



Building a Better Game Experience

As the video game market has grown, it has become increasingly competitive. Traditional console and PC games are now competing against smartphone and tablet titles as the mobile segment explodes in popularity¹. But gamers have limited time playing, on average, only 1-2 hours per day². In order to capture mindshare, and a share of the \$100 billion gaming wallet³, game developers and studios must expand their titles to become more of an experience. Although they must provide a top quality storyline with easy-to-use controls, they must also extend that game experience into new channels and new platforms if they hope to remain top-of-mind with gamers.

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In this whitepaper you will learn:

- What today's gamers expect from you
- What industry leaders are doing right
- How to deliver the best gaming experience

It All Starts With Gameplay

Of course, a game experience doesn't even get off the ground if the gameplay isn't good. In fact, according to the Consumer Gaming Trends report, frustration with gameplay, controls, and speed were all rated as top reasons for becoming upset with or even abandoning a game (Table 1).

Table 1

What Causes You to Become Upset With Or Stop Playing a Video Game? Rank in Order of Importance (5=Most Frustrating, 1=Least Frustrating).

	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Average Ranking
Latency—the game lags, is slow to load/download etc.	22.43% 220	19.78% 194	16.31% 160	17.84% 175	23.65% 232	981	2.99
Complicated controls—hard to master and/or understand	18.18% 178	23.39% 229	21.25% 208	23.29% 228	13.89% 136	979	3.09
Poor gameplay—the way the game plays doesn't make sense	15.31% 149	26.21% 255	26.72% 260	20.76% 202	11.00% 107	973	3.14
Bad storyline—game is just boring to play	14.11% 137	21.22% 206	23.48% 228	25.44% 247	15.76% 153	971	2.92
Internet required—I have to be connected to the Internet to play	31.32% 306	9.52% 93	11.98% 117	11.98% 117	35.21% 344	977	2.90

But today's game experience is becoming more than just the gameplay. Both game studios and the gamers themselves are beginning to experiment and explore with complementary technologies that extend the experience into different mediums and different platforms.

The Game Experience is Evolving

There are four key trends that are transforming the game experience:

- Social media
- Second screen
- Video
- DLC

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What Defines “Gameplay?”

Gameplay is really anything that relates to the user’s ability to accomplish the game’s objectives. So that might be:

- **Storyline**—Is it engaging, providing players the ability to choose different branches and ultimately outcomes?
- **Controls**—Are they intuitive and easy to manipulate in order to make the character respond as expected?
- **Mechanics**—Does the gameplay make sense or is it too confusing to figure out how to manipulate the character or environment?
- **Responsiveness**—Does the game lag (if it’s connected to the Internet) or is it difficult to play because of slowness?

Social Media

Social media has invaded the gaming industry in more ways than just providing a platform for playing. More and more games are incorporating social media into the gameplay itself, enabling players to share game moments (as they happen)⁴, as well as to post achievements and other game-related content, to their social media accounts.

The result? *The game experience is more connected with the user’s life outside the game. This provides the game studio or publisher opportunities for player recruitment that might not be available otherwise.*

Video

Although video has always had a role in hardcore games (as trailers and cut-scenes), it is becoming increasingly popular as a way to extend the game experience in three directions.

First, gamers are beginning to publish videos of their gameplay to third-party services like YouTube (which now supports 60fps, ideal for high-motion videos such as those of video games⁵) and Twitch. In fact, according to the Consumer Gaming Trends report, almost 23% of gamers surveyed reported publishing video of their gameplay to these sites.

Second, just as gamers are publishing video of themselves playing, they are also consuming more gameplay video content. Based on the same report, almost 50% indicated watching at least one video of gameplay strategies, cheats, or hints per month.

Finally, consoles and game developers are incorporating video-capture functionality directly into the game such as with Microsoft’s Xbox Game DVR feature⁶.

The result? *Gamers are more involved in the game experience by creating and consuming video content thereby keeping the game “top-of-mind” for a longer period of time.*

Second Screen

The second screen is beginning to play an important part in how users play the game. Although in many cases the second screen is being used for non-game related functionality (like accessing social media accounts), it is also being used to access content that is directly related to gameplay—cheat, hints, walkthroughs, play-throughs, and other video content. Games like Microsoft’s *Titanfall* and Activision’s *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* have even incorporated second-screen play through a specialized mobile application.

The result? *Even though this trend is really only just developing in gaming, it parallels the overall growing usage of smartphones and tablets⁷. As devices continue to dominate consumer mindshare, titles that utilize cross-platform gameplay will have a much better chance of retaining attention.*

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Just How Important is the Download?

If you don't think downloading a game is critical part of the game experience, just ask Bungie⁸ president Harold Ryan why the studio included some unpublished DLC content on the game discs for *Destiny*. According to Mr. Ryan, "Both inside the US and all over the world, how much you download on your local home Internet connection can be a problem." Bungie hopes to mitigate the frustration users might experience with downloading by "pre-loading" DLC onto the disc itself, thereby ensuring a much more positive experience when future content to the game is released.

DLC (Downloadable Content)

Before there was downloadable content, games were "one-and-done." Fans had to wait for a sequel in order to participate in the environment and storyline again. But downloadable content has radically changed the game experience by enabling players to continue indefinitely. Based upon findings from the Consumer Gaming Trends report, only 13% of respondents never want a content update to the games they play, while on the contrary almost 36% want updates at least once per month or weekly. And it's clear that game studios understand this trend as most games, even casual titles like *Candy Crush Saga*, provide users with a continued stream of playable content.

The result? *Because new games are continually launching, attention and mindshare for any specific title are always in jeopardy. Providing downloadable content or other updates ensures that the game doesn't "end" and gives gamers a reason to keep playing.*

Delivering a Great Experience

It's clear that the game experience is bigger than just how the game plays. Surrounded by complementary content like video and social media and incorporating new mechanisms such as second screens, games increasingly need to do more than just promise good gameplay to keep gamers' attentions.

But this evolving game experience is even more than those associated technologies or trends. Gamers are becoming hyperaware of game delivery—any aspect of the game experience that interrupts or prevents their ability to enjoy playtime. This is increasingly relevant with today's more immersive games. As more titles favor higher-quality textures, maps, characters, environments, and HD video cut-scenes, the file sizes increase. For example, both Bungie's *Destiny* and Activision's *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* were over 40 GB in download size!

In order to meet gamer expectations for the best possible experience, studios and publishers must bake-in a high level of "delivery quality" to ensure that:

- The game downloads quickly and consistently
- Gameplay doesn't suffer from lag or latency
- The game website is available for engagement

The Game Downloads Quickly and Consistently

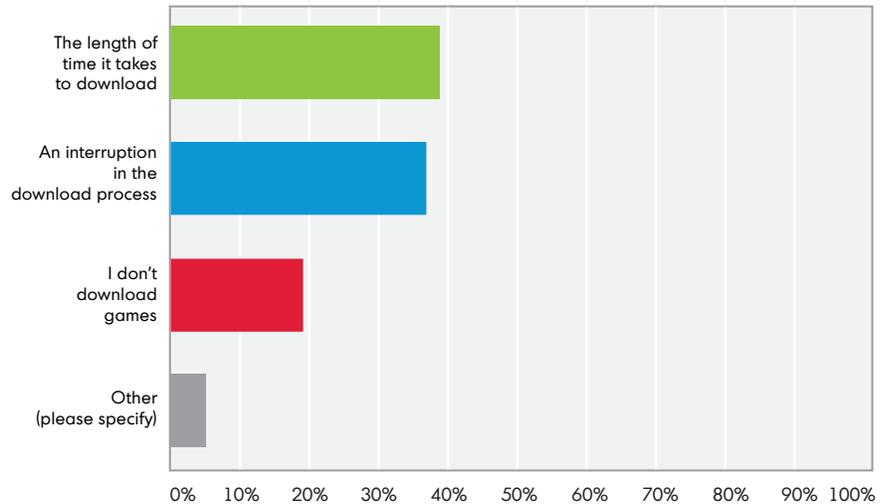
It's pretty obvious—if your users can't download the game (or game content), it's "game over." Either they'll find another game to download or move onto another title to play.

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Should I provide a physical copy?

Although many companies have opted out of providing physical copies of their games, that doesn't mean that consumers don't want one. In fact, according to recent survey results¹¹, over 50% of respondents indicated that they preferred to buy a physical copy of a game (as compared to 40% who wanted downloads). If the success of EA's The Sims is any indicator, a multi-channel distribution channel might be the best strategy¹²!

Figure 2
Frustrations About Downloading Games



As illustrated in Figure 2, when asked about the most frustrating part of downloading games, gamers responded almost equally between “the length of time it takes to download” and “an interruption in the download process.” And what happens when users get frustrated?

What to do? *Employ a content delivery network (CDN) to ensure that downloads are provided at the fastest speeds possible and with the global reach your game needs for worldwide distribution.*

Gameplay Doesn't Suffer From Lag or Latency

Issues with downloading, though, aren't the only aspect of game delivery that needs to be optimized. In game play, especially for Internet-connected games, lag or latency is a critical driver of user frustration (as illustrated in Table 1). Game studios and publishers must address latency within the game in order to ensure an optimal experience.

What to do? *If your game is an Internet- or browser-based game, consider employing a CDN to deliver dynamic content and other game assets for an optimal experience.*

The Game Website Is Available for Engagement

The game website is an integral part of the game experience, providing users with a web resource that is dedicated specifically to their gameplay. But what happens when the website loads slowly? Well, if the site takes longer than five seconds to load, 60% of users will abandon the experience⁹.

What to do? *To ensure that your website is operating consistently and reliably, you can leverage a combination of CDN and dynamic site acceleration services.*

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The Keys to Success

The game experience is evolving significantly. Whereas it was once solely centered on the game itself, the experience that gamers have with a title has extended well beyond just the storyline, controls, and mechanics. In order for game studios to be successful in the highly competitive market (where gamers only have so much attention to spend), they must capitalize on the trends of the evolving game experience:

- **Social media**—Incorporate social media into the game and enabling players to share their game experience with friends and family (potentially influencing others to play the game as well¹⁰).
- **Video**—Incorporate functionality that not only enables gamers to capture and share video easily but also to find game-related video content that can be consumed during the game experience.
- **Second screen**—Explore ways to extend the game experience past the primary screen to take advantage of consumer proclivity to use mobile devices during gaming, whether that's through enhanced game functionality or complementary content.
- **DLC**—Continue to produce content for titles to ensure that if users ever reach an “end” point in the game's storyline, there is still opportunity to continue playing.

But that's not all that developers and publishers must do. Players are becoming increasingly frustrated with the delivery of downloadable games and the impact of latency on game play. In order to get ahead of this growing frustration, developers and publishers should look to infrastructure elements to help deliver the best possible game experience:

- **CDN**—A content delivery network, or CDN service like Limelight Networks Orchestrate Content Delivery provides the scale and global reach to reliably and consistently deliver game files, video, and websites to any device, anywhere on the planet.
- **Website optimization**—Website optimization services, like Limelight Orchestrate Performance, accelerate middle mile delivery to cut down on the number of round trips and round trip time, thereby providing a faster web experience.
- **Cloud storage**—You need a strategy to address where you are going to store game files (and it can't be on a server under Joe's desk). Why not utilize a globally-replicated cloud storage solution that's optimized for digital media like games and video? That's Limelight Orchestrate Cloud Storage, which continually outperforms other cloud-based storage providers. While they are fetching the first byte of content, Limelight is already well into delivery.
- **Video**—As you consider publishing gameplay videos or live e-sports events, you need an out-of-the-box solution like Limelight Orchestrate Video that gets your video to any device easily and doesn't complicate your workflow anymore than it may already be.

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Conclusion

The game experience is so much more than just the gameplay. It's everything that's associated with your game— websites, video, availability of DLC, second-screen play, and more. To deliver an all-around exciting and engaging game experience, studios and publishers must architect game experiences that not only provide for engagement outside the game but also deliver the game experience at the highest possible levels of performance.

¹ According to market researcher Newzoo, mobile gaming is projected to reach \$86 billion by 2016.

<http://venturebeat.com/2013/06/06/global-games-market-to-hit-86-1b-by-2016-as-mobile-charges-ahead/>

² Consumer Gaming Trends. November 2014. Limelight Networks.

³ <http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2014-06-25-game-software-market-to-hit-usd100-billion-by-2018-dfc>

⁴ <http://www.socialmediaexplorer.com/media-journalism/5-ways-video-game-companies-are-leveraging-social-media/>

⁵ <http://www.theverge.com/2014/10/29/7121143/youtube-adds-support-for-60fps-video-playback>

⁶ <http://support.xbox.com/en-US/xbox-one/apps/upload-game-dvr>

⁷ According to the Consumer Gaming Trend report, almost 30% of respondents indicated having used a second screen (to watch gameplay videos or access cheats and hints) while playing.

⁸ Bungie is the development studio behind Destiny.

⁹ State of the User Experience. May 2014. Limelight Networks.

¹⁰ Zynga has done an excellent job of this through direct integration with social platforms.

¹¹ Consumer Gaming Trends. November 2014. Limelight Networks.

¹² <http://www.mcvuk.com/news/read/life-in-boxes-the-sims-4-at-retail/0137575>

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