

The Weekly Listen: Ads in stores, could Google eat the Internet, and did HBO Max's rebrand to Max work?

Audio

On today's episode, we discuss how to do ads in stores the right way, whether Google will eat the internet, whether the rebrand from HBO Max to Max worked, if the US ad market is starting to see green shoots, how successful the "Barbie" movie has been, and more. Tune in to the discussion with our analysts Ross Benes, Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf, and Max Willens.

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Episode Transcript:

Marcus Johnson:

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Hello everyone and thanks for hanging out with us for the Behind the Numbers Weekly Listen, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Awin. I don't know why I'm out of breath. I've done literally nothing in the last two minutes.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

You did just speak at the speed of light, so maybe that's it.

Marcus Johnson:

Is that why? Okay, let's pretend that's the reason.

This is the Friday show that may or may not be stealing coasters from the office. Victoria, anything to say?

Victoria:

I plead the fifth.

Marcus Johnson:

That means she did it. I'm your host, Marcus Johnson. In today's show, in-store retail media's impact...

Max Willens:

When you think about the sort of size and shape of the landscape, there is kind of a different reality for Amazon and Walmart than there is for everyone else.

Marcus Johnson:

Will Google eat the internet?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

If the internet becomes a sea of bots summarizing content written by other bots, its search product will be unusable. And if consumers don't use its search product, there's no reason for advertisers to keep spending on Google Search and Google loses its cash cow.

Marcus Johnson:

Has the rebrand from HBO to Max worked?

Ross Benes:

They have reduced their losses, but don't be fooled by their PR statements about profitability. Taking down write-downs to make yourself look good for a quarter doesn't mean that you've laid a good foundation for your service.

Marcus Johnson:

Is the US ad market starting to see green shoots? And we check in on some interesting facts about the Barbie movie.

Joining me for this episode, we have three people. Let's meet them. They are all senior analysts and all on the Digital Advertising and Media team. We start with Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf based out of Virginia.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Hello, Marcus. Hey, everyone.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello there. We also have with us Ross Benes based out of just above New York City.

Ross Benes:

Hey, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

And finally, we have Max Willens based out of Pennsylvania.

Max Willens:

Yo.

Marcus Johnson:

Hey, fella. So we have three segments for you as per usual. We start with the Story of the Week. We're talking about in-store retail media's impact. We then move to the debate of the

week for today, Make the Case is what it's called, and our panel will present the best arguments they can from each of the three stories we have for you. And then we move to Dinner Party Data where we talk about some random trivia we've recently learned.

We start of course with the Story of the Week.

In-store retail media's impact, out of 10, what do we think it's going to be? Well, with retail media being an increasingly important focal point for the ad industry, the excitement about the in-store portion of retail media is starting to mount. In-store retail media being signage displays that you would see walking around a retail store. Ads, if you will.

So Insider Intelligence retail briefings analyst Rachel Wolf recently wrote about a few investments that major retailers are making in this in-store retail media space. So Canadian grocer Loblaw is adding digital screens to over 500 stores so brands can target shoppers. Vibonomics and Stingray Advertising are combining their networks to offer in-store audio ads across 25,000 grocery, convenience, home improvement, and drugstores. Macy's is also now serving contextually targeted ads to in-store shoppers, and advertisers can already buy placements on 170,000 digital screens across Walmart's nearly 5,000 US stores.

But folks, Rachel writes that in-store retail media is rapidly becoming retailer's next area of focus as they look to turn their one major advantage over Amazon, their in-store audiences, into an opportunity to grow ad sales.

Max, I'll start with you. What do you think in-store retail media's impact will be/is out of 10?

Max Willens:

I think I'm going to at the moment just go for two.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh.

Max Willens:

It's obviously an area of immense interest for retailers because as you point out, a lot of them have been trying to figure out how to wring more value out of their brick-and-mortar footprints. But if you look at our forecast, the in-store's share of overall retail media ad spending is going to remain quite low.

And I think also, this is a little harder to sort of prove with data that exists right now, but I think that retailers are going to have to be really, really careful about entering this foray. I mean, I don't know how many people walk around in a grocery store or a mall or a department store and go, "This place needs more ads. I need more of that."

Marcus Johnson:

I would think not many.

Max Willens:

"I would like a display ad in my face while I am trying to pick out avocados. My ears are uncrammed with ads. This is unacceptable." And that's something that they're going to have to think very deliberately and very carefully about because one of the reasons that these brick-and-mortar footprints are such a problem for retailers is because people have stopped going into them and if they turn the experience of going into them even more unpleasant, it's going to hasten a decline of in-store traffic that I think should be of an immense concern.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yeah, I fully agree on that kind slippery slope issue that in-store retail media presents. Has anyone seen Minority Report here?

Ross Benes:

Yeah.

Max Willens:

No.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yeah. That's a future we could easily find ourselves in. I mean, not so much the eyeball situation that they use. You scan the eyeball and then that's like your consumer profile and it follows you around the store. Hopefully, we don't reach that territory.

But yeah, it's easy to see how in-store experience surrounded by inescapable ads would be horrible for everyone except for those that are making money. And I wonder though, Max, to your point about the percentage of ad dollars, retail media ad dollars, that in-store will

account for being so low. I wonder if that's because of the sheer magnitude of Amazon. If we took Amazon out of the equation, I bet in-store would be pretty significant.

So I think to Marcus's point, it is one of the only big advantages that the long tail of retail media players have over Amazon, so it's definitely worthy of a focus to try and grow the pie in the favor of Amazon's competitors.

Max Willens:

It's a good point, but I would also say too that the flip of that is that you then have to worry about misalignment because you think about something like a Stingray or Vibonomics or something like a CitrusAd and a lot of the long-tail retailers that are hoping to generate some extra coin via retail media are going to have to rely on aggregators and the incentives of an aggregator and the supply that they are aggregating, in theory, should be very tight and there should be a lot of good alignment there, but there isn't always.

And so I think that that's another reason why if you're a mid-size grocery chain or an electronics retailer that owns a couple dozen stores, you have to be really careful about just signing a contract and importing a bunch of tech into your stores and you have to feel rock solid that the experience that they're going to bring into your environments is going to be what you want.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yeah, absolutely.

Max Willens:

That's just my own two cents.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Definitely worth caution, for sure.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Well, so Max, you're at two out of 10 at the moment, but you think in-store retail media can get to a what?

Max Willens:

It's a great question. I think Evelyn's point is absolutely fair that when you think about the sort of size and shape of the landscape, there is kind of a different reality for Amazon and Walmart than there is for everyone else. So I guess it could get to a four, but I think that this is principally a digitally driven channel. So even with the growth, it's never going to be more than four, I would say.

Marcus Johnson:

Evelyn, you said, where do you think it's today and where can it get to?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yeah, I forgot to answer that part of your question.

Marcus Johnson:

Unbelievable.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

I'm generally in line with Max. I think maybe five or six is where it would top out. Maybe I'm just optimistic, putting too much trust in the hands of retailers to do it right. But yeah, right now, I'd say it definitely sits at a two, but it's got a lot of potential.

Marcus Johnson:

Ross?

Ross Benes:

I put it at a five. What it has-

Marcus Johnson:

Currently?

Ross Benes:

Currently, yeah, I put it at a five. So it's not a ton of spend, but it's important for place-based out-of-home advertising, which is a very specific thing, usually advertising that you see like in shopping malls and arena. That form of outdoor advertising has taken a monumental hit. I just wrote about it in my recent out-of-home report. So this is actually an area of growth for a

subset of outdoor advertising that has done pretty poorly. Soon, it will be one-tenth of total digital out-of-home advertising, which isn't anything to sneeze at.

On the downside though, we're still talking about well-under \$1 billion, even at the end of our forecast period. We're talking about one-fourth of \$1 billion of dollars this year. So there is certainly a ceiling on it. And to Max's point about thinking about not overdoing it, I don't know if I've ever encountered a more annoying ad in my life than going into a convenience store and wanting to grab a Gatorade, but instead of just seeing through the glass that has worked since glass was invented, I see an ad advertising the types of drinks that might be in there and I have to just keep opening cooler after cooler, letting the cold air breathe on me, to see, do you have blue Gatorade?

If you didn't have the ad, I would've known that.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

I wonder if the ad revenues counterbalance the amount of money you lose just from people opening the cooler doors repeatedly.

Ross Benes:

Yeah. Just say, "Screw it. You know what? I'll drink my own spit rather than having to see this ad again."

Marcus Johnson:

So Ross is talking about one example is Cooler Screens, which partnered with Walgreens. Rachel was noting in her article, Walgreens actually rolled back its partnership with digital screens provider Cooler Screens because shoppers complained about this very thing that Ross is talking about. The tech made it difficult to find products and also the concerns leadership had over the aesthetics as well. So you've got to do it right, but that does seem like a huge opportunity.

One of the numbers that Rachel points out in her article which I thought was fascinating is the average in-store audience is 70% larger than it's digital counterparts for top retailers, according to data from Placer.ai and Comscore.

So Ross, you said five out of 10. Where can it get to?

Ross Benes:

Oh, like 6.5. I don't think it's going to take over the world.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. All right, folks. That's all we've got time for for the Story of the Week. Time now for the Debate of the Week. Today's segment, Make the Case.

Where our panel Evelyn, Max, and Ross present the for and against arguments for each of the following questions based on three news stories. Two contestants face off per question. Also, the following takes don't necessarily reflect the analyst's personal views. Their job is to just present the best case regardless and offer objective analysis.

Max Willens:

True. We believe in nothing.

Marcus Johnson:

That's intense. So I sent these stories out to folks and they have to be the first one to reply and say, "Hey, I'd like to take this one or defend this argument." And it's first come, first served.

Ross replied-all first and decided... Ross, you put your first and last name beside your stories. Do you think I was going to be like, "Which Ross?"

Ross Benes:

Just in case, yeah, there's another Ross. In kindergarten, there was two Ross Bs in my class of like 20, so you never know.

Marcus Johnson:

Forget that guy. Okay.

Max Willens:

That sounds traumatic.

Marcus Johnson:

All right, folks. Let's crack on with the debate.

Question one, Max against Evelyn. We're talking about whether Google could eat the internet. Justin Pot of The Atlantic writes that Google Search is pivoting to generative AI starting with an experimental tool in public beta called Search Generative Experience. He explains that instead of sending you off to other corners of the web, more search results appear within Google. Like ChatGPT, it pulls information from various sites, rewords it, and puts it on top of your search results, pushing down the links. Some searches will give you a normal list of links, but when the results are right at the top, there's often no point in ever leaving Google. Mr. Pot says this could be disastrous for the rest of the internet since it relies on Google to send billions of visits to sites across the web every day.

The question is, will Google eat the internet? Max is presenting the case of Google will eat the internet. Make the case.

Max Willens:

I think that you could argue that Google already has eaten the internet. It has, in no particular order, the largest email service provider, the largest search engine, it is the largest broker of digital advertisements, it owns the largest video platform. And I think you could also argue with a straight face that it has set the agenda for web publishing for a decade. I mean, there are so many curios across internet culture that are there basically only because of Google, the kind of cottage industry of what time is the Super Bowl web posts and 65 different websites posting the same Marvel movie trailer are all vestiges of an internet that is controlled and sort of shaped in Google's image.

So I would argue that this is something that has already happened. Boing.

Marcus Johnson:

Max, no, that's it. Evelyn, Google won't eat the internet, make the case.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

So my argument is made by the last paragraph in this article. Tech critic Corey Doctorow said, "When you've got a 90% market share, you cannot increase your bottom line by improving your product by definition, and if you can't grow by making the pie bigger, you grow by extracting more from it." And Pot ends the article with, "This is a way for Google to strip-mine the web, but strip-mines, by their very nature, aren't sustainable."

And this is all true. And AI arms race or not, it is not in Google's best interest to reduce the amount of high-quality human generated content out there. If the internet becomes a sea of bots summarizing content written by other bots, its search product will be unusable. And if consumers don't use its search product, there's no reason for advertisers to keep spending on Google Search and Google loses its cash cow. If it wants to stick around for the foreseeable future, it can't afford to torpedo the long-tail publisher's business model, so it won't eat the internet. There's just too much money at stake.

Marcus Johnson:

All right, very nice, folks. Moving to question two, Max versus Ross. Has the rebrand from HBO to Max worked? Parent company Warner Brothers Discovery faces streaming growing pains in Q2, notes Insider Intelligence's Senior Director of Briefings, Jeremy Goldman. He notes that Warner Brothers Discovery, WBD, including Max and Discovery Plus, which it owns, lost close to 2 million subscribers in the quarter, reducing the total count from 98 million to 96. That's the first subscriber decline since Max's launch.

But the question is, has the rebrand from HBO to Max worked? Max is going to be arguing the rebrand from HBO to Max has worked. Make the case.

Max Willens:

I think I am going to rely on the words of Warner Brothers Discovery's Chief Executive David Zaslav, who pointed out that churn was lower than expected. He basically pointed to the decline in overall subscribers as the result of Discovery Max and HBO Max smushing together. And so, to me, if it's all churn and the churn was lower than expected, then you must say that the rebrand was a success.

Marcus Johnson:

Ross, the rebrand from HBO to Max hasn't worked. Make the case.

Max Willens:

You can tell that I love this argument that I just made.

Ross Benes:

So they smushed together two streaming services that are supposed to give them synergy, but instead they lost 2 million subscribers and had their first subscriber loss ever. They also

have higher, greater distribution than they've ever had. Well, not than they've ever had before, but then they had at HBO Max's late run because they're back on Amazon Prime Video channels. So they gave Amazon a cut of the revenue for that and some data, which most streaming services do, but my point being is that they've exhausted their distribution outlets, they put together their best assets and they still lost customers, which makes me think that it could have gone more smoothly.

Now, HBO, which is called Max now, cut a ton of shows over the last year, they've made their library much less attractive. They have reduced their losses, but don't be fooled by their PR statements about profitability. Taking down write-downs to make yourself look good for a quarter doesn't mean that you've laid a good foundation for your service.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Also, let's destroy all brand equity by eliminating both recognizable brands. Let's do it.

Marcus Johnson:

Ross-

Max Willens:

But replacing it with something that is very attractive and very cool.

Ross Benes:

Max, you should have said, "It worked because they named it after me. It's my name."

Max Willens:

I was saving that. I was saving that.

To argue against myself too, so they go through this big production of, as Evelyn points out, torpedoing both pretty recognizable brands and being like, "It's all one thing now. This is all what we're doing." But then they announced, I think it was this week or maybe a week earlier, that they're going to have live sports on Max, but that's going to be under the Bleacher Report some brand, which I frankly am amazed that they still care about because it seems like they had been sort of moving further and further away from Bleacher Report as a brand for years. So they haven't solved the branding problems at all, they've just created new ones.

Ross Benes:

If they called it Ross, I would've taken Max.

Marcus Johnson:

So yeah, to Max's point, WBD, getting ready to launch a sports tier. Warner Brothers Discovery are getting ready to launch a sports tier from its Max streaming service targeted to coincide with MLB playoffs. According to CNBC, the service will simulcast games from the MLB, NBA, NHL, and NCAA as well.

Let's move to question three and we've got Ross versus Evelyn. Is the US ad market starting to see green shoots? Stephen Lepitak and Rebecca Stewart of Adweek write that the ad industry hasn't shaken off the economic slump, but green shoots are sprouting. They point to recent Q2 earnings of Microsoft, Meta, and Google as reasons for optimism, but offer the counterweight of the global economy remaining flat over the last three years and high inflation continuing to bear down on the ad industry.

The question is is the US ad market actually starting to see green shoots? Ross is going to be arguing that the US ad market is starting to see green shoots. Make the case.

Ross Benes:

Well, you could find any anecdotes for this point and as well as anecdotes against it, but Meta had a fantastic quarter. You've also seen some growth, particularly in podcasting, from Spotify and iHeart. CPG brands like Nestle and Pepsi have stated they're going to increase their ad spend. In a report by famed analyst Brian Wieser said that the ad industry had expanded in the second quarter at a greater rate than it did in first quarter.

Marcus Johnson:

Evelyn, the US ad market isn't starting to see green shoots. Make the case

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

To see green shoots, there has to be a pretty stark color differential. Maybe there's a bald spot in your yard, maybe it's crusty winter grass. But big picture, the US ad economy never stopped growing; it just grew a little bit slower than most had anticipated back in 2021. And it's a matter of expectations informing perception. 2021 was a wild year. The mid-pandemic advertising rebound was so massive and comparables were so favorable that it seemed like everything was coming up roses, but normalization is just a tough pill to swallow if the

expectation or the goal is indefinite growth, and as long as inflation stays where it is, we're not going to return to the lush rainforest of 2021. But we're not living in a barren wasteland either.

According to our estimates, the US ad market grew 7.9% last year. It'll grow 3.8% this year. So the yard is already green. That's my argument really

Marcus Johnson:

You really went in on the gardening analogy.

Ross Benes:

I'm convinced now. I agree with Evelyn after hearing that.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

I was just going to say, for the record, I'm on Ross's side of things.

Marcus Johnson:

Unbelievable. They swapped sides at the end. Must have been very convincing. Very nice, folks.

So two things for me. One, so US ad spend did fall 1.6% in June, according to the US Standard Media Index, after growing for the first time in 11 months in May, but given the steep drops ad spending has seen in the last 12 months, particularly the 12% drop last December, a 1.6% drop isn't too bad all things considered when you zoom out.

And then also, Ross mentioned Meta doing pretty well in Q2 or really well in Q2. Recent digital ad company performance does suggest that things are improving to a certain extent. Google grew ad revenue 3% after two negative quarters. Meta was up 12%, up from 4% in Q1 and negative growth last year. Amazon saw ad revenues grow 22% up year-over-year. And these are a decent bellwether considering they're the digital advertising accounts for three out of every four ad dollars in the US.

All right, folks, very nice. That's all we've got time for the Debate of the Week. Very nice arguments. Very nice arguments. We now end the show, of course with Dinner Party Data.

This is the part of the show where we tell you about the most interesting thing we've learned this week. And let's start with Ross.

Ross Benes:

Okay, so I got some data from the American Kennel Club on dog breeds and in 2022-

Marcus Johnson:

Victoria is so excited.

Ross Benes:

It's good to have someone else excited about this.

Max Willens:

My tail's wagging too.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Me too.

Ross Benes:

So the top breed was the French bulldog and rounding out the top five was the Labrador retriever, golden retriever, German Shepherd, and poodle. The standard poodle.

Marcus Johnson:

Are these the most popular or most dogs?

Ross Benes:

No, those are the most popular in 2022.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

And popular in terms of number of people who have the dogs or popular are like, "We took a survey and these dogs, people like the best."

Ross Benes:

You know what? Let's see here. Oh, it's based on the AKC'S registration statistics. So the AKC-

Marcus Johnson:

Victoria knew that. Of course you did.

Ross Benes:

They are... How should I phrase this? The AKC is like a dog's eugenics group so it makes me feel kind of skeezy about the whole purebred movement in general, but they do track this stuff and they're involved with stuff like Westminster.

So as far as where you're going to get reliable dog data, I say they're probably as good as any, although there'll certainly be some gaps in people not... I don't think I've ever reported any dog I've ever gotten to the AKC, so they're missing a lot. So take it for what it's worth.

But in the bottom five at 199, they did 199 dog breeds, who could know there's so many, they had the English fox hound, and then at 196 they had the American fox hound. And I was kind of bummed by this because I think my big guy Cooper here, he's probably a mutt of various things, but he looks like a fox hound. And I didn't realize he was such an unpopular breed. So I guess if I was into being like a hipster dog owner, I could be like, "Oh, I got a fox hound. No one else has a fox hound."

Marcus Johnson:

I wondered why you asked him to leave the room before we did this show. You don't want to hear this.

Ross Benes:

Well, now I brought him back so he could be here and hear this. And I just got to say that I think more people should have Coopers, they should be higher up on the list.

Marcus Johnson:

Favorite breed real quick, let's go around the horn. Victoria?

Victoria:

I'm partial to poodles.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, you are. Yes, Chester. Evelyn?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

This is impossible.

Victoria:

Actually, I agree with Evelyn. I take my answer back. I just own-

Max Willens:

Yeah, that is super hard.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, all of them.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yeah, I own a pit bull, love her to death. She's the sweetest thing on the planet, and I also grew up with golden retrievers and black labs. So I just love dogs. Dogs are the best.

Marcus Johnson:

Max?

Max Willens:

Yeah, I can't pick one, but I had a Bassett Hound growing up and I loved him so much. Yeah, I love them all though. Hard to pick just one.

Marcus Johnson:

Ross?

Ross Benes:

I really love retrievers, even though I have two hounds.

Marcus Johnson:

I was going to say.

Ross Benes:

So I should probably go with the hounds because they're looking at me.

Marcus Johnson:

You got to get them out the room before you start saying these things. Jesus, Ross.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yeah, they might start yelling.

Marcus Johnson:

The answer we were looking for is labradoodles. That's the answer we were looking for. Let's move to Evelyn.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Okay, so I have another top list for you. This is the top most-searched cereals. This is data from Google that they provided to-

Marcus Johnson:

I'm sorry, one second. Who's searching for cereal?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

You know, I don't know.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. All right. Just checking. In the store or on the internet?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

No, on Google.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay.

Max Willens:

I've done a lot of things, searched for some strange stuff while I'm in an altered state-

Marcus Johnson:

Frosties?

Max Willens:

But I've never searched for cereals.

Marcus Johnson:

All right. Sorry, go on, Evelyn.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Well, this data was is from Google. They provided it to Food & Wine. And so the Food & Wine framed it as the most popular cereals, but I don't think that, to your point, Marcus, who searches for cereals? Does that actually mean that they're popular?

Max Willens:

I just said I don't.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

So the top five here, actually, can anyone guess the top most-searched for cereal?

Max Willens:

Lucky Charms.

Marcus Johnson:

Cheerios.

Ross Benes:

Captive Crutch.

Marcus Johnson:

Frosties?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Good guesses. Marcus, you're close. Cheerios is number two.

Marcus Johnson:

Corn Flakes?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Rice Krispies is number one.

Marcus Johnson:

Ah, Rice Krispies.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

An interesting tidbit also is that Rice Krispies was the number one most searched for cereal in every single state in the United States, which the kind of idea that Food & Wine came up with that explains that is that people are searching for Rice Krispy Treats recipes perhaps, but the top five are kind of meh.

Rice Krispies is number one, Cheerios number two, Chex is number three, Special K is number four, and then number five, Lucky Charms. So that's where it starts to get fun. And this is kind of a long list, but I'll also give you the bottom five that I've only heard of some of these. So number 26 is Kaboom. I don't even know what that is.

Max Willens:

That sounds made up.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

So I guess I would search for that too, just to try to understand what even is that cereal. 27 is Apple Jacks. 28, Raisin Bran. I think that's a just position personally.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, that's a shame.

Max Willens:

Just a little.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

29, Cocoa Pebbles, and 30 is Count Chocula. There you go.

Max Willens:

Really?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Yep.

Max Willens:

Really?

Marcus Johnson:

For folks who can't see Max, he's eating a bowl right this second. He's furious.

Max Willens:

Discolored milk dribbling down my face. If Kaboom is not made up at anyone who works at whatever made up company-

Ross Benes:

It's got a Wikipedia entry.

Marcus Johnson:

Ross, we've lost Ross.

Ross Benes:

I Googled it while she was talking because I'd never heard of it either and I feel like I'm pretty knowledgeable on cereal given a few dozen cavities I've had.

Marcus Johnson:

Max, you're up, mate.

Max Willens:

All right. So this week, I saw a news item about Netflix quietly, maybe not so quietly, launching a games controller app in the Apple App Store. And it got me thinking, "Oh, that's interesting." It paves the way for them to allow their subscribers to play games on their televisions instead of their smartphones.

And it got me thinking, just what is going on with their games business anyway? I mean, it's been in the wild for about two years. I think a lot of people scratched their heads when Netflix announced it and have sort of continued scratching their heads ever since, even though it seems like Netflix is making an earnest attempt to sort of build its brand and its library of games.

And so I found some data from Apptopia that was shared with a mobile games website about a month ago. And Netflix has now got 20 games that have been downloaded over a million times. The most popular game has been downloaded about 6 million times and that's nothing to sneeze at. That definitely shows real traction. It's harder to find reliable data on how much these games are being played, how sort of sticky and effective they are. But to give some added perspective, the number one downloaded game of last year was Subway Surfers, which was downloaded over 300 million times.

So it's very hard to say that they have kind of turned this into an overnight success, but they are trying and I thought that was a good set of-

Marcus Johnson:

What was Netflix's most downloaded game, the 6 million?

Max Willens:

Asphalt Extreme, which I've never even heard of. No idea. Too Hot to Handle is the number two, which I think is hilarious. They're making a second one, which I think is even stranger.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank goodness.

Max Willens:

It also includes Mahjong Solitaire, which get out of here, Netflix. I already have Mahjong and Solitaire. I don't need-

Marcus Johnson:

Solitaire is the game that Victoria's sister, who also works at the company, thought was my favorite game. I said, "Do you want to guess my favorite game?" She said, "Probably Solitaire." I said, "Get the hell out of here."

Max Willens:

Remains an extremely underrated burn.

Marcus Johnson:

Thanks, Jackie. That was brutal. All right, very nice.

I got one for you real quick. It's about the Barbie movie, which has emerged as the hit movie of the summer. The film stars Margot Robbie, Ryan Gosling, directed by Greta Gerwig, who also did Little Women and Ladybird. So the recent Wall Street Journal piece from Rosie Ettenheim and Robbie Wellen noted the following, so three things about the film.

One, the Barbie movie has crossed the \$1 billion mark globally. That would make it the fourth US motion picture directed by a woman to do so according to Box Office Mojo. 52 movies in total have done that. The percentage of top films directed by women reached its highest level in 2020 at 15%. Only four films have performed better in the four weekdays after its debut, only four films have performed better in the four weekdays after its debut according to Comscore. Any guesses?

Max Willens:

I got nothing.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Avatar.

Marcus Johnson:

Yep.

Ross Benes:

Is this four movies in the last year or four movies ever?

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, sorry. Avatar's not there. I don't know why I said yes. Ever.

Ross Benes:

Oh, ever. I don't know. Like the first Star Wars?

Marcus Johnson:

Star Wars: The Force Awakens, and Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker are first and fourth. Spider-Man: No Way Home, second. Avengers: Endgame was third.

And then finally, 2%, just 2% I should probably say, of the 476 nominees for Best Director have been women, just 2%. Kathryn Bigelow was the first female to win Best Director for Hurt Locker. I haven't seen that. Have you guys seen that? That is one I wanted to get to.

Ross Benes:

Hurt Locker? Yeah, I've seen it.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

I haven't seen.

Max Willens:

It's pretty great.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, I need to get that.

Max Willens:

If you feel like being unable to breathe for two hours is your idea of a good time.

Marcus Johnson:

Not really.

Max Willens:

But it's very good. Just very stress-inducing.

Marcus Johnson:

But you've watched it? It was good? All right. There's my weekend. That's all we've got time for this episode. Thank you so much to my guests. Thank you to Evelyn.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Thank you, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Max.

Max Willens:

Always a pleasure, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Ross.

Ross Benes:

See you later, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

Why does it take so long, Ross?

Ross Benes:

Just letting it sit in there.

Marcus Johnson:

Were you thinking about I don't know whether I want to thank you back? All right, fine. Thanks to Victoria who edits the show, James who copy edits it, and Stuart who runs the team. Thanks to everyone listening.

You can head to [BehindtheNumbers_Podcast](#) for outtakes. We'll see you guys on Monday for the Behind the Numbers Daily, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Awin. Happy weekends.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

I don't know if I told you this. Movie theater popcorn doesn't have real butter. It's usually plant oil so I can eat it and oh boy, did I?

Marcus Johnson:

She's back.

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Went way overboard with the popcorn.

Victoria:

It's so good. You only get the popcorn.

Marcus Johnson:

She's back.

Victoria:

You smuggle in drinks, unless you're a fountain soda aficionado, which I can confirm that I am an.

Marcus Johnson:

Aficionado.

Victoria:

You usually smuggle in drinks. Chocolate, sour candies. My mom used to smuggle in containers of watermelon in the summer.

Max Willens:

Nice.

Marcus Johnson:

Who's bringing in Tupperware?

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf:

Max.

Marcus Johnson:

Are you bringing in Tupperware?

Victoria:

And Grace.

Marcus Johnson:

Genius.

Max Willens:

That's pretty amazing.