The Half-Life effect on PC-VR is the biggest Steam has ever seen

Enlarge / How’d the *Half-Life: Alyx* bump work out for SteamVR adoption?
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On Friday, Valve revealed the biggest jump ever in virtual reality use on its SteamVR platform: a 0.62 percent increase of all Steam users. This jump between March and April 2020, unsurprisingly, coincides with the first Steam Hardware Survey to include players of the megaton VR exclusive *Half-Life: Alyx*.

If that percentage tally sounds ridiculously low, remember that the last public announcement of all Steam users came in January 2019, at a count of 90 million. That number has likely grown quite a bit since then, owing to factors like free-to-play games attracting more users over that 15-month span. If we agree with estimates like Road to VR’s count of roughly 141 million Steam users in April 2020 (as determined by an exponential trendline with an r-squared factor of 0.922), then that “0.62 percent increase” would mean a one-month jump of over 870,000 active VR users.

The previous record-holder for a one-month jump in SteamVR users came in January 2020, which saw a spike of roughly 0.22

percent. This notable jump in sales followed Valve's *Half-Life: Alyx* unveil in late November 2019. The April 2020 figure, on the other hand, tracks anyone who had connected a SteamVR-compatible headset to their computer at any point in the 30 days leading to the "early April" period of Steam's automatic survey-gathering process (for users who opt into the survey). So that period would include *HL:A*'s release as a playable game on March 23. With *HL:A* in the mix, the one-month jump in percentage points was nearly *triple* the previous record-holder.

The percentages for these VR headsets are specifically a subset of all SteamVR users, as tracked in early April 2020. The bottom-most percentage is a reminder that SteamVR adoption is still a sliver of the *total* Steam userbase, which Valve doesn't regularly offer a public estimate of.

Valve's hardware survey also breaks down which VR systems are favored by SteamVR users, and the original HTC Vive has the

apparent lead in the early-April survey. That headset is used by roughly 0.50 percent of all Steam users, a figure that may very well be boosted by the Vive's compatibility with the Valve Index Controllers. While *HL:A* is compatible with every hand-tracked VR controller system on SteamVR, Valve has been keen to advertise its new controllers, which can be purchased separately, as an ideal option. These are *not* compatible with anything in the Oculus or Windows Mixed Reality ecosystem. (Valve's hardware survey doesn't specify Index Controller use.)

With all its headsets combined, Oculus has the clear lead in SteamVR use, totaling roughly 0.86 percent of all Steam users in early April (roughly 1.2 million people, as per the Road to VR estimate). Interestingly, we also see in that period that its Rift S headset was used by over three times as many SteamVR players as its Quest headset, despite Quest receiving a nifty "Oculus Link" update to make it play nicely with SteamVR. These Oculus figures are less conclusive than other platforms, since a substantial percentage of Oculus headset users may never use any storefronts outside of the official Oculus apps.

While Windows Mixed Reality has a broad ecosystem of headsets, made by a variety of manufacturers such as Samsung and HP, its cut of the SteamVR pie is slim: only 0.16 percent of all SteamVR users, roughly 225,000 players, in terms of "active" users in early April. Valve doesn't break down which particular WMR headsets are in the lead in that niche, but it's reasonable to assume that no single manufacturer can lay claim to more than 80 percent of that total, if not much less. Either way, the Valve Index, which is both quite expensive and frequently sold out since its June 2019 launch, has already surpassed the WMR ecosystem, totaling 0.22 percent of all SteamVR users during that survey's period.

What could have been

Valve also counts the sliver of users who have figured out how to connect PlayStation VR hardware to Windows 10 PCs—a move we don't necessarily recommend, particularly for a game like *Half-Life: Alyx*, but, hey, more power to those who've tried it. The figure is a reminder that Sony's last official PSVR sales tally was "over 5 million," as announced at CES 2020.

These survey results could have played out differently if Valve and Oculus alike hadn't struggled to keep up with VR headset sales demand; both companies' flagship VR systems have been sold out or back-ordered at major retailers for months, particularly while anticipation for *Half-Life: Alyx* began mounting. As of press time, it's still impossible to buy systems from either company directly from their site and expect immediate shipment; Oculus lists nothing but "sold out" notices for all of its kits, while Valve lists a minimum wait of eight weeks for any Index-affiliated hardware.

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