Finding Aid to
Joel Billings' Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) Papers

Summary Information

Title: Joel Billings' Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) papers
Creator: Joel Billings (primary)
ID: 112.1517
Date: 1976-2001 (inclusive); 1979-1996 (bulk)
Extent: 1.25 linear feet
Language: The materials in this collection are in English.
Abstract: Joel Billings' Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) papers are a compilation of corporate records from Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI). The bulk of the materials are dated between 1979 and 1996.
Repository:

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

Administrative Information

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Custodial History: Joel Billings' Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) papers were donated to The Strong in April 2012 as a gift from Joel Billings. The papers were accessioned under Object ID 112.1517.
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Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Billings, Joel
- Billings, Susan
- Bowen, David H.
- Hawkins, Trip
- Lyon, John
- Rubinfien, David

Corporate Names

- Electronic Arts (Firm)

- SSI (Firm)
- Strategic Simulations, Inc.
- TSR Hobbies, Inc.

Subjects

- Advanced Dungeons and Dragons (Game)
- Computer adventure games
- Computer Bismarck (Computer game)
- Computer games industry
- Computer war games
- Dungeons and Dragons (Game)
- Electronic games industry--United States
- Games of strategy (Mathematics)
- Games--software
- Simulation games
- Tank (Computer game)
- War games

Historical Note

Joel Billings, an American video game designer, founded Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) in 1979.

A wargame enthusiast from an early age, Billings realized that contemporary strategy game companies were not dedicating resources to develop computer versions of their analog games. While in college, Billings designed and programmed a simple wargame called *Tank*. After discussing his ideas with other game programmers, Billings began SSI with a modest investment. (Apple executive Trip Hawkins convinced Billings to program on the Apple II due to its graphics capability.) The California-based company successfully published its first wargame, *Computer Bismarck*, in 1980.

SSI produced dozens of simulation games during the 1980s, branching into fantasy, science-fiction, and sports. In 1987, SSI acquired the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D) license from TSR; that same year, Electronic Arts bought 20 percent of SSI. Billings' company produced many AD&D titles in its popular "gold box" game series starting with 1988's *Pool of Radiance*.

Mindscape acquired SSI in 1994, following the loss of its lucrative AD&D license. Billings stayed on as President and CEO of SSI through December 1995. He later reevaluated his position and decided to step down as an executive to focus on game production and design. Mattel owned SSI before selling the company once again to Ubisoft in 2001. The SSI brand has been retired.

Since 2000, Billings has been designing at wargame producer 2 By 3 Games.

Collection Scope and Content Note

Joel Billings' Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) collection contains a sample of corporate records from Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI). Document types include meeting minutes, business plans, financial statements, correspondence, statistics, news articles, and other documentation. Also in this collection are printouts of the BASIC computer code for the SSI games *Tank* and *Computer Bismarck*. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1979 and 1996. Additional scope and content information can be found in the "Contents List" section of this finding aid.

Joel Billings' Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) collection is arranged in one series which has been further divided into seven subseries. The collection is housed in three archival document boxes and one flat folder.

Related Materials

The trade catalog collection housed in the library stacks at the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong contains SSI product catalogs from 1981 through 1996.

The International Center for the History of Electronic Games at The Strong also holds dozens of SSI-published games.

System of Arrangement

Series I: SSI corporate records, 1976-2001
- Subseries A: Historical information
- Subseries B: Business plans
- Subseries C: Meeting minutes
- Subseries D: Financial documents
- Subseries E: Research and statistics
- Subseries F: Computer code printouts
- Subseries G: Advertisements

Contents List

Series I: SSI corporate records, 1976-2001

Subseries A: Historical information

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains narratives, yearbooks, articles, and other text documents describing the employees and history of SSI. Of interest is the information packet from an SSI presentation to TSR for a *Dungeons & Dragons* license in 1987. Folder 8 holds several letters written to Billings for the 10th anniversary of SSI, including one from Electronic Arts' Trip Hawkins.

Box 1

Folder 1 "A Short History of the People, Places, and Events Associated with the founding of SSI," Joel Billings, n.d.
Folder 2 "Authorized Apple Distributors" list, September 1979
Folder 3 Settlement agreement, SSI and Monarch Avalon, Inc., 1984
Folder 4 "Strategic Simulations, Inc. Company Backgrounder," June 1986
Folder 5 SSI presentation to TSR for Dungeons & Dragons license, Spring 1987
Folder 6 "The SSI 10th Anniversary Yearbook," February 1990
Folder 7 Software Toolworks and SSI merger information, 1994
Folder 8 Sample historical SSI correspondence, 1984-1996
Folder 9 News clippings on SSI, c. 1980s-1998
Folder 10 SSI organizational chart [with annotations], n.d.

Subseries B: Business plans

Scope and Content Note: Within this subseries are various business plans prepared for Billings during the first year of SSI's incorporation. These documents include descriptions of the early computer wargaming landscape, the strategy and objectives of the company, financial analyses, company data, and various appendices featuring statistics and résumés. Later business plans are also housed in this subseries.

Box 1

Folder 11 "Preliminary Business Plan," n.d. [c. 1979]
Folder 12 "Five Year Business Plan," August 24, 1979
Folder 13 "Strategic Simulations Business Plan," December 1, 1979 [c. 1]
Folder 14 "Strategic Simulations Business Plan," December 1, 1979 [c. 2]
Folder 15 SSI business plans text, 1979-1980
Folder 16 "SSI Five-Year Plan," January 1986
Folder 17 "SSI Vision Statement," n.d. [c. 1993?]

Subseries C: Meeting minutes

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds a binder of meeting minutes and other financial information, along with a folder of handwritten company meeting minutes. The binder includes SSI company bylaws, board of director meeting minutes, stock option actions, lists of shareholders, and a sample stock certificate.

Box 2

Folder 1 SSI minute book, 1981-1993 and 2001
Folder 2 SSI company meeting minutes, 1984-1997

Subseries D: Financial documents
Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains various financial records from SSI between 1980 and 1993. Internally-generated income statements break down lines of revenue within the company, and audit reports describe company-wide information for stockholders.

Box 2

Folder 3	SSI financial statements, 1980-1984
Folder 4	SSI income statements, 1985-1992
Folder 5	SSI audit reports, 1988-1992
Folder 6	SSI stockholder reports, 1990-1993

Oversized

Folder 1	Early SSI forecasts, 1980-1981

Subseries E: Research and statistics
Scope and Content Note: This subseries includes statistics recorded by staff at SSI via customer response cards and sales figures, as well as outside research conducted by other companies or publications.

Box 3

Folder 1	SSI domestic sales numbers, 1980-1994
Folder 2	SSI customer response cards statistics, 1981-1997
Folder 3	SSI employee statistics, 1985-1992
Folder 4	"Survey of Game Manufacturers," CGW Survey, 1985
Folder 5	"Top Fifty Best-Selling Titles for 1991," 1992
Folder 6	"A Sea Change in Consumer Software: The Consolidation Food Chain," UBS Equity Research - Michael P. Wallace and Sara J. Zeilstra, November 1996
Folder 7	SSI user surveys, 1997
Folder 8	"The First Decade of Computer Games," Microprose, 1992
Folder 9	*Computer Gaming World*, November 1996, No. 148 [features"150 Best and 50 Worst Games of All-Time"]

Subseries F: Computer code printouts
Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds two games' computer code printouts. (Billings created *Tank* for a class project while at Claremont-McKenna College in the fall of 1976.) The folder containing the code for *Computer Bismarck* also has notes and drawings created during its production.

Box 3

Folder 10	*Computer Bismarck* BASIC computer code with notes, SSI, 1980

Oversized

Folder 1	*Tank* BASIC computer code, Joel Billings, Fall 1976

Subseries G: Advertisements
Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses some SSI-related advertisements.

For SSI product catalogs, search the online catalog of the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play.

Box 3

Folder 11	Electronic Arts mailer for SSI products, Spring 1988
Folder 12	SSI publicity mailer to retailers, n.d.
Folder 13	*Computer Bismarck* full-page advertisement, n.d.

Revision Note
"Extent" under Summary Information section was updated to reflect revision to "linear feet."