

HOW THE WORLD BECAME GAMERS

**DIGITAL AND GAMING
CULTURE POST-COVID**



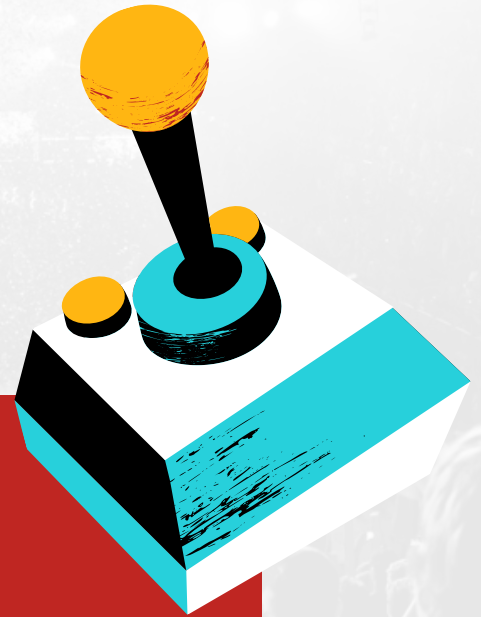
INTRODUCTION



Back in 2018, when life was simple and crowded events were the norm, we took a microscope to the world of esports with our [7 Commandments of Esports Communications](#).

Now, as we see the first hope of *life as we know it* returning, we've returned to the drawing board. This time we're casting an eye over digital entertainment and remembering what we lost and gained in 2020 - as well as making some predictions for the future of gaming culture.

Here are our five major takeaways.



TAKEAWAYS

1. THE NATURE OF CELEBRITY HAS CHANGED FOREVER

2. OUR DIGITAL PLAYGROUND HELD US TOGETHER

3. SHARED EXPERIENCES MEAN SHARED EMPATHY

4. ESPORTS TAUGHT TRADITIONAL SPORTS HOW TO KEEP THE GAME GOING

5. WE ALL BECAME GAMERS



THE NATURE OF **CELEBRITY** HAS CHANGED FOREVER



2020-21 was the year that the shine officially came off celebrity. From misjudged *Imagine* singalongs to ill-timed and thoughtless private jet photos, the model of what makes a famous person admirable took a sharp left turn.

Whether the change is permanent or fades as the pandemic begins to ebb, there's one clear learning - when it comes to influencers and celebrity in times of crisis, escapism is overrated.

So how does this affect digital and gaming culture? There's never been the same kind of barrier between viewer and star in the gaming world than there has been in the traditional celebrity system. Here, influencers feel real enough to touch - even from glitzy home studios, they're recognizable, playing the same game and speaking the same language as the thousands watching them from their own battle stations. Most importantly, while the pandemic decimated TV, film and music projects, gaming influencers continued to show up.

Daily content from our favorite online stars allowed us to maintain our communities and routines in uncertain times - and created even more brand loyalty.

TAKEAWAY

**IT'S TIME TO DOUBLE DOWN
ON INFLUENCER MARKETING
IF YOU'RE HOPING TO REACH
GAMERS**

OUR DIGITAL PLAYGROUND HELD US TOGETHER

BECAUSE GAMERS

Traditional sports lost ground in 2020. Fans felt the loss of communal experiences, shared moments in the bleachers and packed stadiums - particularly as fear and uncertainty raged.



In our digital world, the landscape looked a little different. Many of our usual habits - meeting friends from around the world in game, cheering on our favorite esports team, tuning into an evening stream - remained unscathed. Our online spaces slowly expanded to fill holes left in our offline lives, even if [the New York Times made fun of us for it and told us we should be ashamed.](#)

Gamers and digital entertainment junkies were one step ahead of the game during social isolation. We learned skills like community building and self soothing through hobbies before we were forced to - and while non-natives struggled to catch up, we were able to hunker down through the worst. We're still wary of interlopers and pretenders, but we know the value of being there for each other.

TAKEAWAY

ONLINE FAN COMMUNITIES GREW STRONGER DURING THE PANDEMIC, BUT NOT NECESSARILY MORE INCLUSIVE. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE, AND DON'T ASSUME THEY'LL WELCOME YOU JUST BECAUSE YOU OPEN YOUR CHECKBOOK



SHARED EXPERIENCES MEAN SHARED EMPATHY

THE
VIBRANT
BECAME
GAMERS



What if your friends, their friends, your family and everyone you know went through something at the same time? You don't need to imagine it. You've lived through it.

The gulf between gamers and those that had to work to match their offline and online lives is clear. Gamers didn't need to work hard to seek out company in the digital world - because of their existing networks, they had an inbuilt outlet to process what they were going through.

It's no accident that the gaming community was among the first to mobilize in support of pandemic relief, or that charity streams and fundraising started to appear early across Twitch and YouTube and stayed strong throughout 2020. It's not coincidental or accidental that streamers tackled issues of mental health openly and that many streams became an open dialog where fans talked through their frustration and anger.

Can the internet be a cruel place? Absolutely. Should you be careful of your mental health when trading blows with strangers, whether it's on the battlefield or on social media? Definitely. But 2020 showed us that when we're forced underground, those who have already put in the work to build their villages online are better equipped to share and receive support.

TAKEAWAY

GAMING CULTURE ISN'T ABOUT ESCAPING REALITY: IT'S ABOUT PROCESSING IT



ESPORTS TAUGHT TRADITIONAL SPORTS HOW TO KEEP THE GAME GOING

4

For a moment back there, esports and digital competition was the only game in town. With stadiums shuttered around the world and sports leagues forced into lockdown, fans were left mourning their weekly rituals and tribes.



Not so in the world of esports. Moving the action from offline LANs to online-only games was no picnic, but it was possible. Publishers and tournament organizers rose to the challenge, keeping the action going and creating a much-needed outlet for fan energy otherwise going unspent. This uninterrupted action earned the respect and envy of traditional sports, who struggled to keep their fans engaged online.

In our guide [Extra Innings](#), we talked about what esports taught sports during these months. Looking to the future, it's clear that the rulebook has changed for how fans interact with the clubs and athletes that represent them on the field. Gaming culture and digital entertainment will be the template for how sports clubs connect with the next generation of fans - and the key for their survival in the long run.

TAKEAWAY

**TRADITIONAL SPORTS NEED TO PICK
UP ITS ONLINE GAME TO SURVIVE
IN THE LONG RUN**

WE ALL BECAME GAMERS

The dividing line between gamer and non-gamer, tenuous for years, dissolved into dust as we all took our lives online. For an entire generation the question isn't 'are you a gamer?' but 'what do you play?' - and even for generations who pride themselves on their game illiteracy, the barriers have blurred. Whether it's online karaoke, zoom quizzes or streaming entertainment online, we all took one step closer to gaming culture than before.



Understanding that gaming isn't a niche hobby or pastime, but a language - in the same way that streaming entertainment or music found its way into the mainstream - is the key to realizing its full power. 2020 jumpstarted a movement already in motion: the way we interact with our entertainment has more in common with a LAN center than it does with a cinema.

What does this all mean? When we stop dismissing and demeaning gamers (not for me! How can you spend all day indoors playing games? Grow up!), we open up many interesting possibilities. Mainstream brands can interact with gaming audiences in new ways and culture can learn from the innovation that gaming drives without hesitation. Suddenly an in-game concert in Fornite that breaks records isn't a punchline - it's an exciting sign of the revolution to come.

TAKEAWAY

GAMING CULTURE WILL LEAD THE WAY FOR ALL OF US, NOT JUST THE HARDCORE

IN SUMMARY...



THE NATURE OF CELEBRITY HAS CHANGED FOREVER

- Isolation and entertainment industry being shut down has been a leveler
- We're no longer worshipping the kind of aspirational, 'traditional' celebrities we used to
- With most of our lives online, digital superstars rule the roost

OUR DIGITAL PLAYGROUND HELD US TOGETHER

- Barriers between work and play blurred
- Corporate team building can be a game of Among Us (why not?)

SHARED EXPERIENCES MEAN SHARED EMPATHY

- We don't want escapism in our digital entertainment
- Shared online spaces became a place to comfort and commiserate as well as to celebrate

ESPORTS TAUGHT TRADITIONAL SPORTS HOW TO KEEP THE GAME GOING

- Flashback to [Extra Innings](#)
- Geolocation no longer what brings us together to celebrate winning moments

WE ALL BECAME GAMERS

- Think about the everyday experiences that have become online-only
- Whether it's online karaoke, zoom quizzes or something else....congrats, you're a gamer





**THE
STORY
MOB**

**WWW.THESTORYMOB.COM
CONTACT@THESTORYMOB.COM**