BRAND MARKETING FOR MOBILE GAMES

BEST PRACTICES FOR BRAND-BASED MOBILE GAME MARKETING

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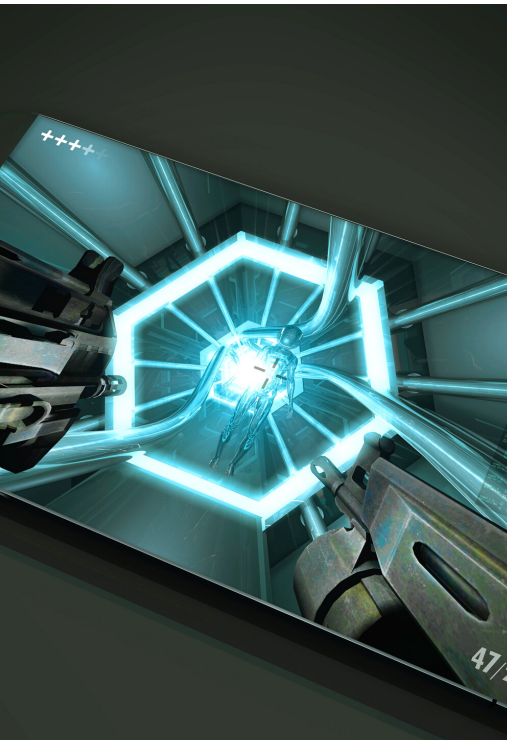https://www.linkedin.com/in/willmaness/

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INTRODUCTION

The mobile gaming industry generated an estimated $77.2B of revenue in 2020, and is estimated to surpass the $100B mark by 2023. Interest in mobile gaming has also increased amidst the COVID 19 pandemic, with the industry recording a 12% increase in new players during 2020. However, this growth has further increased competition within mobile gaming, already a highly competitive space. Not only has the number of mobile games published each year continued to rise, but churn rates have become increasingly challenging: the retention rate of the average app declined by 12% in 2020.

CHALLENGES FACING THE MOBILE GAME INDUSTRY

The mobile gaming industry has historically relied on performance-based marketing to generate positive return on investment. Performance-based models depend on user-level tracking that enables precise targeting, measurement, and optimization of marketing spend. Additionally, continuous improvements in the algorithms of ad partners has made targeting both more precise and more scalable: algorithms use hundreds of attributes to automatically select and target the most receptive audience.

Key Challenge: Privacy changes and increased competition for player attention post-pandemic may make performance-based models less efficient, especially for smaller firms.

As customers grow increasingly wary about the ways their data is used and their identities are tracked across digital channels, platforms have responded by limiting marketers' access to user-level data. In its iOS 14.5 update, Apple changed the rules around use of its identifier for advertisers (IDFA), requiring users opt-in to data tracking across other apps and websites. Apple's changes to IDFA are not an isolated event; more stringent privacy and data-gathering regulations are also on the horizon. In the EU, the upcoming ePrivacy Regulation (ePR), an extension of GDPR, will limit marketers' ability to track and target users.

Apple's IDFA change has disrupted advertisers' ability to accurately measure campaign performance and reliably predict ROI. While opt-in rates vary by app type and may rise over time, most apps have seen opt-in rates well below 50%. In its testing, Facebook noted a more than 50% drop in Audience Network publisher revenue when personalization was removed from mobile app install campaigns. For smaller mobile game studios who lack million-dollar marketing budgets, the reliable ROAS and ROI predictions generated through performance-based marketing have been key to sustaining profitability. Additionally, while larger mobile studios may weather the changes to IDFA by relying on their wealth of first-party data, smaller studios are less likely to have built or have access to large first-party data ecosystems.

Key Insight: Competing for awareness and attention in the future will require branding capabilities.

Responding to IDFA and other privacy changes, the mobile app landscape will need to transition away from relying solely on user-level targeted advertising to drive user acquisition. Brand-based marketing approaches are well-suited to this environment because they typically focus on creating broad awareness, using contextual targeting parameters instead of targeting ads to specific individuals. Additionally, as privacy changes reduce mobile game marketers' control of campaign optimization, the importance of creatives as a tool for studios to boost campaign performance will also rise. Finding elements that strengthen the alignment between creatives and target audiences is a key focus of brand-based marketing.

OPPORTUNITIES GENERATED BY BRAND-BASED MARKETING

While developing game branding capabilities will be important as a response to privacy changes, brand-based marketing as a whole also offers a wider set of new opportunities through increased awareness, higher conversion, product improvement, and business longevity.

Key Insight: Brand-based marketing capitalizes on critical opportunities to increase game awareness, boost interest, drive conversion, improve product, and create a sustainable business opportunity.

AWARENESS

Before any player downloads a game, they need to first be aware of the game. Traditional branding techniques specialize in creating this awareness and expanding the base of players that may download a game. The brand-based marketing techniques discussed in this paper will help to both expand the awareness of a game among a broader audience as well as increase the rate of awareness within a game's specific target segments. This first awareness opportunity expands game exposure to more potential players, while the second helps games capture more of an existing audience - this can be especially beneficial for niche games.

INTEREST

Awareness must also pair with interest, and great brands do just that. Increased interest within both the historic and new segments of players can improve metrics of performance based campaigns (e.g. better CTR, IPM). This interest also triggers more organic searches which elevates visibility and ranking on the app stores.

CONVERSION

By building a unique and attractive brand, future players are more likely to pick a game against its competitors when choosing which game to install. One way branding achieves this is through increased marketing program effectiveness. With a stronger brand at the early stages of a player's download and buying journey, studios report marketing efficiency gains. It is no longer brand versus performance marketing – they need to work together to increase marketing KPIs. Having a strong brand will result in higher click-through-rates and lower cost-per-acquisition. Many well-established brands invest in brand-boosting campaigns, without even including a call-to-action feature; they understand that increasing brand awareness will improve KPIs on all channels.

This will result in a longer play times, better retention metrics, and fewer players returning to competitors games - all converging into a higher customer lifetime value. Research in the video game industry has shown a linear relationship between perceived brand differentiation and player loyalty. Although the study focused on the three main video game consoles - Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft - and not on mobile gaming, the researchers found that the strength of the perceived brand differentiation could account for nearly 50 percent of brand loyalty for the three manufacturers.

Brands also capture people's thoughts and emotions about a product, and emotions are a powerful driver of consumer decision-making and purchasing. Studies have shown that the richer the emotional content of a brand in the eyes of consumers, the higher the degree of customer loyalty that brand inspires. Thus, by designing creative that builds an emotional connection with target audiences, mobile game marketers can increase loyalty and retention even in a competitive space with high churn rates.

PRODUCT

Having a line to potential customers by building a tightly-knit, highly engaged community around their brand allows studios to more easily test marketing assumptions about players' needs and desires. Simple engagement metrics (such as looking to see where prospective users dropped off while watching a gameplay video) can also be used as leading indicators of whether a new game is likely to be well-suited to its target niche, and what elements of the game might be more or less appealing. Ultimately, better feedback creates a flywheel allowing studios to develop a better game faster and less expensively. By creating spaces for players' voices to be heard, studios can also build a stronger sense of community among them while learning more about what they need and value.

SUSTAINABLE VALUE

Building a strong brand can help increase the overall long-term value of the game. First, developing a highly successful brand allows studios to unlock new revenue streams through franchising and licensing opportunities. The classic example is Angry Birds: after launching in 2009, the game quickly became the most downloaded mobile game of 2010. Angry Bird's branding as crisp, fun, colorful, and humorous helped make it a breakthrough hit. Rovio capitalized on the strength of the Angry Birds brand through franchising deals that included two movies, a television series, and hundreds of consumer products. Today, the movie franchise alone is worth an estimated $500 million, and more than 1.8 billion Angry Birds products have been sold in over 100 countries.

Second, in the long run, a strong brand becomes intellectual property (IP) that can act as a store of value. IP is valuable because it can drive non-paid conversions, increase positive word of mouth, and expand a game's audience. The feelings of liking, affiliation, and emotional connectedness fostered by strong brands can extend a game's longevity, even in a crowded mobile market and even when the game is technically inferior to newcomers. Additionally, if a game has a particularly strong brand, IP in the form of characters, universes or locations, and weapons can be deployed as valuable creative assets beyond the game itself. For example, in the PC gaming space, Riot used IP from its hit game League of Legends to create Legends of Runeterra.

HOW TO BUILD A VALUABLE BRAND

WHAT IS A BRAND?

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as the "name, term, sign, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers. This definition raises three main points. That brands are a collection of features meant to identify and make distinct a good or service.

In the mobile gaming industry, brands exist at many hierarchies including publisher, studio, story, game, or character brands. While all these brands have value, game brands stand alone most effectively. Because of this, game brands are a great starting point for studios new to branding. These brands include three main components: brand strategy, brand voice, and brand elements.

BRAND STRATEGY

A good brand strategy captures the ethos of a brand, which marketing can use to guide a brand's actions and visual identity. There are six core components: mission, promise, value proposition, positioning, vision, and purpose. These represent the brand's current priorities and future aspirations. Studios can begin to craft this strategy by reflecting upon and answering these reflective questions:

BRAND STRATEGTY COMPONENT	REFLECTIVE QUESTION
Mission	Who are you now and what do you do?
Promise	What can you be counted on doing? What are the expectations?
Value Proposition	What benefits and cost savings do you create?
Positioning	What thoughts and feelings do you want to evoke vs. other brands?
Vision	Who do you want to be and what would you like to do?
Purpose	How do you want to make the world a better place?

When crafting a strategy, also revisit the history of the game or company. Why was this game created? Who are the members of the founding team? What are their stories? What is the setting or context of the game? Who are the game's primary characters? What are their struggles or objectives?

KEY BRANDING ELEMENTS

BRAND VOICE

Brand voice is the personality of a brand which informs how a brand acts. This personality brings brand strategy to life by interacting with players. Specific copy or elements may differ across channels in order best resonate with the players there, but brand voice must always be consistent with the strategy. When determining a brand voice, studios should reflect on the personality of the brand. What style of communicating aligns with this personality, and how does this resonate with players? Think about the sorts of activities, hobbies, and passions that the brand might have. How does the brand comment on related social media content? How might the brand approach popular holidays or traditions?

BRAND FEATURES

Brand features refer to the brand elements that visually represent the brand. Some elements include name, logo, colors, tagline, image, icon, intellectual property, and typography. These visual elements must further the brand strategy and complement the brand voice. When determining these elements, think again about the personality of the brand. What colors, visuals, or fonts align well? Experiment. Try a variety of options. Get internal and external feedback.

BUILDING BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is a measure of the extent to which players are aware of your brand. Without building awareness, great brands go unnoticed. To generate awareness, brands should consider the consistency of branded content and alignment of the brand's components. Once the branded content is generated, engage online. Socialize with players, influencers, and communities that are relevant to the game. Take this brand voice into owned content as well. Create a blog, forum, or even host live-events. Also, awareness is not entirely the responsibility of marketing. Product plays a critical role in developing awareness as well. Product managers and game developers should consider features that promote awareness like:

- In-game shareable content
- Features that make content sharing easy
- Competitive or collaborative gameplay
- Social features that connect players
- Release schedules that keep players engaged and excited about new content

CASE STUDY: CLASH OF CLANS

Note: This case study is not Supercell content and instead is an approximation of the real brand details based on review of publicly available materials.

The Clash of Clans brand establishes itself as engaging, unique, and competitive through its strategy. It is positioned to translate traditional complex genre gameplay into an intellectual property environment that encourages approachability and joyful player experiences.

Brand Strategy Component	Illustrative Detail
Brand Mission	The iOS premiere competitive strategy game
Brand Promise	Fun and easily-accessible gameplay with the Clash of Clans community
Brand Value Proposition	Engaging character intellectual property and unique gameplay mechanic
Brand Positioning	Addicting and approachable mobile strategy gameplay with strategic rigor and without needless complexity
Brand Vision	A suite of engaging, rich, and approachable mobile games
Brand Purpose	Bringing connectivity, competition, and joy to mobile phone users everywhere

Clash of Clans @ClashofClans · May 9
Happy #MothersDay to all the moms and mother figures out there! 🤗
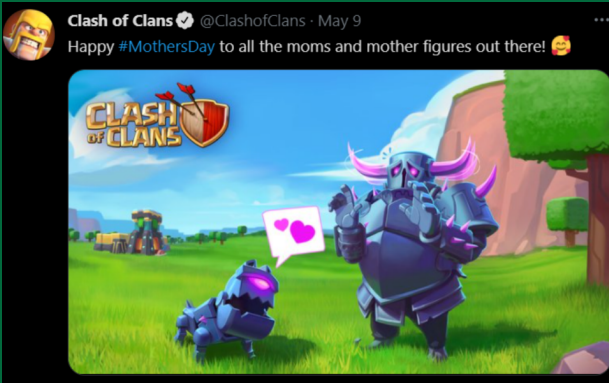
Across its 3 primary channels: owned website, app store, and social. Clash of Clans uses consistent copy and brand elements. On May 9, 2021, @ClashofClans tweeted for Mother's Day (see above). The tweet shows the brand mark and character intellectual property in a branded environmental setting. The copy is family friendly, supportive, and fun. It reinforces the game community through a sense of family and emphasizes the approachability of gameplay compared to other mobile strategy titles.

This tweet also portrays brand elements including icon, name, imagery, colors, and characters. These elements make the tweet immediately recognizable as Clash of Clans content. These elements also reinforce Clash's brand strategy. The typography uses block lettering to reinforce the Barbarian character intellectual property, which has natural associations of simplicity and competition. The colors and imagery are fun and whimsical. The juxtaposition of these elements creates a sense of engaging combat competitive gameplay in a fun and approachable context.

Name	Logo	Color	Slogan / Tagline
Clash of Clans		Among Others	"Lead Your Clan to Victory!"
Image	**Icon**	**Characters / IP**	**Typography**
			You Blockhead

BUILDING BRAND EQUITY

Brand voice is the personality of a brand which informs how a brand acts. This personality brings brand strategy to life by interacting with players. Specific copy or elements may differ across channels in order best resonate with the players there, but brand voice must always be consistent with the strategy. When determining a brand voice, studios should reflect on the personality of the brand. What style of communicating aligns with this personality, and how does this resonate with players? Think about the sorts of activities, hobbies, and passions that the brand might have. How does the brand comment on related social media content? How might the brand approach popular holidays or traditions?

Successfully crafting a brand, like Clash of Clans, creates perceived value and emotional resonance among current and would-be players. This differentiates the game from other mobile strategy games that may be similar in concept or play mechanics. The value added to marketing activities by branding is referred to as brand equity.

There are 5 components of the customer mindset important to brand equity: awareness, association, attitude, attachment, and activity.

Awareness quickly leads to association. Ideally this association reflects brand strategy or deliberate co-branding. If associations are strong, customers will develop attitudes toward the brand and even personal attachment. Strong attitudes or attachment drive activity or interaction with a brand, which increases click-through-rates, drives downloads, boosts in-app purchases, or increases play times. Creating deep brand equity within the customer mindset requires branded content to be consistent in all relevant locations. This includes social media, website content, app-store content, emails, or any otherwise.

Strong branding and awareness campaigns generate and establish brand equity overtime, but teams also need to think about maintaining equity. Poor launches, server outages, and bugs commonly eat away at brand equity in the gaming industry. Some quick tips on maintaining equity over time include:

- Make the game easy to find in the app store or online
- Price game purchases in-line with customer expectations
- Have strong quality assurance programs to support smooth game version releases or updates
- Encourage players - especially brand promoters - to write reviews about the game
- Have comprehensive FAQs, forums, or customer support to address player questions
- Ensure in-game marketing experiences do not significantly detract from the gameplay experience

With all this in mind, it is most critical to listen to the players. Positive player experiences will generate brand equity and loyalty. Negative experiences will detract. Take feedback seriously and make changes to the brand, marketing program, or game as needed.

BRAND-BASED MARKETING
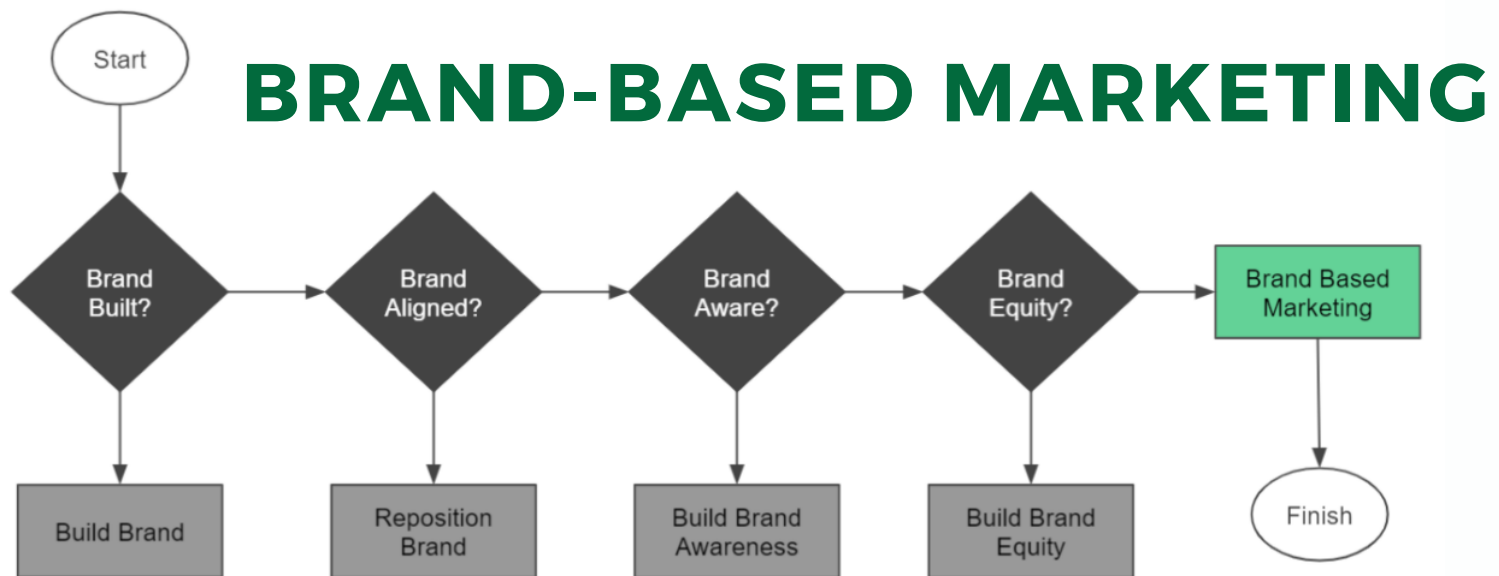
Brand-based marketing and brand-based marketing campaigns leverage a firm's brand, marketing program, and customer mindset to achieve market performance and increased shareholder value. Marketers at leading brands blur the lines between performance and brand-based marketing to think about campaign performance metrics across the funnel. In this circumstance, all marketing activities leverage brand by being consistent with the strategy, voice, and identity to increase marketing performance metrics across program goals.

After generating brand equity, the final stage involves designing and implementing a brand-based marketing campaign. Campaigns are typically timed to when studios are launching a new game title, introducing a major update, or entering a new market. It's important to spend enough time imagining, positioning, and testing the brand before investing resources into a major marketing campaign: in the consumer-packaged goods industry, a new brand identity can take up to a year to develop!

BRAND-BASED CAMPAIGN PROCESS OVERVIEW:

1. Determine campaign objectives that reflect the brand's key associations and positioning.
2. Define core audience segment(s) and build a targeting strategy to reach them.
3. Develop creative assets tailored to each segment and group.
4. Select media formats and channels to deliver creative assets.

AUDIENCE SELECTION AND TARGETING

Your brand positioning should shape your audience selection and campaign targeting. According to interviewees, studios often consider two to three core customer segments when planning their marketing campaigns. By honing in on narrower customer segments that particularly value their brand's unique points of differentiation, studios can spend fewer resources to reach the most receptive audience. As one studio put it, "niches get riches!" After identifying a core niche for the brand, studios should also consider other niches which share some, but not all, of the core niche's characteristics. These segments represent adjacencies, which could become opportunities to extend the brand to a new audience. For example, if Generation X parents enjoy a throwback game, their young children could represent an extension opportunity across generational demographics.

Contextual Targeting

When developing campaigns, it's crucial to ensure the brand appears in front of the right customers, in appropriate contexts, and at the correct time. Advertising is highly contextual: displaying an advertisement next to relevant content can significantly enhance its value, while ads placed in inappropriate contexts can tarnish a brand's image by introducing harmful associations.

Thus, targeting should focus on reaching the selected audience in contexts that are well-matched to both the audience's desires and the brand's key associations.

Contextual Targeting Tips

1. Directly select types of content to position game creative next to.
2. Switch out creative based on the content it accompanies
3. Purchase ad inventory that best fits the appropriate brand context, including positioning near content that matches brand keywords and phrases.

DEVELOPING CREATIVE

Developing strong creative and hitting the right message is a critical success factor that can allow studios to succeed despite having smaller budgets. A Nielsen study found that the quality, messaging, and context of creative is responsible for as much as 49% of all sales lift. In fact, award-winning creative is so powerful that ads that win awards generate a full eleven times more market share growth. Conversely, if creative doesn't meet users' expectations or fit their tastes, the game is likely to struggle and it may even reflect poorly on the studio as a whole.

FEATURES OF GOOD CREATIVE

Creative should fit the motivations of the core audience segment the game is targeting: it needs to capture why they would enjoy or already like the game. Strong creative shares three key features:

1. A "hook" that captivates the audience in the first few seconds.
2. A clear story or an arc that builds a sense of progression and momentum.
3. An ability to evoke the core emotional elements you want associated with your brand.

CREATIVE CONCEPT	HOW IT WORKS	GOALS	EXAMPLES
INFLUENCER GAMEPLAY	• Short videos of influencers playing the game	• Attract players • Legitimize the game and gain credibility	• Ulala: Idle Adventure
CHARACTER COUNTDOWN	• Previews the game by counting down the best characters, powers, or weapons	• Showcase the wide range of in-game options • Generate higher engagement and increase curiosity	• AFK Arena, Rise of Kingdoms
CHARACTER PUZZLES	• Feature characters or concepts from the game in brain-teasing puzzles	• Engage players' desire for completion and validation. • Drive higher click-through rates	• Hero Wars

Ideally, studios should find ways to quickly and frugally test your creative to confirm that it is driving momentum towards the objectives they selected. Creative messaging represents a hypothesis about what the game's selected audience values: for example, a marketer developing a puzzle-based creative may believe that people enjoy playing her game because it evokes a sense of challenge while delivering a hit of validation when completed. By using A/B testing to test different forms of creative with small audiences while controlling for other variables, studios can confirm their hypotheses are correct before investing significant resources into a full campaign rollout.

Working With Third Party Agencies

While studios often default to using internal in-game videos as creative, this isn't always the most effective strategy. Professional agencies can add value by increasing the quality level of creative in a way that's perceptible to users: they can take what's special and unique about the game (its points of differentiation) and help them shine through in each creative medium. Rising competition in the mobile game market has raised audiences' expectations of creative: a simple video demonstrating basic gameplay is less likely to break through. As a result, an increasing number of studios bring in third-party agencies to provide the innovation and human touch needed to develop standout creative.

Agency Collaboration Process

1. The studio develops a brief for the agency including information on campaign objectives, primary and secondary audiences, brand points of differentiation, and key game features.
2. The agency determines tactics and develops assets that work best for each customer segment.
3. Some agencies make connections to influencers, helping frame the game to highlight why it would be an authentic fit with that influencer's personal brand and audience.

Experienced CPG marketers looking to work with agencies usually select for expertise, evaluating how well the agency has executed against similar briefs in the past. Another key factor is the agency's network: the connections and resources they bring to the table that align with the brand's needs.

Developing Creative In-House

Although studios recommended working with third party agencies when possible, they also offered advice for small indie studios that must develop creative in-house. The main takeaway was the continued need for an outsider's perspective: interviewees recommending getting feedback from someone who hadn't worked on and wasn't associated with the game. More information about the pros and cons of developing creative in-house vs. working with third party agencies can be found in the Center for Digital Strategy's Mobile Gaming Playbook.

SELECTING MEDIA CHANNELS

When selecting media channels, it's vital to know the game's specific audience segment(s) and determine which channels they frequent, as well as the types of interaction the studio wants to encourage. While Youtube and Twitch are currently the channels that are most strongly associated with gaming, niche audiences may also be reached through other channels, including Facebook, Discord, and Reddit. Finally, it's important to make sure that the general tone of creative across different channels is consistent, even if the content and delivery are different. Discrepancies in brand voice between platforms make it more difficult to maintain a unified brand identity.

NON-DIGITAL MARKETING CHANNELS

While most mobile games are promoted using digital campaigns, non-digital channels can be used to heighten excitement and reach player bases outside of core mobile gaming audiences. The use of television and other media in mobile game marketing has become more common recently, especially in the Japanese and Korean mobile markets. In the US, gaming brands spent $28.1M on TV advertising in October 2020.

PROS OF MULTIMEDIA STRATEGIES

- Reach potential players outside of core mobile gaming audiences.
- Increase the "hype factor" for brands centered on excitement and competition
- Unlock new growth opportunities after performance-based techniques have been exhausted.

CONS OF MULTIMEDIA STRATEGIES

- More costly, especially if using TV advertising.
- More time consuming to create and run vs. a social media campaign
- Harder to determine attribution and to directly measure success

Case Study: Game of War

- Game of War, a free-to-play mobile MMO game, released a TV commercial ad spot starring supermodel Kate Upton.
- The ad was reportedly aired more than 9,000 times, most notably in the 2015 Super Bowl
- Sales of in-app digital goods and paid "boosts" to speed up empire-building doubled after the ads aired, and Machine Zone's revenue rose to $1 million per day.
- However, the campaign reportedly cost Machine Zone $80 million in airtime.
- While not every company can afford to invest the high dollar amounts this type of TV ad campaign requires, multimedia advertising can still unlock new opportunities for growth when a studio sees diminishing marginal returns from performance-based marketing.

GENERATING EARNED MEDIA

In addition to paid advertising, successful mobile games gain awareness through positive word of mouth, including social media shares and posts, game reviews, app store ratings, and user-generated content. Collectively, this publicity which the studio earned but did not explicitly purchase is defined as "earned media." As the number of mobile games released grows and studios spend more on paid advertising, earned media has become an important way new games establish their points of differentiation and earn legitimacy. However, generating positive earned media can be challenging for studios, as it requires users to actively choose to engage and share game-related content within their networks. Marketing research has shown that most customers don't organically share information about products.

Many studios solve this problem by strategically "seeding" content and experiences from their games that are designed to spark conversation and by seeking to develop communities around their games that foster organic sharing of information. Studios looking to generate earned media should start by considering what types of interaction they are hoping to encourage from players (i.e., shares of trailer videos, app store ratings, joining a game Discord channel, etc.). Once the most valuable types of interaction have been determined, the studio can then work on increasing the probability that these interactions take place by drawing on customers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to share and engage with new content.

Tips for Generating Positive Earned Media:

- Recognize that most customers don't organically share information.
- Develop clear objectives for the types of interactions to encourage.
- Strategically "seed" content from your game designed to spark conversation.
- Create content aimed at generating earned media separately from conversion-based content.
- Consider making content targeted to niche audiences aligned with your brand as a cost-effective way to generate earned media
- Start small and scale up: if content starts to blow up, invest more and double down on that strategy.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Building a community around a game allows the people that matter (the game's core audience) to have an authentic, real relationship with the brand and the company; something that goes beyond just being willing to download the game. The feelings of loyalty, attachment, community, and engagement inspired by these communities create resonance, the highest degree of brand affiliation. Ultimately, engaged gaming communities allow studios to increase LTV by giving users a powerful voice in how the game evolves.

A challenge for mobile gaming communities is that accessing common community-building platforms like social media and online forums usually requires players to leave the game. Thus, studios looking to develop communities around their game must strategize their use of established community-building platforms vs. attempting to develop their own in-game community spaces.

Benefits of Communities

- Gather feedback to refine rules and gameplay
- Explore ideas for new levels, characters, and features
- Leverage community to create user-generated content at minimal cost
- Produce "homegrown" influencers who can draw positive attention to the game
- Amplify market positioning and messaging
- Allow user self-service through player-generated resources and guides

3 STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING MOBILE GAME COMMUNITIES

STRATEGY	PROS	CONS	EXAMPLE
TAP INTO AN EXISTING COMMUNITY, SUCH AS A GAMER FORUM OR A SOCIAL MEDIA GROUP ALIGNED WITH THE GAME'S BRAND.	• Helps drive higher awareness quickly • Non-gaming groups that are aligned with the studio's brand may have higher engagement vs. core gaming segments. • Standardized tools to engage with players and encourage conversations	• The space is not designed with the studio's marketing objectives in mind • Little control over the conversation or ability to moderate • May alienate the existing community or provoke a negative response	**Niche, a genetics survival game developed by Stray Fawn Studios, targeted teachers (a non-core gaming demographic) through education-focused forums and subreddits.**
CREATE A COMMUNITY SPECIFICALLY FOR THE GAME USING AN ESTABLISHED PLATFORM SUCH AS FACEBOOK OR DISCORD	• Makes your game the center of the conversation at all times. • Greater control over the conversation and ability to moderate • Allows studios to integrate native marketing and advertising elements • Increases ability to collect first-party data and monitor metrics	• Lower awareness vs. existing communities. • Players must leave the app to interact with the community. • Higher expectations for studio responsiveness	**Fluffy Fairy Games focuses on growing and maintaining its active Facebook community. After Facebook users requested they add in-app purchases, over time, these items became 40% of revenue.**
CREATE AN IN-GAME COMMUNITY DIRECTLY WITHIN THE GAME'S APP	• Targets players who are most receptive to connecting • Keeps players in-app and maximizes opportunities to engage, retain, and monetize users • Complete control over the conversation and ability to moderate • Complete ability to collect first-party data and to relate community activity to game performance metrics	• Only targets existing players; cannot reach potential users • Time-consuming to create • Expensive • Requires both initial investment and continued maintenance	**Rodeo Stampede used KTPlay to develop their in-app community. By using this community to integrate in-game rewards with a word of mouth marketing campaign, the studio saw a 97.6% new user increase during the event.**

COLLABORATING WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS, BRANDS, AND FIRMS

PARTNERING WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS

Many gaming studios are now using influencer marketing to help build trust and legitimize new games in the eyes of target audiences, drawing on the existing trust and regard that players have for these influencers. For a detailed guide to using influencer marketing and the process of partnering with influencers, see the Center for Digital Strategies Mobile Gaming Playbook.

PARTNERING WITH OTHER BRANDS

When building awareness for smaller products without the budget for multimedia campaigns, it can be helpful to link your brand with a concept that already has significant awareness and traction. By working with partners, you can use their alliances to differentiate from other competitors. Brand partnerships work best when both organizations have some brand associations in common and can benefit from the unique associations linked to each other's brands. Thus, when selecting companies to partner with, look for those that share key associations with your game brand; companies that will be perceived as authentically connected to what you do and will add value for your customer base. After selecting a partner that has these traits, studios should work with them to help create content that integrates with both their brands.

PARTNERING WITH OTHER FIRMS

For smaller studios, getting your game into events or subscriptions offered by major platforms like Apple and Google can be key to increasing awareness and generating positive buzz. Incorporating new features offered by these platforms into your game can help smaller games break into bigger events. Games that support the new features and traits prioritized by the platforms (and, more fundamentally, by the players) can gain access to a bigger microphone.

MEASUREMENT
How do you know it's working?

Brand measurement includes identifying brand metrics, creating a methodology and cadence for tracking them, and generating insights. Brand measurement programs assess a brand's product, competitors and category, looking at metrics such as advocacy, awareness, loyalty, preference, favorability, engagement, and trust, among many others. Some brand metrics can be tracked through search engine traffic, but effective brand measurement programs directly interact with players, through surveys or consumer panels. The latter is an effective low-cost strategy to gather feedback, and can also be used to develop brands, rather than only measure them.

When building a brand measurement program, companies must be patient and set clear and reasonable business objectives. The first step in building brand metrics is to determine those objectives. These can be directly mapped to brand measurement objectives. Some of the most common objectives include:

- Growing brand awareness
- Developing brand salience
- Increasing positive consumer sentiment
- Building top-of-mind consideration
- Gaining preference from competitors
- Creating positive associations with the brand

BRAND MEASUREMENT STEP 1:

listen to players, run annual brand surveys, and track their engagement with the brand

LISTEN TO PLAYERS

If new to brand measurement, a good first step is to listen to your players rather than invest in sophisticated tools. Engaging with players is the most cost-effective way to assess the value of a game's brand. These player insights are just as important as quantitative insights such as sales increase. Brand surveys are a great way to gather large amounts of player data, but can limit creativity by asking standardized questions across all respondents. Alternatively, studios connect with loyal players to ask questions about brand perception and preference over competing games.

ANNUAL BRAND SURVEYS

Studios that are new to brand measurement should conduct an annual brand survey to measure brand awareness and other key brand metrics. A main advantage of surveys is flexibility: surveys can be targeted, ask the right questions, and conducted online or offline (although online is generally best).

Some elements to keep in mind when designing brand surveys are the following:
- Pick the right respondents: sending the survey to all players instead of target players might muddy results
- Brand measurement surveys can be biased by extreme reactions from a small group of players: aggregating reactions might not always make sense
- Make it fun to complete: a survey needs to be easily understandable, mobile-friendly and a reasonable length, otherwise respondents might refuse to participate

As most brand work, this measurement can occur at different hierarchies (e.g. studio, game, character). For smaller studios, some of which might only have a couple games, measuring brand at the title level makes the most sense (question examples: What do you think about this title? Are you excited about this title?). Other types of brand surveys generally apply at large studios.

ANNUAL BRAND SURVEYS (CONT.)

After choosing the right respondents, the next step is questionnaire development. In general, most respondents tire at the 20-question mark, sometimes sooner depending on the format and nature of the questions. Out of these 20, questionnaires should allocate a few to the following brand metrics:

- Awareness: Do you know this game? Would you consider downloading it?
- Favorability: Is this your favorite game? Are there games that you prefer playing?
- Engagement: Are you using this game everyday? Do you use this specific feature?
- Purchase intention: Do you plan to buy or download this game?

TRACKING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BRAND

Studios have data to measure the value of a game's brand. Engagement metrics after a game's launch indicates players' perceptions. For example, after launching a new feature, a surge in engagement highlights strong favorability. Mobile games often struggle to get players to come back; many lose interest in the game after a handful of sessions. Therefore, significant play times can indicate a good brand perception as well.

Another way for studios to measure brand engagement is to use advertising solutions. For example, after launching a Youtube branding campaign, a studio might track metrics such as the view through rate (VTR). VTR is a good indicator of whether a branding campaign resonated with the consumer, and therefore increased engagement. Studios can also use search engine query tools to analyze searches and how they relate to brands.

BRAND MEASUREMENT STEP 2:
running more advanced brand surveys and tracking community engagement metrics

ADVANCED BRAND SURVEYS

Some studios will find it valuable to run brand surveys monthly, quarterly, biannually, or even at specific moments in a game's life cycle. For instance, some studios run surveys after entering a new market, launching a new title, or releasing a major update. Fast-moving brands in consumer goods and technology track brand metrics monthly or more frequently. However, most studios find that semi-annual and annual measurement is the most effective cost-benefit.

Studios that make frequent use of brand surveys should track more advanced metrics than the typical awareness, favorability and purchase intention metrics. More sophisticated metrics include "premiumness" (are users willing to spend more on this game than other titles in the same category), excitement (what do users feel when they play the game), and advocacy (are users willing to become brand ambassadors).

Some elements to keep in mind when scheduling surveys are the following:
- Try to time brand surveys to coincide with high advertising spend, which increases the odds of detecting gains driven by a branding campaign
- Try to time surveys to be completed in time for important marketing planning activities: the results can be used to adjust a studio's marketing strategy
- Brand surveys for highly targeted customer segments can take longer to complete

STATISTICAL MODELING AND WEIGHTING

Companies must calculate how many people need to respond to the survey to reach desired levels of statistical confidence when interpreting results. The table below suggests population sizes by margin of error at a 95% confidence level.

| Population Size	Sample Size per Margin of Error		
	±3%	±5%	±10%
500	345	220	80
1,000	525	285	90
3,000	810	350	100
5,000	910	370	100
10,000	1,000	385	100
100,000+	1,100	400	100

STATISTICAL MODELING AND WEIGHTING (CONT.)

The response rate will also affect the number of people to whom a survey should be sent. For instance, if 100 respondents are needed and only 25% of invited players accept, then at least 400 people need to be invited. To calculate this, surveyors can use the following equation:

(# of respondent needed / expected % response rate) * 100

Studios should also assign weights to tracked brand metrics, as not all metrics are generally considered equal. For instance, a studio might consider awareness more important than preference, as there are few similar games in the category. In this case, player awareness is more valuable than preference over other titles. Studios should assign weights to brand metrics based on their relative importance for the business. These weights and individual metric scores allow studios to calculate an overall brand value score, the single currency to measure and optimise branding efforts. The higher the brand value score, the better a studio's marketing efforts are performing to drive brand engagement. This translates directly into downstream metrics like sales.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Studios can also track community engagement metrics to measure the success of their branding efforts. When building an authentic community of users, studios must look at metrics other than downloads, time spent on the app, or recurring users. They should understand how engaged players are in the community, and how the community self-starts this engagement. The total number of fans is often less important than the engagement per fan. It is more valuable to have 10,000 players with 9,000 engaged, and 5,000 brand ambassadors creating their own content, than a community of 100,000 players in which only 5,000 (5%) are engaged. Studios should track the rate of growth of their community, but more importantly, compare it to the rate of engagement. Community growth at the expense of engagement risks brand loyalty.
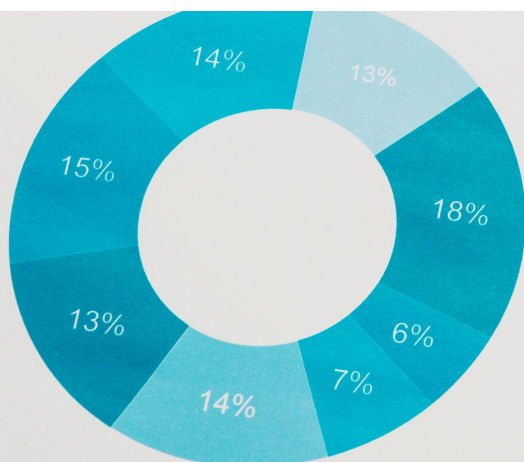
BRAND MEASUREMENT STEP 3:
brand uplift modeling and brand audits

BRAND UPLIFT MODELING

Studios with more financial resources use brand uplift surveys. The surveys are sent to two groups of consumers - one that was exposed to a branding campaign (the exposed group), and another that wasn't (the control group). Brand lift surveys measure the same metrics as other brand surveys (e.g. awareness, consideration, engagement, and purchase intention). These surveys evaluate with more certainty whether a campaign had an impact. They will answer a question such as: is purchase intention for the exposed group higher than for the control group (is there an uplift for the exposed group)?

The uplift achieved by the branding campaign can be measured in real time, as users view the advertisement. If the studio does not see uplift, it can modify the advertisement, for instance by adding more brand elements, or changing the length of a video. Uplift modeling can be used for both pre-launch and post-launch campaigns. As in A/B testing, the results of a pre-launch campaign influence a post-launch campaign. YouTube has a built-in feature called Brand Lift Survey, in which the set-up and measurement are fully automated. Studios can talk to their Google Sales Representative for more information.

There are several important considerations when using uplift brand modeling. The first is that defining the right metrics is even more important than for regular brand surveys. For instance, measuring awareness uplift makes sense for a completely new IP, but less so for an already popular game. If a studio has a powerful brand, it should not expect significant awareness uplift following a branding campaign. It should instead look at metrics such as consideration or favorability. Second, studios should understand the difference between uplift absolute value and relative value. For example, if a studio starts from low brand awareness and achieves large uplift, then the relative value is the important metric. In contrast, if the control group is already aware of a brand, then even if the brand achieves the same absolute uplift, the relative value will be lower. Studios should be sensitive to the context in which they are growing their brand; are they launching a new game, or growing their audience for an existing title?

BRAND AUDITS

The largest studios conduct brand audits, annual checkups that evaluate a brand, its strengths, and its weaknesses. Studios usually hire outside firms for an outsider's perspective. Brand audits examine internal branding (e.g. brand values, company culture, mission) and external branding (e.g. logo, advertising, website, social media, email marketing and public relations).

The first step in a brand audit is questioning players. Relying on website traffic and social media numbers alone will not give a complete picture; a mixture of quantitative and qualitative feedback will provide a more complete view. The second step is reviewing web and app analytics. Looking at downloads is not enough; brand audits also consider playing time, conversion rates, and bounce rates. The third step is reviewing social data; this demographic information allows you to better understand your audience. Brand audits leverage social data to conduct a sentiment analysis, allowing you to understand the wider public opinion around your brand. They can also complete a linguistic analysis, which categorizes mentions to give an overview of the associations with your brand. The fourth and final step is looking at your competitors, to understand your place in the market.

EIGHT AREAS THAT STUDIOS MAY CONSIDER SCORING DURING A BRAND AUDIT:

1. Player-centric brand mission, vision and purpose
2. Superior competitive brand/game positioning
3. Well-defined game portfolio and studio brand
4. Fully integrated marketing program
5. Player loyalty
6. Compelling game value proposition
7. Innovation and relevance over-time
8. Brand growth strategies

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP

When implementing brand-based marketing within a studio, commitment from the top is essential. The implementation of brand-based marketing will usually take several years, during which executives must allow their marketing teams to experiment with new types of campaigns. As highlighted above, brand measurement is not an exact science, and calculating clear ROI is difficult. Brand value is also a long run investment. CEOs and CMOs must therefore show patience and evaluate brand marketers on different metrics than performance marketers.

CAPABILITIES AND PEOPLE

The transition from performance-based marketing must be led by those most impacted by the change. In most cases, this will be digital marketers, who will also enact the company's response to IDFA changes. Some studios have distinct roles for performance marketers and brand marketers. The largest studios have sufficient resources to hire an expert to lead branding efforts. Smaller studios usually ask marketing employees to focus on both branding and performance marketing. This is complex, as metrics between the two approaches are different, and more importantly, are measured over different time horizons.

FINANCING

When implementing brand-based marketing, some companies decide to create a dedicated team within their marketing department, with its own budget. In smaller studios, a single team usually manages both types of marketing. It will have one budget, which is spent on performance-based marketing and brand-based marketing. On average, companies with strong brands spend about 20% of their marketing budget on brand awareness. A tip to keep in mind is that the best time to take large brand swings is when the company has the most disposable budget. Otherwise, leadership will likely focus on performance-based marketing, for which the return on investment is more easily calculated.