

# Games in physical reality

By  Emily Stander

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The One Club's Creative Week (7-11 June) was dedicated to giving creative leaders and pioneers an online platform to come together and discuss issues, changes and ideas across different industries. Epic Games looks at how game studios and brands work together.



Source: [www.unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

Led by Lenny Simon, head of games licensing, Unreal Engine, the panel discussed different means of connecting to communities, how the games themselves play a role in that and marketing creatively in the virtual world.

The full panel included:

- Nikki Lewis - global head of marketing, Valorant, Riot Games
- Lindsey Rostal - cofounder and game director, Timberline Studios
- James Kuk, CEO and cofounder, Metaview

Video games have become an essential element of popular culture. Now, they are also becoming an essential means of connecting with audiences (especially younger audiences). Connecting with audiences is also an integral part of successful brand campaigns - and the two have come together in success in the past. Here, we look at some of the points which were discussed amongst the panel about marketing in a unique way through games...

## The gaming community

Games are a sprawling map of creativity. To make this possible, there are multiple types of games and multiple types of development studios. Independent (Indie) studios are generally the smaller studios which work with fewer people and resources - and also usually self-publish - compared to big publishers like EA Games. However, that is no measure of whether or not they will be successful - just that they have some differences in the way, the why and the how of game development.

The vast creative possibilities which exist in game creation don't only give developers an opportunity to create different types of games - but also creates the opportunity for multiple communities to form.

Communities play an important role in the development of games. "Specifically, with a game as hardcore as Valorant, your community is almost like an extension of your development team. Part of what you do as a marketer is invite them into the development process, they want to deeply understand the decisions you're making," said Lewis.

For Rostal, this ties in with the idea that developers make decisions which ask questions like; why does this particular element exist in the game? Why is it important to the player? An example of this line of thinking can be seen in the recent Valorant trailer which showcases their new character - not only can you see her abilities, but she is specifically created to fulfil a story element in the game.

This is the kind of marketing technique which speaks to audiences and communities. We don't only see what is being added to the game on a technical level, but also why we can be invested in the character and story. Making communities feel involved and important in the decision-making process is key to success.

## **Marketing in-game**

Understanding the decisions made in-game, according to Lewis, is something the players want to know and resonate with. Communities and players are looking for authenticity in their games. “As long as that reason is clear in the execution and carried out in all forms, then that’s what creates the authenticity,” she said.



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Games provide an unusual (for now) avenue for marketing techniques which draws the game in question into real life. Fortnite is one such example of a game which has used this technique multiple times. A small example is the integration of Louis Vuitton in the game as an available skin (a cosmetic item which changes the appearance of a character played). Another example is the integration of Marvel into the game. For a short time, players had the opportunity to play as Thanos - the big bad in the Marvel universe movies.

What is referred to as the metaverse is the second kind of avenue which Fortnite used to connect with their players and fans. The black hole event is a prime example of using gaming as a platform, and the metaverse, to connect communities. This event was an apocalyptic scenario which shut the whole game down entirely - an introduction to the next season of play. Fortnite stayed unplayable for a long time after the event and there was no communication from Epic Games afterward. It was weird, mysterious and a fantastic means of storytelling.

The black hole event brought the global community together in the same way a sporting event does. People had the opportunity to connect in the larger internet space through shared experience.

Rostal said, “From my creative perspective, what I view [the metaverse] as and what makes me excited about it, is this element of persistence where you’re able to continue to tell stories and branch things out and have a variety of integrations”.

Esports is another fantastic avenue for branding in games. Especially in terms of reaching younger generations, esports has given brands the opportunity to sponsor and integrate in a way that, according to Kuk, is easier to do than in-game. “Communities and fans who enjoy this kind of content are more welcoming. If a brand or agency can just talk to the fans of a particular esports, not all esports are created equally, the fans are not the same, it’s actually a good opportunity to partner with a brand or community depending on what franchise you’re looking at,” he said.

## Takeaways

As branding and marketing grows and changes, there is no question that the gaming industry cannot be ignored as an avenue for effective and creative techniques. Game studios are already finding pertinent methods to connect with their audiences - through creative storytelling, good game design and the involvement of their communities - and finding great success through these avenues. Brands and agencies should take their opportunities to do the same.

## ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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