

Russian Tank Maker Hopes Videogame Will Help Boost Sales

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T-90 tanks like these seen in a military parade on Red Square are set to feature in the 'Armored Warfare' game.

Russia's flagging tank maker UralVagonZavod, or UVZ, is boosting its cyber-image by partnering with online video game makers, Russian media reported Monday.

UVZ, based in the Urals city of Nizhny Tagil, became the byword for blue-collar conservatism in Russia after a company worker pledged on live television in 2011 to lead his colleagues in a crackdown on anti-Kremlin protests spearheaded by young computer-savvy urbanites.

But now the state-run corporation is eyeing the same demographics it previously lambasted: UVZ will promote its brand among young audiences by getting its tanks featured in video games, the RBC.ru news website said.

UVZ's virtual tanks will debut in Mail.ru Group's localized version of the U.S.-made massively

multiplayer online, or MMO, game "Armored Warfare," the report said.

The tank maker will oversee the design and provide audio recordings of tank sounds for the game.

UVZ and Mail.ru Group did not return repeated calls for comment Monday.

Kommersant cited UVZ's executives as saying that teaming up with game developers will boost the company's brand and attract a young audience of potential military-industrial complex employees.

Game makers sometimes partner with equipment makers if a game features things like cars or airplanes, said Nikolai Baryshnikov, head of the gaming department at software company 1C.

"This is normal practice," Baryshnikov said.

1C has worked with aircraft maker Ilyushin and truck producers for its own projects, Baryshnikov said by telephone Monday.

But he dismissed media reports that 1C was actively engaged in any collaboration with UVZ.

Endorsement with UVZ will help the upcoming "Armored Warfare" take on market leader "World of Tanks," said Gevorg Akopyan, a gaming analyst who works at Russian video game magazine Igromania.

"World of Tanks" maker Wargaming.net cooperates with the Kubinka Tank Museum in the Moscow region — an iconic brand for tank lovers — and affiliation with UVZ would help Mail.ru Group redress that balance, Akopyan said.

The Belarus-made "World of Tanks" beat the mammoth "World of Warcraft" — arguably the world's best known MMO — in terms of revenue last year.

Wargaming.net has co-staged cybersport championships with UVZ since 2011, but has not featured modern tanks in its games, which are set during World War II.

Akopyan was skeptical about UVZ's declared goal of brand promotion through video games.

"People who buy games do not buy tanks," he said.

UVZ produces a range of equipment, from rolling stock to broadcast seeders, but is most famous for its tanks, including the T-72 and T-90.

The company's net profit shrunk 21 times year-on-year in 2013 to 448 million rubles (\$13 million).

UVZ has ramped up promotion efforts aimed at the general public in recent months, launching its own clothing line and holding crash courses for soldiers in tank biathlon, the Defense Ministry's own publicity project aimed at popularizing the tank forces.

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