

IN-GAME IN THE MEMBRANE: AN E-WORLD WHERE ADVERTISING DOESN'T EXIST

WAVEMAKER UK'S SOPHIE STRONG AND BEN MCINERNEY ON HOW BRANDS CAN TAP INTO IN-GAME OPPORTUNITIES

Imagine a world where your brand is invisible. In fact, no brands are visible. The advertising industry is completely non-existent.

This world largely exists. And it has scale. Serious scale. It's the e-world. A world where we do the same things we do in our real, physical lives, but in a virtual capacity. The most prolific example dropped last month with DJ Marshmello's 10-minute e-concert within Epic's behemoth video game, Fortnite. If you did participate, you weren't alone.

WHAT IS AN E-GIG?

In a first-of-its-kind experience, Epic disabled certain features of the gameplay - namely the ability to shoot opponents - so players could attend DJ Marshmello's e-set without fear of being attacked. Players were compelled. 10m people concurrently streamed the e-gig. To provide some perspective, that's bigger than the Super Bowl which attracted 3m streams.

And so, this represented one of the earliest examples of the potential of e-experiences. A situation where people could attend a concert from the comfort of their home, attended by 10m of their pals in an environment where everyone can quickly and clearly communicate to one another – something frustratingly not possible at real concerts.

It appears these numbers are only going to grow. Google have just declared their intent to get in on the action. The announcement of their gaming platform, Stadia, aims to seamlessly integrate YouTube into a gaming platform – a smart move given people spend an average of 66 minutes watching other people game on platforms such as Twitch. Stadia also removes the need for a physical console, providing a significant differentiator from Microsoft and Sony.

And this raises an intriguing side-plot. To date, the e-world has thrived in an environment bereft of advertising. But with DJ Marshmello proving social gaming can capture a captive audience, and with YouTube – a platform that embraces advertising – joining the party, it would be naïve to ignore this as an opportunity for advertisers.

But firstly, while e-experiences largely stem from in-game opportunities, it is certainly not the exclusive route to create e-experiences. Think of things like flight simulators or the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's theory test and you get an idea that creating virtual experiences isn't exactly a new concept. It's just a new opportunity for advertisers. So how has this developed?

For starters, the nature of the games that these opportunities spawn from are decidedly different from previous games. Games were traditionally single-player and offline, presenting little opportunity for brands to natively integrate into the storyline.

Where the likes of Fortnite, and EA's recently launched Apex Legends (which hit 25m users in the first week) differ from most games is in the gameplay and connectivity. Users can only play in online modes while accessing the game across multiple devices - gaming consoles, computers, smartphones. Again, this is something Stadia is aiming to capitalise on.

Rather than having a narrative or linear game-play, users are dropped into open maps to compete against one another. Due to the online nature of the game, this means the developers, Epic, have the ability to augment and completely change the environment with which players compete in.

The first exploration was to drop-in DJ Marshmello's live concert, but this was only a glimpse of the potential. What if Epic partnered with McDonald's or Domino's to drop in a fast-food restaurant? Gamers could go into the store, order food, and have it delivered to their home – without having ever stopped their gameplay. This would truly bring the e-world and physical-world (online and offline) together as well as providing an avenue for attribution – something in-game advertising has always struggled with.

This is a big deal. Gamers spend an average of 210 minutes playing each day. Once in a gaming environment, the user is reluctant to leave and doesn't want to be distracted - a massive win for advertisers struggling with declining view rates in social platforms. Furthermore, it is an

environment where consumers are spending their disposable income. PlayStation report the monthly average revenue per user is €37 – so we know this is a platform where people are already comfortable making transactions – especially with logged in profiles and pre-registered credit cards.

For advertisers, this is a golden opportunity to own this space with 'game-changing' creative solutions which no other brand has taken advantage of. It's an opportunity to be visible in a space where brands currently are invisible.

However, we can also use e-experiences to influence societal behaviour changes. At Wavemaker, we are currently working alongside Niantic – the developers famous for Pokémon Go. Niantic are developing Wizards Unite, a Harry Potter spin-off to Pokémon Go. Within the game, the player has challenges to complete in the physical world whilst in the e-world of the game. Working alongside Niantic, we are geo-setting these challenges – ensuring they are away from tube station entry / exit points. The idea is to help manage footfall congestion, particularly at peak travel times

Admittedly, the work can be cumbersome, and slow-moving. As a quicker entry point, immediate opportunities exist to reward consumers for achievements within the game. Let's say for instance, a player 'earns' three trophies in a week within PlayStation – what could that unlock? Exclusive price points on the Eurostar? How about custom pizza recipes through Domino's?.



From an advertiser perspective, this would reduce the level of development resulting in a quicker and inexpensive way to enter the e-experience environment whilst still covering off the attribution point through redeemable rewards.

We acknowledge the e-experience concept requires a leap of faith, a time commitment and a big imagination for advertisers – especially without wanting to piss off the consumer.

Get this right though and you have a captive, high-spending audience with limited competition vying for their attention and share of wallet. The risk is certainly compelling.

We're game to take that risk, are you?

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