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???Michael Kim



Have you heard of Fortnite? How about PUBG? What's your understanding of Overwatch? Whether you've played these games or not, there's a good chance you've heard them mentioned somewhere. There's a reason these games come up in everyday conversation in mainstream businesses: they make money. Serious money. Fortnite alone is estimated to generate hundreds of millions of dollars per month. It's not only the game developers who are making money — the players are also cashing in. With platforms like Twitch and YouTube Gaming, players themselves are becoming the center of attention, and businesses are taking notice because of the sponsorship opportunities gaming provides.

Partnerships in Nontraditional Places

There's money circulating in the eSports circuit as well. eSports have come a long way since its first

entry into the public spotlight in 1980. From Space Invaders to Street Fighter to Starcraft to DOTA, the appeal, audience, and marketing opportunity has steadily increased over time. Today, it's not uncommon to see an eSports team, event, and/or athlete backed by an elite brand or a company break free from its 'traditional' marketing demographic and embrace this "new" community of consumers.

This is a not an easy audience to crack, however. The gaming community has been difficult to reach. They consume media in non-traditional formats and methods. They prize stewardship of the community and fiercely reward brands who align to their mission and purpose. Conversely, brands with an agenda not aligned to this ethos are immediately rooted out and shunned. Content creators like Penny Arcade and the late TotalBiscuit (to quickly name a few) who are highly regarded as ambassadors to the community and command high influential power have led the way in exposing products, games, services to a very picky audience.

> *…they do a lot of research when it comes to buying things, so you have to get it right because people will be talking about you. If you get it right, it's perfect. If you get it wrong the entire audience can turn its back on you and you're pretty much done*

– S. Lagrange MarketingWeek

Brands, for example, look for influencers, potential partners, and new audiences all the time across communities of interest such as eSports and music. NBC just announced Lilly Singh, a YouTube vlogger, will take over Carson Daly's late night slot. Let's also not forget about how an unassuming boy from Canada eventually became one of the world's biggest recording artists because a marketing manager accidentally clicked on one of Justin's earlier videos and wanted to learn more about him.

At the IEG2019 event, industry leaders are gathering to discuss how similar "niche" communities can be broached and understood. They recognize the importance of messaging with authenticity to a hyper selective market. They also realize that there are potential pockets of people waiting to be discovered and engaged in dialogue. Whether it is the next rising hip-hop star, gamer, or fashion maven, brands must learn the landscape in which these new personas have been born and nurtured in order for their messaging to connect with a like-minded audience.

Empathy is Key

I believe it's extremely important to exercise empathy when connecting with a community of interest. In other words, understand the world through their surroundings, their senses, and their experiences.

For example, let’s say you want to connect with a community of eSports athletes or hip-hop artists. Empathy means putting yourselves in their shoes. How would members of the community view your brand? Would you and your audience feel relevant to them and their community?

Whether it’s introducing a new product to the next generation of APEX Legends players or launching a new service for your own company, I recommend applying empathy above all else to make sure there is a fundamental, and most importantly, lovable fit between your offering and the audience.

We’ve designed a product development approach known as FUEL to elicit this empathy. Our design thinking workshops are crafted to keep the audience front and center in all of the activities and decisions. This helps produce outcomes and prototypes that generate actionable insights while delivering lovable experiences. Curious to learn more? Contact us today!

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