

Industry Report
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The Top Performing Ad Networks of 2019

FOR PC AND CONSOLE GAMES



Written by: **Emilee Helm**, Marketing Manager
Data Analysis: **Robert Syvarth**, VP Engineering

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About Gamesight

Gamesight is the marketing platform for PC & console games. Gamesight empowers publishers to build strong communities, engage the right influencers, and effectively measure marketing performance. Gamesight works with some of the top gaming brands in the world like Warner Brothers, Microsoft, Wizards of the Coast, and SEGA. In 2018, Gamesight worked with thousands of influencers and ran the largest single influencer campaign on Twitch.

Gamesight was founded in 2015 in Seattle, Washington. The dedicated team is funded by the top VCs in Seattle and is currently hiring for multiple positions.

To learn more visit www.gamesight.io or follow us on Twitter [@gamesight](https://twitter.com/gamesight). If you have a passion for gaming, games marketing, and data visit www.gamesight.io/jobs

Methodology

The goal of our research was to uncover which ad networks offered the highest value to PC game publishers. To determine value, we used two crucial factors to grade performance:

Prevalence - network frequency and volume run through the network

Performance - click-through and conversion rates and quality of players delivered

To measure these traits, we examined the frequency of individual ad networks across the platform, what networks grossed the highest engagement, and at what rates they converted players.

Non-programmatic data collection:

All data unrelated to campaign performance was collected from publicly available sources, or in response to specific inquiries. We endeavored to use as many primary sources (game websites, publisher press releases, official statements, etc.) as possible. However, in many cases, we pulled from credible journalistic sources to fill in gaps.

We have cited all our sources in our endnotes section. If you are a developer or publisher of a game in this report and would like to provide us with corrections or updated data, please reach out to info@gamesight.io.

Key Definitions

Ad Network - A company that connects advertisers to websites that want to host ads. The key function of an ad network is to aggregate ad supply from publishers and match it with an advertiser's demand.

Impressions - The point at which an ad is viewed once by a visitor or displayed once on a web page. The number of impressions of a particular advertisement is determined by the number of times the particular page is located and loaded.

Clicks - The number of times a user has engaged with an advertisement after having it appear in their web browser.

Conversion - The act of converting a customer who browses your site to a paying customer.

Retention - The rate at which users continue to return to and engage with the product advertised.

Search Ads - Relevant advertisements that return following input to a search engine in a web browser.

Display Ads - Display ads (also known as banner ads) are designed images that appear at the top of a webpage or are intertwined throughout the content.

Social Ads - Ads designed specifically to run on social media platforms. Often, they resemble organic content.

F2P - Acronym for "free-to-play." Games that are free to play but monetized through in-game purchases.

Premium - Games that are sold for a fixed amount upfront, typically \$60.

Overview

Gamesight is the marketing platform for both PC and console games. Our software empowers publishers to build active communities, engage the right influencers, and effectively measure marketing performance. The most common question we receive from customers is: “What is the most effective marketing channel?”

Everyone is continuously searching for the best methods to optimize ad spend, and this analysis aims to answer those questions in broad strokes. This report offers an in-depth look at the most popular advertising networks for PC and console gaming, ranking them using data gathered from the Gamesight engine.

Key Takeaways:

- 1. Social media advertisements are dependably successful in converting gamers into players, specifically Twitter and Reddit.** With 40 percent of U.S. adults between 18 and 29 years old using Twitter, developers can effortlessly reach their target audience through the site. Online gaming and its communities are highly accessible via the internet, making it a no-brainer for businesses to advertise to them on their most-visited social networks.
- 2. To get the most out of your audience, it’s vital to understand them.** Networks such as CPM Star — which are explicitly designed for games — show great promise in regard to targeted-ad creation. Taking time to be attentive to your audience pays off: Gamer-oriented networks like Network N and CPM Star yielded an average conversion rate of 4.3 percent.
- 3. There is no perfect formula.** Marketing will look different for every game, and to ensure the best results, companies must continuously experiment with their strategies. Titles vary in popularity and budget, and determining what works best for an individual community comes with repetition. Tweaking your approach based on feedback from both your data and your community will often yield the best results.
- 4. Working with content creators on Twitch, YouTube, Mixer, Facebook Live, or even TikTok and Instagram, can be a vital part of a successful marketing campaign.** However, it is important to find influencers that will accurately represent your brand, with an audience who is a best-match for your game. Hiring “the biggest” will not always net the best results. Instead, identify creators who fit within your genre, build a relationship with them, and clearly communicate your needs and expectations.

Top 5 Analysis

The top 5 networks were selected using a combination of both prevalence and performance and their success across various titles. They are:



Twitter Ads



CPM Star



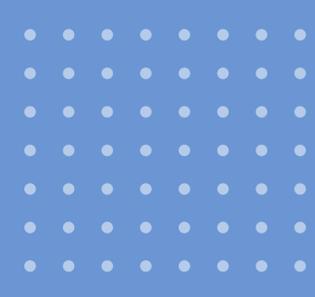
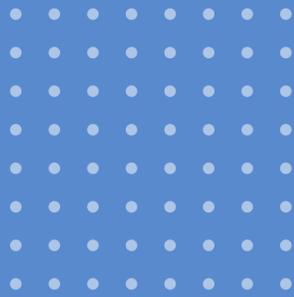
Google Ads



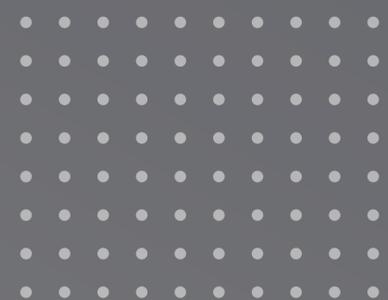
Facebook Ads



Reddit



Twitter Ads



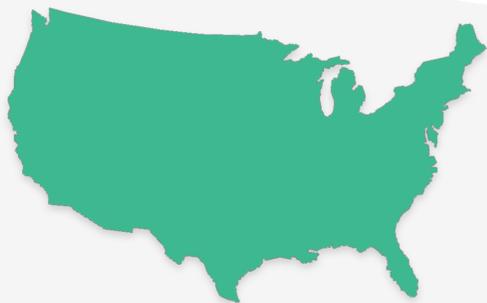


Best Overall Performer

Twitter Ads consistently provided the highest average conversion and retention rates among networks.

In 2018 alone, there were over 1 billion tweets about gaming around the world. Twitter reports that over 65 percent of its users are gamers, half of which play console games consistently. The gaming community, developers, publishers, and fans have long been using Twitter to share their thoughts and spark conversations about new products. Data from Twitter has also shown that its users are 1.25 times more likely to spend money on games and gaming products¹.

There are three main types of advertising content on Twitter: **promoted tweets**, **promoted accounts**, and **promoted trends**. The goal of these campaigns is to generate brand awareness and increase engagement. Users can interact with promoted content the same as they would with organic content – meaning that fans and players can share, comment on, and tag their followers in advertisements.



United States

Top Geographical Performance



Volume Score

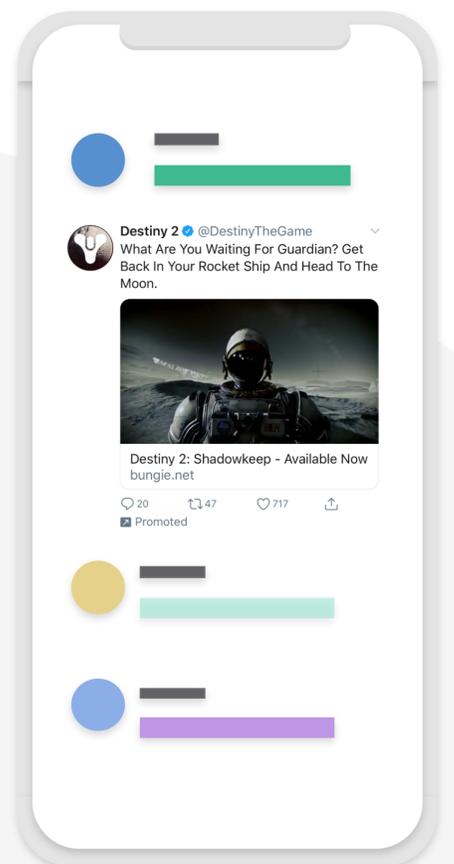


6.1%

Average conversion rate



Retention Score



The promoted badge in the bottom left identifies that the content is being paid for. However, fans can still interact with it as they would any other organic tweet. They even have the ability to “retweet” the advertisement.



CPM Star

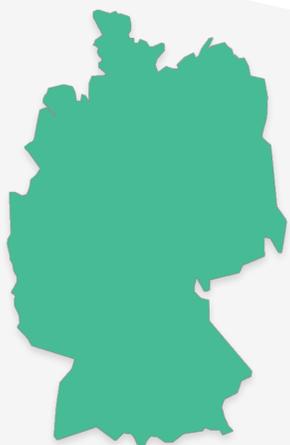


Widest Reach

CPM Star was utilized to reach gamers across more regions than any other network

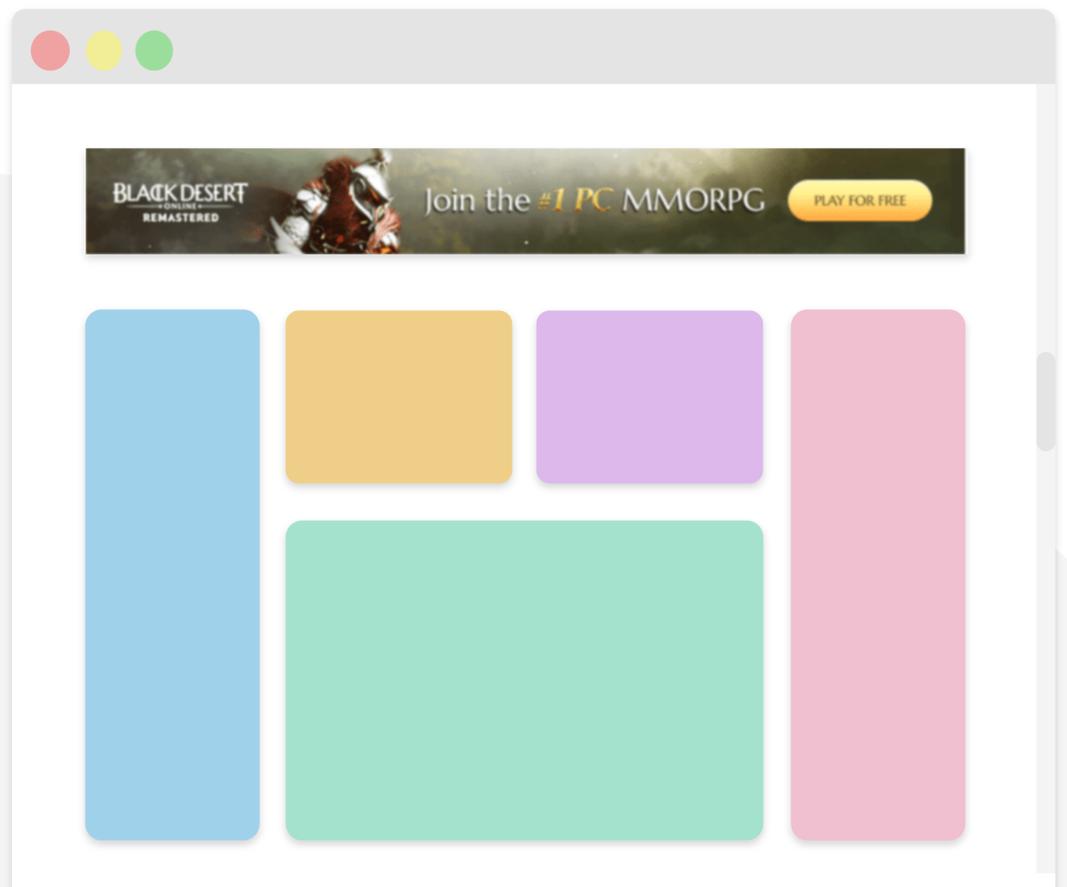
Working with and for video game advertisers, publishers, and developers, CPM Star is one of the largest advertising networks solely dedicated to the games space. CPM Star specializes in dynamic and captivating advertisements specifically targeting gamers.

Having partnered with the likes of Nintendo and Activision, CPM Star designs ads capable of making an impact. The network offers seven variations of ad types for their customers, including branded prerolls, dynamic site skins, and editorial pieces on related websites.



Germany

Top Geographical Performance



This is a common example of a display or banner ad that would appear surrounding content in a web browser.

4.3%

Average conversion rate



Volume Score



Retention Score



Google Ads

Google Ads



Largest Volume

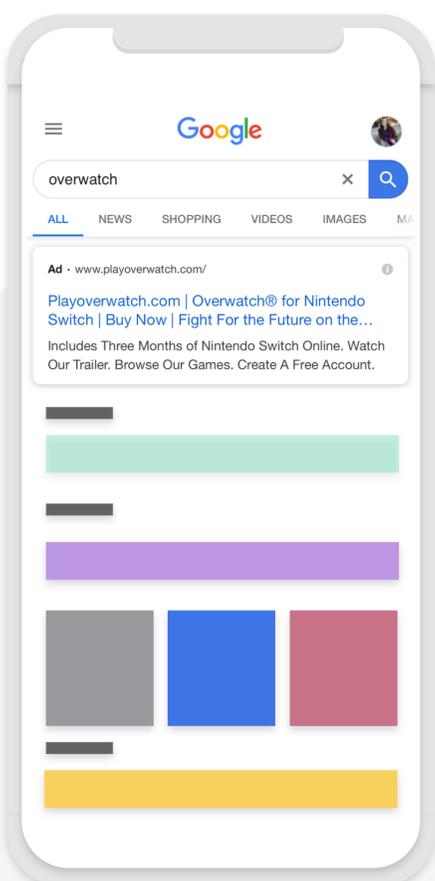
Google Ads was the network that produced the highest volume of clicks and conversions.

Valuable for reaching a wide range of players, Google Ads was the **second-most-used network** among PC Games. Google Ads, previously known as AdWords, is one of the world's most popular search and display networks. The all-encompassing platform maintains three major network types: the **Google Search Network**, the **Google Display Network**, and the **YouTube Network**². All fall under the aegis of Google, and all are useful for game advertising.

Search ads appear in the results of a search page or on a Google partner website. These advertisements are predominantly textual and labeled "ad" accordingly. Additionally, both image and video advertisements may also appear in the search results.

On the contrary, display ads are **targeted** campaigns meant to attract a specific audience. In gaming, these advertisements may be used to re-engage players or attract new audiences. These ads are designed to be eye-catching and appealing.

Finally, by using the **YouTube Network**, companies can attach their products directly to content before, after, or during a YouTube video.



United States

Top Geographical Performance



Volume Score



3%

Average conversion rate



Retention Score



In both desktop and mobile browsers, search engines will return advertisements relevant to the user's input.



Facebook Ads



Facebook Ads



Highly Utilized

Facebook Ads was the most frequently used ad network across all titles

Most prevalent among advertisers in our analysis, Facebook Ads have become a go-to network across industries. A frontrunner in the mobile-gaming space, in particular, Facebook has found success by optimizing their ads for players who are likely to make an in-app purchase after installing the game. Tailoring advertisements in this way increases the game's longevity while also maintaining a healthy return on ad spend (ROAS).

While Facebook has a strong foothold in the mobile space, their PC game offering is still reaching maturity. Our [new conversion tracking integration](#)³ with Facebook is working to change that. With conversion data becoming readily available, our customers are unlocking the same feedback loops that enable Facebook advertising to be a powerhouse on mobile platforms.



Brazil

Top Unique Reach



Volume Score

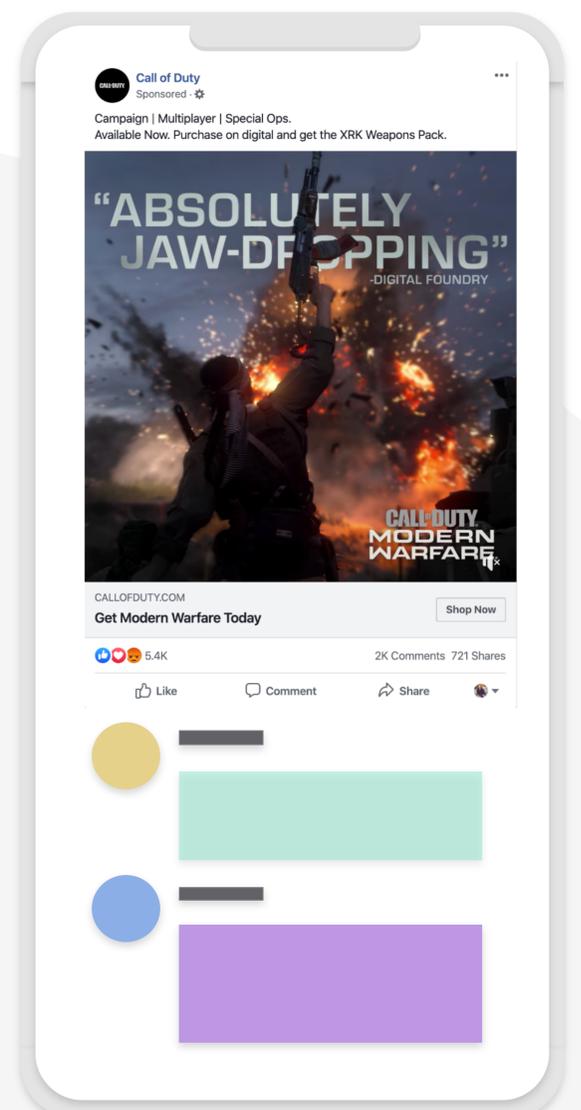


2.5%

Average conversion rate



Retention Score



Sponsored posts, like promoted tweets, are integrated directly into a user's timeline allowing them to comment, react, and share the content.

Reddit



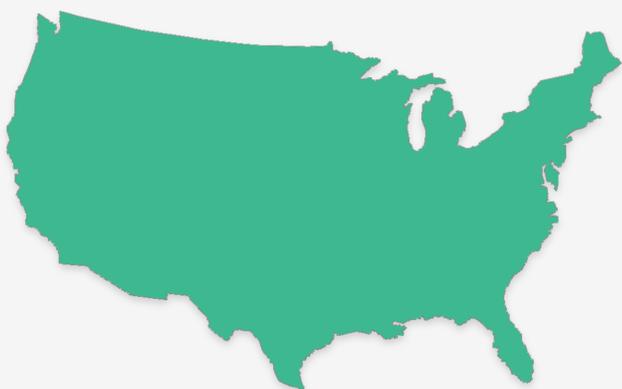
Reddit



High Click-to-Conversion Rate

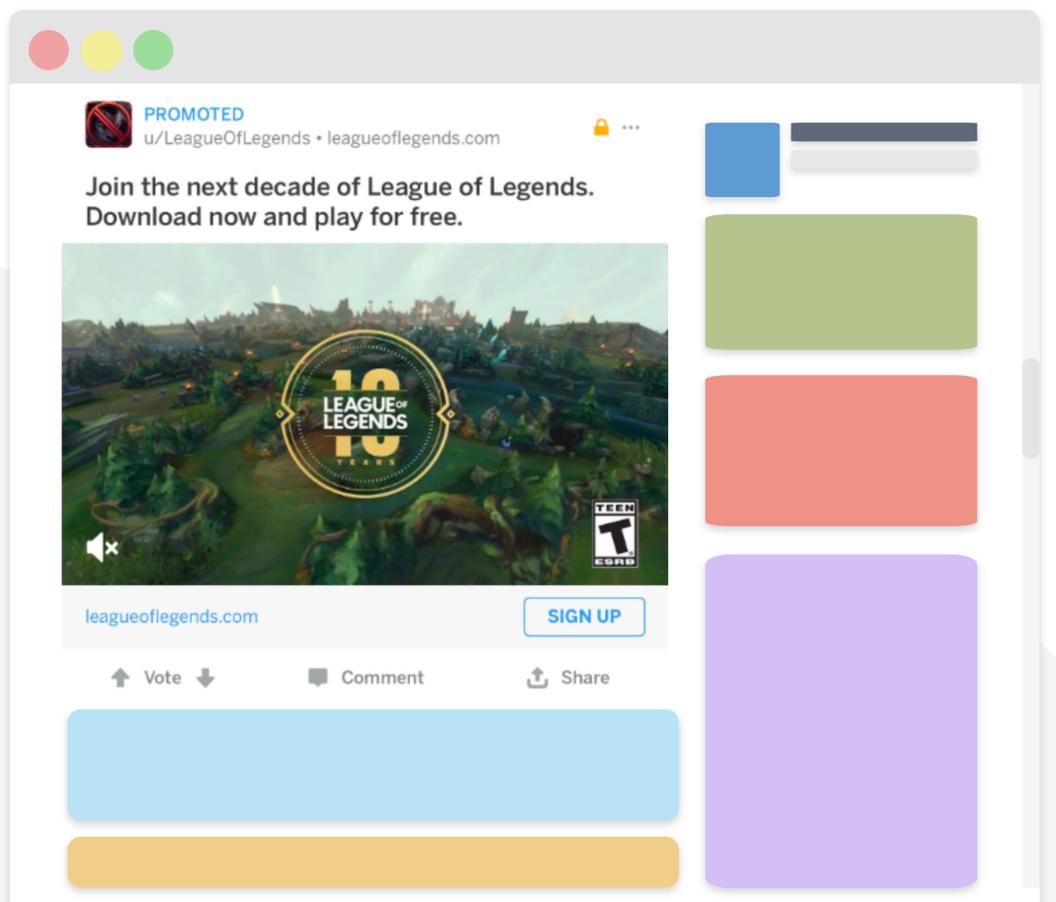
Reddit had the second-highest conversion rate of among networks

Because it attracts some of the most influential communities on the internet, advertising on Reddit, a popular discussion platform, is becoming one of the most marketable advertising platforms in the gaming industry. Like Twitter, users can engage with content as if it were organic. They can upvote, comment, and share advertisements throughout the platform.



United States

Top Geographical Performance



Promoted content on Reddit which integrates into the timeline much like Twitter and Facebook.

4.3%

Average conversion rate



Volume Score



Retention Score





Free-to-Play versus Paid Titles

Working with both free-to-play and paid titles, we understand that it is more common for a free game to see higher conversion rates via advertisements than a paid, \$60 one.

Accounting for these barriers to entry, we wanted to compare the marketing strategies of both free-to-play titles as well as premium games. How are companies allocating their budget? And what networks are converting the most players?

Social

Social Ads



Social Ads

Like display advertisements, social ads are integrated directly into the virtual timeline. Social advertisements encourage engagement and provide businesses an opportunity to promote their products to a unique subset of players. Potential customers can interact with social content as they would any other organic post, taking on a share of the game promotion themselves if they so choose.

For F2P titles, social ads were the number one way players discovered games. Proving to be an effective marketing strategy, advertising to your core demographic on the platforms they use most frequently has its benefits – especially for publishers working with a smaller budget.

Social media is the perfect space to generate buzz, connect with players, and receive feedback, particularly in the online gaming community. Because of this, networks such as Reddit and Twitter Ads saw a considerable amount of success in converting audience members to players when using promoted

NOTABLE SOCIAL NETWORKS





Search

Search Ads



Search Ads

Paid search advertising is a method of placing advertisements on a webpage with search engine results.

Search advertisements rely on keywords to return relevant ads as based on input. Keywords allow marketers to narrow their audience and provide prospective players with the best information possible to inform their buying decisions.

Most popular with search engines like Google Ads, businesses can target players within specific locations and demographics. Each time an ad appears on a results page and a user clicks it, the company pays a small fee per engagement.

NOTABLE SEARCH NETWORKS



Influencer

Influencer



Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing was the third-most-popular form of advertising. Now more than ever, gamers are discovering new games through influencers. This method may not cohere with each title, but the benefits of sharing a new release via live-streaming can be crucial in driving decision-making in customers.

While Twitch just missed the top five in our rankings, it's important to recognize the power of influencer marketing when advertising a new game as companies are relying on content creators more than ever.

The most prominent example of this was the launch of *Apex Legends* in February 2019⁴. Electronic Arts (EA) released the game with no prior promotion; rather, they had the world's biggest content creators simultaneously broadcast the game on launch day. *Apex* dethroned *Fortnite* to become the most-watched title on Twitch and acquired over 50 million registered players within a month of its release.

Viewers gravitate towards streamers for a variety of reasons. Whether it be their skill-level, sense of humor, or their insight, community members feel connected to their favorite streamers. When it comes to marketing, live-streaming allows audience members to be exposed to a new title without having to make a purchase. Rather, viewers have the ability to tune into a live-stream, ask questions, and preview a game from the perspective of someone they trust. Influencer marketing creates an authentic impression, encouraging the viewer to make decisions based on their own experience.



Display



Display Ad



Display Ads

Display ads are the most widely used form of advertising and are a highly effective method for marketing new products and remarketing to past customers. Display ads come in many forms as they seamlessly adapt to numerous platforms and webpages. In our analysis, display advertisements were responsible for the highest percentage of player conversions for both free-to-play and premium titles.

NOTABLE DISPLAY NETWORKS



Conclusion

Data shows that the two most prominent network types are display and social advertisements. With nearly 70 percent of conversions coming from social ads for F2P titles and 70 percent of conversions for paid titles coming from display ads, we find two very different approaches to marketing for games.

Social media marketing for free-to-play titles may prove useful as the gaming community has consistently shown an interest in discussing new releases, trying new games, and sharing their individual successes on social platforms. For marketers looking to spark interest in an up-and-coming title, targeting social channels is a logical first step in building a brand, engaging with fans, and generating conversation around their game.

In contrast, marketing teams for paid titles employed search advertisements more frequently. Not only were these advertisements displayed at a larger volume, they also accounted for 70 percent of the conversions for premium games.

Combined, social and display advertisements were just as effective across both F2P and paid games. While data was not able to provide a perfect formula for efficiently selling a game, there is a clear distinction on the types of ads that are the most effective. For titles working with a smaller budget, emphasis on social, search, and display ads proves to be the most beneficial.

End Notes

- 1 https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/a/2016/connecting-with-game-enthusiasts-for-e32016-and-beyond.html
- 2 <https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/117120>
- 3 <https://docs.gamesight.io/docs/facebook-ads>
- 4 <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/4/18210935/apex-legends-respawn-ea-surprise-launch-battle-royale-big-gamble>