

Taking Gaming to the Next Level

Humans are hard-wired for play. Throughout our lives, we play games to relax, to have fun, and to temporarily escape from the pressures of daily life. Game-based marketing holds great potential for marketers seeking to build their brands, but success will come only to those who play by the rules.



Increasing numbers of people are turning to various forms of digital games for entertainment. While occupied with an absorbing game, people are fully engaged, engrossed with the activity. What more could an advertiser ask for than the involvement generated by a good game? Thus gaming presents a huge opportunity for advertisers.

UK Digital Game Playing	
Age Range	% Play
Total 15+	52
15 to 24	81
25 to 44	69
45+	30

The universe of "gamers" is diverse—a far cry from the stereotype of gamers as anti-social young men. According to data from KMR's network of TGI studies, over half the total UK population plays digital games on one platform or another—PCs (32 percent), gaming consoles (28 percent), mobile phones (20 percent) or online (10 percent). Only among the younger age group do we see a substantial bias to men rather than women: 86 percent of males aged 15 to 24 play games, versus only 75 percent of females. Comparable data from the major markets of Western Europe confirm that gaming penetration exceeds 50 percent among 15- to 44-year olds. So if you are targeting Gen X, Gen Y, or an even younger group, you should consider getting into the game.

Timing Is Everything

Until recently, the only in-game option available to advertisers was a static ad which could not be changed or updated once it was built into the game's code. Now, however, dynamic ad serving allows ads to be replaced with a lead time as short as 24 hours. A billboard in a game such as *Counter-Strike* can feature Axe deodorant one day and Subway's daily sandwich special the next. Ads can play for a specific period of time and can be tailored to a specific geography. Now that Electronic Arts, the world's largest video game publisher, has signed deals with ad networks Massive Inc. and IGA Worldwide, we can expect to see this new capability fully exploited.

Like any TV or Internet advertising, campaigns in games can be evaluated with familiar reach and frequency metrics. But focusing on superficial similarities with TV advertising or movie placements may blind advertisers to some even more powerful possibilities presented by the medium.

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Advertising Opportunities

We believe that four basic options exist for building brands using game-based marketing. Each offers a different level of consumer engagement with a brand. As brand engagement increases, so does the likelihood of a substantial return on investment.



Advertising

Around-Game Advertising

Viewed outside of the actual period of play, around-game advertising can take the form of pre- and post-game banners, interstitials between rounds of play, or any number of ad formats on a game's Web site.

Scenic Advertising

Inside the actual game, brands can advertise as part of the scenery, e.g., on billboards, drink machines, and TV screens. This type of placement adds realism. Absence of scenic advertising can be quite conspicuous, such as in the game *Madden 07*, where the billboards around the football stadium hold the game maker's logo instead of "real" advertising.

Placement

Scenic Brand placement

Inside the game, a brand can be placed as a prop, which gamers see but do not really interact with. While not an integral part of the game, the scenic brand placement adds realism.

Interactive Brand Placement

Interactive brand placement makes the brand a critical element in the game, and allows gamers to interact with it. In *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*, players use both the Sony Ericsson P900 smartphone and a T637 camera phone.

The universe of gamers is diverse; it's not just anti-social young men who play

Comparing Advertising and Interaction

A recent project conducted by Millward Brown for a U.S. based client enabled us to compare the effects of around-game advertising with interactive brand placement. We were engaged to evaluate the integration of a well-known automotive brand into a game. Prior to the game's release, we observed that exposure to the brand's advertising on the game's Web site raised awareness of the brand. After the game became available, we found that respondents who played it not only had higher awareness of the embedded brand, but also gave it higher consideration for purchase. These game players were not exposed to the brand's advertising on

the game site. Therefore, their enhanced opinion appears to have come from their contact with the brand during the game—that is, from the interactive brand placement.

The success of the brand placement was due, at least in part, to the sense of authenticity it brought to the game. Over three-quarters of those who played agreed that the brand was appropriate to the game and enhanced the game's realism. Respondents extrapolated from the inclusion of the motor vehicle to other possible brand placements, such as fast food and snack brands.

However, the feedback did suggest that if a brand were touted too aggressively, response could be negative. The experience of Pizza Hut bears this out. A release of Sony's Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMO) *EverQuest 2*

included the integration of an "ad" for Pizza Hut. Typing "/pizza" opened a separate window which allowed players to place an order. Even though this integration was designed to allow players to order food without leaving the game (a desirable benefit, because MMO players will often play for many hours at a time), the integration caused an outcry among some ardent players, who found it intrusive and incompatible with the fantasy environment created by the game.

Advergaming

It is only a short step from integrating a brand into a game to building a game around a brand. Advergaming, a technique used by cereal and candy manufacturers to market to children, is now proving popular with advertisers aiming to reach older audiences. Dodge, for example, hosts over 10 different games on <http://www.dodge.com/games/>, ranging from a test of how fast you can stow packages inside a Dodge Caravan to street racing featuring the Dodge Charger.

Advergames typically lack the production values of console or PC-based games. Rather, they are based on popular arcade games, sports simulations or puzzles, and are hosted on the brand's Web site. Since the brand is integral to the game, advergames offer substantial potential to create brand recognition. However, creating a game that people want to play is only half the battle.

The advertiser then needs to drive players to it. Few advergames are compelling enough to drive significant traffic through word of mouth alone, but some have managed to generate significant buzz by creating compelling alternative realities which engage people

across multiple communication channels. A notable example is the recent launch of the Audi A3 in the United States. The agency team

at McKinney-Silver set out to reach active gamers, a sub-group of the target market, by developing a complex and absorbing game about the mystery of a stolen A3. The game, called *The Art of the H3ist*, used a majority of the advertising budget to combine live events, multiple media, blogs, Web sites for fictitious companies, coded messages and hidden video clips into an alternative reality campaign which garnered 45 million PR impressions. The campaign helped to deliver 2 million unique visitors to AudiUSA.com, along with 10,000 sales leads, and boosted sales 19 percent over target. More information on the launch can be found online at http://www.mckinney-silver.com/A3_H3ist.

Other opportunities abound for brands to utilize games as part of their marketing program. One such example is Cadillac's sponsorship of *Project Gotham Racing 3*. In the first month, gamers worldwide are reported to have downloaded the V-Series Expansion Pack more than 150,000 times and logged 7,600 hours of racing with Cadillac V-Series cars.

Rules of the Game


Game-based marketing is not appropriate for every brand, and the investment and risks involved increase along with the potential for engagement. If you are going to include gaming in your marketing mix, we suggest the following "rules:"

The game should fit the target audience

The fit between the game and your target audience would seem to be the obvious starting point, but we have observed some unlikely game-brand pairings. Does it really make sense for hip-hop icon 50 Cent to buy Glaceau's Formula 50 to refuel in *50 Cent: Bulletproof*? To us, the connection between rappers and vitamin water is tenuous.

The point is not simply to reach a lot of people. Game-based marketing is not about reach. It's about targeting and engagement.





If a player is forced to interact with a brand which doesn't belong, repeat exposures are likely to re-enforce negative emotions

When considering gaming as a marketing channel, think less about TV and movies and more about magazines and the Internet.

The game should have potential for longevity

The game needs to have initial appeal as well as the "stickiness" to keep people playing over time. Here are some factors to consider:

- Are the graphics, sound and "physics" (the way things move and interact in the game) better than the existing standard?
- Does the game offer new ways of playing that will enhance player appreciation?
- Is the interaction of the player with software-controlled characters and objects natural and compelling?
- Do the challenges seem to match the likely skills of the target audience?
- Does the game offer the chance for recognition from other players?

The brand should fit the game

If the branded content is to add to the experience of playing the game, it must be a good fit. Branding that is not a good fit may detract from the experience of both game and brand. Placing a brand in a game is not the same as placing an ad on TV. A 30-second TV spot placed in an inappropriate program is over quickly, but a brand placed in an inappropriate game will be encountered repeatedly. When a player is forced to interact with a brand which doesn't fit, repeat exposures are likely to re-enforce negative emotions, not positive ones.

The game should enhance brand perceptions

While communication through game placement is implicit, it can still say a lot about your brand. A brand may be included because it conveys a sense of fun and adventure, but the communication can also go beyond association. In *Tiger Woods Golf*, for example, offering an upgrade to Callaway clubs to reduce slice conveys the brand's benefit loud and clear.

Ideally the marketer should be able to leverage the gaming conventions of multiple plot lines and increasing difficulty levels. Providing multiple brand encounters in different contexts can add depth and implicitly convey different messages about the brand's uses, users or features.

Brands should also benefit by association with the positive emotions generated while playing the game, such as enjoyment, excitement and pride. If the brand is central to the game, we should expect that over time these emotions will transfer to the brand.

Conclusion

Whether they choose to take advantage of increased ad serving flexibility or the potential of adver gaming to transcend a simple ad impression, we expect advertisers to exploit gaming more aggressively than they have in the past. The real interactive environment offered by this evolving medium has great potential to deepen consumer relationships with a brand, but game-based marketing is not a risk-free proposition. The strong engagement and emotion attached to game play can cut both ways, and a brand may be forcefully rejected if its presence in a game is seen as an interruption or a blatant sell.

For more about game-based marketing, see <http://www.mb-blog.com/>