

Amid turmoil in advertising, IAB PlayFronts demonstrate execs see gaming as a critical means of achieving brand objectives

Article

The recap: At the IAB's first-ever **PlayFronts** event, brands like **American Eagle** and **Unilever** discussed how they use gaming to promote commercial goals and connect with increasingly hard-to-reach cohorts such as Gen Z. Speakers outlined the scope and variety of gaming audiences, while also pointing out that many businesses have been slow to respond to these opportunities.

Panel of the day: American Eagle spoke alongside in-game advertising provider **Anzu** (which recently raised another \$20 million) and its new ad sales partner **NBCUniversal**. The brand said it has begun to experiment with **Roblox's** Livetopia, a top 10 role-playing game on the service.

- An in-game mansion offered gamers a variety of activities, as well as the opportunity to try on virtual representations of American Eagle's seasonal clothing.
- The results: More than 5 million people have dressed their avatars with the merchandise, and the activation has seen more than 7.5 million unique participants since its launch, according to the retailer—nearly 50% higher than initial expectations.
- American Eagle marketing executive Ashley Schapiro noted that in the last two weeks alone, the campaign's engagement increased by 20%.

Schapiro noted to Digiday afterward that 65% of Livetopia users are female, making it more aligned with American Eagle's customer base—combating the false and dated narrative that only young men can be reached via gaming platforms. More than half of US gamers are women.

On What Devices Do US Gamers Play Video Games?

% of respondents, by gender, Feb 2022

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---------------------------|------|--------|-------|
| Mobile phone | 64% | 82% | 74% |
| Console (e.g., PS5, Xbox) | 46% | 18% | 32% |
| Desktop/laptop | 38% | 23% | 31% |
| Tablet | 21% | 27% | 24% |
| Other | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| No answer | 0% | 1% | 1% |

Note: n=1,042 ages 18+; excludes responses of "other" and "no answer" (roughly a combined 3% for each demographic listed)

Source: SurveyMonkey as cited in company blog, Feb 8, 2022

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Zoom out: PlayFronts took place as many factors push gaming further into the mainstream: pandemic-fueled shifting media consumption habits, the pending cookiepocalypse, a decline in linear TV viewership, and ad oversaturation on connected TV.

- Marketers are now challenged to cultivate customers who are not accustomed to in-game advertising just as the sector becomes increasingly important to growth.
- The value of the gaming industry has soared in recent years, and the sector has seen a number of major acquisitions, including [Microsoft's purchase](#) of PlayFronts presenter **Activision Blizzard** for \$70 billion.
- It's no wonder the event was popular enough that the IAB suggested next year's conference could run multiple days.

Willem Dinger, global director of sponsorships at Unilever, noted that gamers are spending sizable sums on digital avatars. Tapping into that spending is not only a form of opt-in advertising, but has the potential to be a not-insignificant revenue generator for CPG manufacturers like his—a "massive business opportunity," in his words.

The big takeaway: Vendors and publishers have a generational opportunity to introduce advertising to gaming in an additive way—will they rise to it? The industry hasn't yet defined consistent, scalable models for in-game advertising, as some PlayFronts speakers suggested.

- The exception lies with free mobile games, which are often supported with ads foisted upon users in exchange for unlocking levels and upgrades—not exactly a great experience. **Mobile gaming ad revenues are expected to reach \$7.87 billion in the US** alone by 2024, [per](#) our forecast—but immersive advertising revenues have quite a bit of catching up to do.