

The fourth theme, collaboration, has been built into the company’s foundation considering that its founders and employees are all gamers. From the beginning, they have espoused working with pro-gamers testing, feedback, and eSports sponsorships and tournaments (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a). However, in some ways, collaboration can be seen as Razer’s youngest theme because of its latest iteration, working with outside companies to co-develop products. Reflecting this, textual analysis discovered 63 instances of collaborative words and phrases, almost or less than half of the other three themes. The disparity is due to this theme’s young age, with words and phrases such as “co-develop”, “in conjunction with”, and other company names (Belkin, Microsoft, etc.) not appearing with much frequency on the company’s *Interactive Timeline* until 2006, eight years after Razer was founded. Their first foray into collaboration resulted in the successful launch of Microsoft’s first gaming mouse and was extended to include a gaming keyboard. Since their initial partnership, Razer has collaborated with between one and three outside companies a year to develop gaming hardware peripherals (Razer USA Ltd., 2011a, *Interactive Timeline*). Various interviews describe these high-profile partnerships as honors and providing the company with “street cred” (Sahinovic, 2008, July 30; Badit, 2008, Oct. 7).

Certain products lines have been developed by Razer in conjunction with game developers and other companies (rather than hardware developers such as Belkin) for certain games, such as *Star Wars: The Old Republic* and *StarCraft II*, and movie franchises, such as *Tron Legacy* and *Transformers*. These peripherals, particularly those designed for a specific game, contribute to
Razer’s theme of competitiveness by providing “…gamers an unrivalled advantage in the game thanks to the synergy between the game and the peripherals….All their features will let [the player] feel the game as it’s meant to be” (Sacco, 2011, Aug. 15, para. 6).

Besides collaborating to create gaming peripherals, this theme is supported through Razer’s attendance at various conventions, festivals, and tournaments. The Cult of Razer blog includes video coverage from recent events such as the company Blizzard Entertainment’s BlizzCon, the game MineCraft’s MineCon, and the digital festival DreamHack (Razer USA Ltd., 2011b). At both BlizzCon and DreamHack, Razer’s videos were hosted by pro-gamer Athene, representing the company’s themes of For Gamers. By Gamers., competitiveness, and collaboration (Razer USA Ltd., 2011b).

Reflection

One of the largest challenges presented by this cultural analysis was writing for a general audience. While the names of certain games, companies, conventions, and other aspects of gaming culture are second nature to me, a general audience only has surface knowledge. Throughout this paper, I have attempted to clarify the particular aspects of gaming culture I was discussing, but there will undoubtedly be some confusing names or references. Another challenge was the process of textual analysis. Which words should be included when analyzing for a theme? What if the same word appears multiple times, but has a nuanced meaning in each case? Do I count specific words or do I combine them into phrases? One last challenge was combatting a possible bias. I purchased my first Razer mouse in 2005, and I currently own three Razer products. Throughout my analysis, I attempted to remain objective while describing my findings, but readers may find a biased opinion. There is also the issue of the language Razer
itself uses; a theme like competition lends itself to confident and aggressive vocabulary in all aspects of representation.

**Conclusion**

In this cultural analysis, four themes were developed and supported through an examination of Razer’s website and social networking outlets: For Gamers. By Gamers., competitiveness, research and design, and collaboration. The company’s history and mission were provided as background. The cultural metaphors of the team and the cult were used as the platforms upon which Razer’s themes were developed. Finally, I reflected on the process of this cultural analysis as a whole. Through this analysis, I strove to achieve an unbiased, accurate representation of Razer USA Ltd., and I hope that this goal has been met.
References


CultOfRazer. (2011, Nov. 26). Congrats to Cypher and Av3k for bringing home 1st and 3rd place finishes at this year’s @DreamHack QuakeLive tournament. Team Razer FTW [Twitter post]. Retrieved from http://twitter.com/#!/CultOfRazer/status/140555768192708609


Appendix

1998
Min-Liang Tan and Robert "Razerguy" Krakoff meet.

Razer announces the world’s first gaming mouse, the Razer Boomslang.

1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004

Min-Liang Tan and Robert "Razerguy" Krakoff meet. Together with a group of intrepid designers, engineers and gamers, gaming history is made when Razer is founded in San Francisco, CA. Razerguy takes up the position as General Manager while Min takes up the position as lead designer and inhouse gamer.

Razer announces the world’s first gaming mouse, the Razer Boomslang. Incorporating proprietary technologies from Razer’s research laboratories, the Razer Boomslang provides precision up to five times of other conventional mice.

The Razer Boomslang takes the world by storm and creates an entire industry dedicated to high performance gaming.

2004
Razer Diamondback – the true successor to the Razer Boomslang and becomes one of the top selling gaming products of all time.

Razer’s corporate troubles finally catch up with the company and the founders struggle to revive the company’s fortunes. The professional managers have by this time all left the company and Min and Razerguy step up to run the company.

For the first time ever, the gamers are now in charge of their own destiny. Razerguy takes up the position as President and the previously inhouse gamer, Min, is appointed as Creative Director. Together, the founders seek to rebuild the company’s past glory.

The first product from the phoenix that has risen from the ashes is the Razer Diamondback. Designed by Min and launched in late 2004, it is the true successor to the Razer Boomslang and becomes one of the top selling gaming products of all time.
Following the initial success of the Razer DiamondBack, a limited edition run of the Razer DiamondBack - Plasma Edition, is released. All initial launch units are sold within the first 38 minutes and backorders start coming in all over the world.

The Razer Copperhead, the world’s first laser gaming mouse with a 2000 dpi sensor is launched in late 2005. Following the heavy success of the Razer DiamondBack, the Razer Copperhead sweeps almost every single gaming accolade in the industry.

Following the successes of the recent products and convinced that the philosophy of For Gamers, By Gamers, would be critical to the future of the company, the board of directors appoint Min-Liang Tan as CEO and Creative Director of Razer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Razer launches the Razer Vespula.</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Razer announces the Razer Onza and the Razer Chimaera.</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Razer and Science bring precise motion control to PC gaming with the Razor Sence.</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Razer welcomes south Korea gaming team, WolfMode Fox into Team Razer.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Razer expands to Shanghai, China with its second office.</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Razer and Blizzard share the official range of StarCraft® II Peripherals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Razer announces their partnership with Disney to co-develop TRON® Gaming Peripherals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Razer updates the Razer Lachesis with a brand new 5000 3.5g laser sensor and multi-color LED lighting system and shortly after, announces the Razer BlackWidow Mechanical Gaming keyboard at Gamescom 2010.</td>
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January | At CES 2010, Razer announces the first Xbox 360 licensed professional gear, the Razer Ouya professional gaming controller. At the show, the Razer Chimaera Xbox 360 headset is also announced, marking the PC gaming giant’s first foray into console gaming.

February | Razer’s support of the professional gaming community continues with the announcement of the top South Korean team, WolfMode Fox, coming under the banner of Team Razer.

March | In April, Razer’s commitment to the Chinese market is reinforced with Razer’s establishment of its first sales and marketing office for China in Shanghai.

June | Razer and Blizzard share the official range of StarCraft® II Peripherals which features the unique APM (Action per minute) lighting system which is integrated from the game directly with the software, offering gamers a completely immersive gaming experience with hardware enabled effects and custom color settings.

July | Razer announces their partnership with Disney to co-develop TRON® Gaming Peripherals which includes a gaming keyboard and mouse with the distinctive bioluminescent blue glow that is reminiscent of the film aesthetic inspired from the upcoming TRON: Legacy film complete with unique Razer and Da-Rui effects at system startup and shutdown.

August | Razer updates the Razer Lachesis, the world’s original ambidextrous gaming mouse with a Razer Precision™ 3.5g laser sensor and a customizable multi-color LED lighting system and shortly after, announces the Razer BlackWidow and the Razer BlackWidow Ultimate Mechanical gaming keyboard at Gamescom 2010 – a fully programmable gaming keyboard featuring a uniquely tactile mechanical key architecture and enhanced key form that allows gamers to type and click much faster than other mechanical keyboards in the industry.
Razer: For Gamers. By Gamers.

That's it for tonight folks. Day 1 of BlizzCon today was madness. People at the convention by 11-11:30 am for a meet, greet, and signing tomorrow with Method Guild, Select, Ret, Sen, and Sheth. See you there.

Razer

@CultOfRazer

Congrats to Cypher and Av3k for bringing home 1st and 3rd place finishes at this year's @DreamHack QuakeLive tournament. Team Razer FTW

26 Nov via Twitter for iPhone Favorite Retweet Reply

Mentioned in this Tweet

DreamHack

DreamHack is the world's largest digital festival and holds the official world record as the World's Largest LAN party in the Guinness Book of Records.
I don’t believe in superstitions.

But I did feel that there was something special about the nickname ‘Emperor of Terran’ that was given to me. Though I regularly practice over ten hours and my entire body feels like it will melt down, I hold myself up, thinking,

“I should live up to the name.”

- Lim Yo-Hwan
Greeting friends, families, loved ones, good Samaritans, and soon-to-be-destroyed zombies, we are Team Razer.

Most of us are colleagues and friends who love gaming, and certainly love stomping on zombie heads to burst them like watermelons.

When we learned of a 24-hour gaming charity marathon, hell yeah, sign us up. Because if we can do what we already do on a regular basis, but help a good cause while at it, why not?

What is gaming marathon? What is 24 hours? What is sleep? We don’t know what these words mean, we won’t bother looking them up in a dictionary. We already game for extended periods of time, so much so that our bodies are mere husks of our former selves, our souls more connected to our PCs than our physical bodies.

We’re going to seriously own up these 24 hours with the best gaming adventures in a whole myriad of games.