

GET IN THE GAME

A LOOK AT THE MODERN
STATE OF GAMING



GAMING'S EVOLUTION

23M

CANADIAN GAMERS IN 2026

The gaming industry has undergone a profound transformation over the past decade, accelerated by a pandemic-era surge that attracted millions of new players into the ecosystem.

While growth has since stabilized, gaming has firmly cemented itself as a dominant force in global entertainment, rivaling traditional media in both scale and influence.

What we are seeing now is not a decline, but a maturation - a shift from rapid expansion to sustainable, diversified ecosystems spanning content, community, and commerce.

THE MODERN GAMING ECOSYSYEM

Gaming is no longer a linear industry – rather, it functions more as a network of interconnected stakeholders that collectively drive engagement and monetization.

This includes game developers and publishers, advertising partners providing a bridge to gaming audiences, as well as the communities and platforms where gamers spend their time connecting with friends and engaging with their favorite creators. Each plays a critical role in a layered ecosystem where content extends far beyond the game itself into streaming, social media, and adjacent entertainment formats.

Understanding gaming as a marketing opportunity requires looking beyond gameplay and into the broader ecosystem that powers it. Together, these elements create a highly engaged, always-on environment where audiences don't just consume content - they participate, create, and shape it in real time.



GAMING INDUSTRY TRENDS

HOW THE GAMING LANDSCAPE IS SHIFTING

MOBILE'S EXPANDING ROLE

Mobile continues to grow its share of the gaming category, driven by accessibility and a broadening player base.

In Canada, 52% of gamers identify mobile as their primary device, making it one of the strongest growth vectors in the market.

For brands, this carries meaningful implications for creative strategy and media planning, as mobile gaming communities often carry distinct behavioral and demographic profiles from console or PC audiences.

THE CONVERGENCE OF GAMING, SOCIAL, AND CULTURE

Gaming is increasingly converging with social media, short-form video, and broader entertainment culture. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Discord now function as integral components of the gaming ecosystem.

Looking ahead, this convergence is set to deepen, with major upcoming releases such as GTA VI and Marvel's Wolverine expected to generate significant cross-platform cultural moments.

Brands that understand gaming as a living cultural system will be best positioned to capitalize on these intersections.



GAMING INDUSTRY TRENDS

HOW THE GAMING LANDSCAPE IS SHIFTING

Gaming engagement has expanded well beyond JUST active gameplay.

- 64% of gamers engage with gaming content such as highlights, creator content, and walkthroughs.
- In 2025, live streaming generated 36.4 billion total hours watched, compared with just 2.8 billion hours for esports, and even within esports, co-streamers accounted for half of total viewership.

Consumption is now multi-platform and always-on, with audiences spending an increasing portion of time watching, chatting, creating, and community-building alongside, or instead of, playing video games.

ESPORTS: A RECALIBRATING CATEGORY

After years of rapid investment and outsized expectations, esports has entered a period of recalibration. Since 2023, the category has faced reduced sponsorship activity and broader financial pressure, with sponsorship growth slowing to 7% in 2025, down from 18% in earlier expansion years.

For brands, this signals the need for a more selective approach - evaluating Esports as one channel within a broader gaming strategy, rather than treating it as the primary gateway to gaming audiences.

'Esports' refers to the more organized, competitive side of gaming, where professional players and teams compete in structured tournaments and leagues for prize money, championships, and sponsorships, like traditional sports.



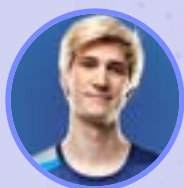
THE RISE OF CREATOR-LED CONTENT

LEADING VOICES IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY

At the center of this shift is the rise of creator-led content as the dominant driver of cultural influence. Audiences increasingly prefer personality-driven, creator-led access over passive or official broadcast formats making gaming influencers primary cultural connectors who are often more trusted than traditional media personalities among younger audiences.

For advertisers, this underscores the importance of reaching gaming audiences across creator and content touchpoints, not just in-game environments.

Leading Canadian creators like xQc, Pokimane, and NickEh30 command tens of millions of online followers. These creators do more than just influence their community - they shape trends, drive cultural conversations, and provide brands with a direct pathway to highly engaged audiences.

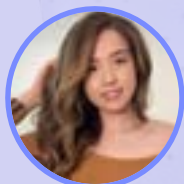


FELIX LENGYEL (xQc)

xQc is one of the world's largest livestreamers, known for his high-energy personality, variety gaming content, and massive live audiences. Originally a professional Overwatch player, he has built a global fanbase by streaming everything from competitive games to reaction content, making him one of the most influential figures in online entertainment.

FOLLOWERS

16.4M TWITCH
2.5M YOUTUBE
1.8M IG



IMANE ANYS (POKIMANE)

Pokimane is one of the most recognizable creators in gaming, blending livestreaming, gaming, lifestyle, and entertainment content across multiple platforms. A longtime Twitch pioneer and entrepreneur, she has become a leading voice for diversity and inclusion in gaming while partnering with some of the world's biggest consumer brands.

9.5M TWITCH
6.6M YOUTUBE
5.9M IG



NICHOLAS AMYOONY (NICKEH30)

NickEh30 is one of Canada's most popular gaming creators, best known for his Fortnite gameplay and exceptionally positive, family-friendly content. His reputation for brand safety, consistent community engagement, and cross-platform reach has made him a sought-after partner for major advertisers and one of the most trusted personalities in gaming.

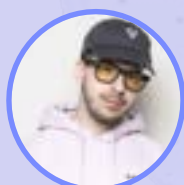
5.8M TWITCH
8.7M YOUTUBE
4.0M IG



JEREMY WANG (DISGUISED TOAST)

Disguised Toast rose to prominence through strategic Hearthstone content before becoming one of the defining personalities behind the Among Us phenomenon and later expanding into a wide variety of gaming and entertainment content. Known for his sharp wit and analytical approach, he has also established himself as an entrepreneur through his esports organization, Disguised (DSG).

2.8M TWITCH
3.8M YOUTUBE
1.0M IG



ANDRE REBELO (TYPICAL GAMER)

Typical Gamer is one of Canada's most successful gaming YouTubers, with a career spanning more than a decade and millions of subscribers. Best known for his Grand Theft Auto V and Fortnite content, he has built one of the largest gaming audiences on YouTube through consistent, entertaining gameplay and family-friendly content.

1.1M TWITCH
16.0M YOUTUBE
2.8M IG

DECODING THE GAMING AUDIENCE

The Canadian gaming audience is already both enormous in scale and becoming increasingly diverse. Gaming now reaches over 23 million Canadians, according to latest estimates - and the audience profile has become increasingly broad: 51% of Canadian gamers identify as women, 52% say mobile is their primary device, and players are distributed relatively evenly across all age groups; 37% aged 35-54; 35% aged 55-plus; and 27% aged 16-34. These numbers underscore that gaming has become a mainstream media behaviour, not a youth niche interest (source: ESAC Power In Play, 2025).

For advertisers, the breadth of this audience expands gaming's relevance well beyond endemic categories and into everyday marketing across a wide range of brands and sectors. It also changes where influence comes from: 74% of Canadian gamers regularly engage with online gaming content, and gaming influencers are increasingly more trusted than traditional media among younger audiences, making creator partnerships, short-form video, streaming, and community activations more commercially relevant than ever.

The highest-upside opportunities for Canadian brand marketers are in creator-led campaigns, social video, and native activations in massive online communities like Roblox, Fortnite, YouTube, and Twitch.



GAMING AUDIENCE PERSONAS

Gaming audiences have never been more diverse, making it critical for brands to move beyond outdated stereotypes of the "typical gamer." Today's gaming ecosystem spans passionate core players, casual mobile users, esports enthusiasts, content consumers, and creator-led communities, each with distinct motivations, behaviours, and engagement patterns.

Understanding these audience segments is essential for developing authentic marketing strategies, selecting the right platforms and partners, and delivering experiences that resonate with the communities brands are trying to reach. The following personas provide a high-level view of the key audiences shaping the modern gaming landscape.



BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING BRAND RELEVANCE IN GAMING

THE PRINCIPLES THAT IMPACTFUL BRAND CAMPAIGNS FROM FORGETTABLE ONES

To effectively engage within the gaming ecosystem, brands need to rethink traditional media approaches. The most successful strategies align with how audiences naturally interact with the ecosystem: creator partnerships that tap into trusted communities, targeted media placements within relevant environments, and in-game integrations that enhance rather than disrupt the player experience.

Success in gaming isn't just about presence, it's about connection. Brands must provide value, maintain authenticity by aligning with gaming culture, and demonstrate a deep understanding of specific niche audiences rather than treating gaming as a single homogenous group.

BEST PRACTICE #1: CREATE TANGIBLE VALUE EXCHANGE

- Gaming audiences are far more receptive to advertisers when there is a clear value exchange, rather than a one-sided message. Rewards-based mechanics such as contests, giveaways, and in-game rewards resonate because they feel community-oriented, not interruptive.
- A recent gaming market study found that 80% of gamers are more likely to make a purchase after seeing an ad if it offers in-game rewards, reinforcing the importance of providing tangible benefits.
- Creators can make these value exchanges feel even more meaningful by turning them into fan-first experiences, such as exclusive drops, VIP access, custom merch, or opportunities to engage directly with their favorite streamer.
- This approach is especially powerful in gaming because audiences tend to reward brands that enhance the experience, rather than simply showing up.



BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING BRAND RELEVANCE IN GAMING

THE PRINCIPLES THAT IMPACTFUL BRAND CAMPAIGNS FROM FORGETTABLE ONES

BEST PRACTICE #2: BUILD CREDIBILITY, NOT JUST PRESENCE

- As digitally-native consumers, gamers tend to be able to detect ads from a mile away – that's why it's important for brands to lean into authenticity and avoid coming across as disingenuous. Gamers spend time in spaces carefully curated around trust and shared culture, so traditional ad messaging can often feel obvious and intrusive.
- 42% of gamers have bought a product or service that their favorite streamer recommended or used. That's why the most successful gaming campaigns don't feel like campaigns in the traditional sense. Rather, they're crafted to feel more like branded collaborations, or natural extensions of the gaming experience itself.
- It's also important for brands to recognize that authenticity in gaming isn't just about tone - it's about behaviour. Audiences expect brands to understand the space that they're entering, show up in a way that reflects the norms of that community, and contribute something meaningful rather than extracting attention.
- In practice, this means partnering with the right creators, using the right language, and building ideas that feel native to the platform, community, and content style.

BEST PRACTICE #3: TARGET SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES WITHIN GAMING

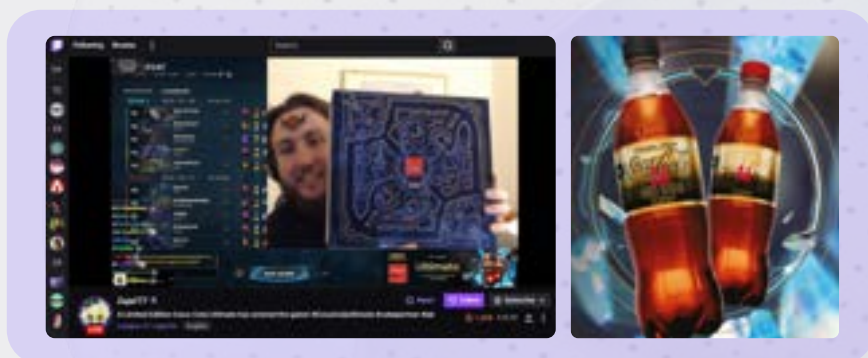
- Messaging needs to be tailored to reach specific communities. One of the biggest mistakes brands make in gaming is treating "gamers" as a single audience, when in reality, the space is made up of many distinct communities with different motivations, platforms, behaviours, and cultural cues.
- Newzoo's 2024 Global Gamer Study found that 80% of consumers worldwide play games, 64% view gaming content, and 35% engage in other gaming-related behaviors such as joining communities or creating content.
- A user who frequently watches livestreams on Twitch, a user who plays Roblox casually, and a user who spends hours in an immersive RPG community may all technically be "gamers," but they don't necessarily respond to the same brand messaging or ad creative. An ad targeting family-friendly console gamers is going to look very different from an ad targeting hardcore RPG gamers.
- Brands need to identify and recognize the various corners of the gaming ecosystem to unlock their full potential. Effective brand strategy starts with recognizing those differences, rather than defaulting to a generic one-size-fits-all gaming playbook.

BRAND ACTIVATIONS IN GAMING

EXAMPLES OF IMPACTFUL GAMING PARTNERSHIPS

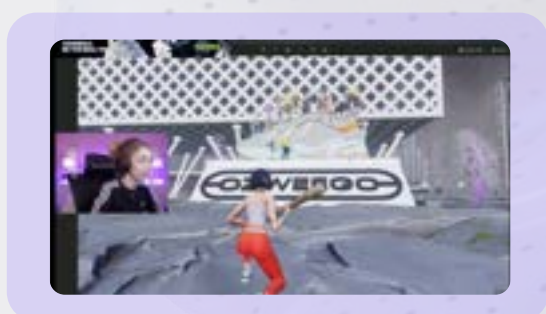
Coca-Cola's 'Taste the Game' initiative exemplifies how brands can authentically engage gaming audiences by blending product, content, and community participation into a cohesive experience.

- To address the challenge of engaging Gen Z, Coke partnered with Riot to build challenges within one of the most popular games in the world, League of Legends. WPP partnered with Twitch to create an authentic experience aimed at engaging with Gen Z audiences. The campaign focused on celebrating every gaming win, big or small, with Coca-Cola.
- Coca-Cola partnered with two prominent gaming influencers on Twitch where they announced the partnership, integrated the product into their streams, leveraged custom emotes/cutscene integrations, Unboxed limited edition LoL/Coca-Cola box live on stream and through giveaways to our audience.
- By leveraging Twitch's reach and engaging influencers, Coca-Cola was able to forge authentic connections with Gen Z gamers, driving awareness and association for the brand within gaming culture.



adidas' Ozworld campaign leveraged gaming to expand reach among Gen Z and Millennial audiences, driving consideration for adidas' new Ozweego sneakers.

- To engage with Gen Z audiences, adidas created a fully customized, immersive in-game Fortnite experience to drive engagement within the gaming community.
- The in-game world allowed users to immerse themselves in a unique virtual playground, where they were free to explore and interact with other players in-game, compete in a series of minigames, and express their creativity through avatar customization.
- adidas leveraged two leading Canadian gaming creators and Fortnite streamers, Chica and Sommerset, to amplify the activation to their massive online communities.
- While the streamers explored the custom map, played the minigames, and highlighted the in-game adidas integrations, adidas' brand messaging was further supported by paid media support across a curated selection of gaming-focused sites and channels.



BRAND ACTIVATIONS IN GAMING

EXAMPLES OF IMPACTFUL GAMING PARTNERSHIPS

Mastercard became the first global sponsor of League of Legends Esports in 2018.

- Mastercard later expanded into regional leagues and fan-facing activations including the Mastercard Nexus pop-up, Priceless Experiences, in-game rewards, and a 2020 "Thank the Fans" campaign tied to Worlds' 10th anniversary.
- Mastercard used gaming not just for awareness, but to build an always-on fan platform combining live-event access, digital content, co-branded merchandise, and in-game value. The partnership has expanded geographically, evolved from in-person activations to year-round digital engagement, and was significant enough to be renewed for multiple years and shortlisted by industry awards as a standout Esports/gaming partnership.



Chipotle became the first restaurant brand to open a virtual location on Roblox in promotion of their limited time Halloween-themed "Boorito" in 2021.

- Chipotle then returned to Roblox with Burrito Builder, which allowed players to roll digital burritos in-game to unlock real-world entrée offers. The campaigns connected IRL food offers, play-to-earn mechanics, and branded gameplay in a way that made Roblox an actual commerce funnel, not just a branded world.
- Chipotle offered \$1 million in free burritos during the Boorito Roblox activation, which was later credited with producing Chipotle's highest digital sales in a single day in company history. Burrito Builder extended this strategy by making Chipotle the first brand to let Roblox players exchange in-experience currency for real-world items.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THE GAMING INDUSTRY?

Looking ahead, gaming's trajectory will likely continue to be defined by deeper cultural integration and technological evolution.

This includes continued expansion of cross-media IP ecosystems, major upcoming releases such as Marvel's Wolverine and Rockstar's highly anticipated GTA VI, as well as increasing convergence between gaming, social platforms, and immersive digital experiences. Gaming is evolving into a foundational layer of digital culture.

The next decade of gaming will not be defined solely by play, but by how gaming intersects with culture, storytelling, and identity.

Gaming is no longer niche; it's an established part of mainstream culture. Creators, not leagues, are the primary drivers of influence. Authenticity and value exchange determine success, and the opportunity extends far beyond gameplay into content, community, and IP. Brands that approach gaming with strategic intent and cultural fluency will unlock one of the most powerful engagement ecosystems in modern media.



GET IN THE GAME

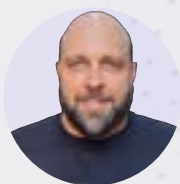
A LOOK AT THE MODERN GAMING INDUSTRY

WPP Media empowers brands to win by building upon a foundation of deep audience intelligence, strategic relevance, and innovative media ecosystems.

The WPP Media Sports + Entertainment team are leaders in sponsorship marketing, uniquely positioned to help brands move beyond transactional partnerships and build meaningful, culturally resonant strategies — whether through the Toronto Tempo, women's sports, or the broader sports and entertainment landscape.

Connect with your WPP Media client lead today to discover how our data-driven strategies and media innovation can build your brand and drive business growth.

CONTRIBUTORS



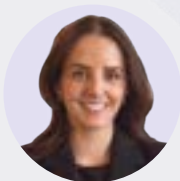
DANIEL MEKINDA

Executive Vice President, Sports + Entertainment
daniel.mekinda@wppmedia.com



BRANDON MAZERALL

Vice President, Sports + Entertainment
brandon.mazerall@wppmedia.com



JUSTINE TAINSH

Director, Sponsorship Strategy
justine.tainsh@wppmedia.com

EDITORIAL & DESIGN



KAREN ZUCCALA

Vice President, Marketing & Communications
karen.zuccala@wppmedia.com



JULIUS GUALTIERI

Designer, Marketing & Communications
julius.gualtieri@wppmedia.com

GET IN THE GAME

A LOOK AT THE MODERN GAMING INDUSTRY

WPP Media empowers brands to win by building upon a foundation of deep audience intelligence, strategic relevance, and innovative media ecosystems.

The WPP Media Sports + Entertainment team are leaders in sponsorship marketing, uniquely positioned to help brands move beyond transactional partnerships and build meaningful, culturally resonant strategies — whether through the Toronto Tempo, women's sports, or the broader sports and entertainment landscape.

Connect with your WPP Media client lead today to discover how our data-driven strategies and media innovation can build your brand and drive business growth.



DANIEL MEKINDA

EVP, WPP Media Sports + Entertainment
daniel.mekinda@wppmedia.com



BRANDON MAZERALL

Vice President, WPP Media Sports + Entertainment
brandon.mazerall@wppmedia.com



JUSTINE TAINSH

Director, WPP Media Sponsorship Strategy
justine.tainsh@wppmedia.com



KAREN ZUCCALA

Vice President, WPP, Marketing & Communications
karen.zuccala@wppmedia.com



JULIUS GUALTIERI

Designer, WPP, Marketing
julius.gualtieri@wppmedia.com