Consumer Gaming Trends is Limelight Networks’ first in a series of new annual surveys that explores trends in consumer video gaming and the video game industry.
Table of Contents

Executive Summary. .................................................. 3
Trends .......................................................................... 6
Additional Findings. ................................................... 10

Figures
Figure 1: What is Your Favorite Type of Video Game (Choose Only One) . . . . 6
Figure 2: For Your Favorite Game Type, How Frequently Are You Willing to Update it With New Content and Levels? . . . . 7
Figure 3: How Many Video Games Do You Download a Month for PC or Console? . . . . 7
Figure 4: How Many Video Games Do You Download a Month Onto A Mobile Device Like a Smartphone or Tablet? . . . . 7
Figure 5: How Do You Prefer to Purchase Your Video Games (Choose Only One) . . . . 8
Figure 6: How Many Times a Month Do You Watch Videos of Other People Playing the Video Games You Are Playing for Gameplay Styles, Gameplay Strategies, Game Cheats, or Game Hints? . . . . 8
Figure 7: Where Do You Post Videos Of Your Gameplay (Choose All That Apply)? . . . . 9
Figure 8: Over the Past 6 Months, Where Have You Played Most of Your Video Games (Choose Only One)? . . . . 9
Figure 9: How Do You Use a Second Screen (Tablet or Smartphone) While Playing Video Games (Choose All That Apply)? . . . . 10
Figure 10: Where Do You Play Video Games? Rank in Order of Frequency Where You Play Most Often (4=most often) . . . . 10
Figure 11: What is the Most Frustrating Part of Downloading Video Games? (Choose Only One) . . . . 11
Figure 12: How Many Hours A Day Do You Spend Playing Video Games? . . . . 11
Figure 13: What Causes You To Become Upset With Or Stop Playing a Video Game? Rank In Order That Frustrates You The Most (5=most frustrating, 1=least frustrating) . . . . 12

Conclusion. ............................................................... 13
Appendix. .................................................................. 13
Executive Summary

Consumer Gaming Trends is Limelight Networks’ first in a series of new annual surveys that explores trends in consumer video gaming and the video game industry.

The survey report is based on global responses that Limelight Networks received from 1,035 consumers ranging in demographics, gender, and education. Key conclusions drawn from the survey results include:

- Consumers invest in a game experience, not just one-off play
- Physical distribution is still top-of-mind for consumers
- Video is the future of the game experience
- The second screen is transforming the way consumers play

In addition to these findings, there were a number of interesting trends such as:

- PCs and laptops still lead the way for gameplay
- Digital downloads are frustrating
- Casual gamers play a lot everyday
- Poor gameplay frustrates gamers the most
- Casual games are hot

Consumers Invest In a Game Experience, Not Just One-Off Play

The gaming landscape has definitely changed over the past few years. Where video games were once largely relegated to hardcore gamers and the likes of titles such as Halo and Call of Duty, the rise of mobile platforms (smartphones and tablets) as well as game integration with social networks have enabled a new group of “casual games” that appeal to a much broader audience. Games like Angry Birds, Candy Crush Saga, Clash of Clans, Minecraft, and Farmville can be started and stopped easily without complicated storylines or controls. They can be picked up and played for a few minutes rather than requiring hours of gameplay to achieve some modicum of success.

And the popularity of casual games is reflected in our survey results. Amongst game genres over 50% of respondents indicated that “casual” was their favorite type of game.

Despite the difference of opinion in game genres, though, both casual and hardcore gamers share a common desire—it would seem that regardless of playtime or game requirement, players develop an affinity for their titles and want the game experience to continue with new content and game updates. Based on our survey, almost 75% want updates at least once a year with almost 50% wanting updates at least once per month or more frequently.

What these findings seem to indicate is that once players pass the point of abandonment, they are committed to the game well beyond just the point of completion. To capitalize on this, game studios need to not only develop on-going updates for their titles (regardless of genre) but also continue to provide for fast and efficient downloads (approximately 40% of respondents indicated that the most frustrating aspect of downloading games is the length of time it takes to download²). Without a strategy for continued game expansion (rather than just focusing on releasing new titles), gaming companies may find that consumers opt for other titles that can provide them the continuing game experience they want.
Physical Distribution Is Still Top-of-Mind for Consumers

While industry statistics over the past few years have shown a continued decline in the retailboxed sales of video games this has not resulted in fewer people playing games. On the contrary, the decline of boxed sales has largely been a result of the increase in digital downloads. With the popularity of Valve’s Steam and Electronic Arts’ Origin digital distribution platforms, more consumers are gaining access to an increasing library of titles. This may account for the fact that over 53% of respondents download at least one title per month for their PC or console and 40% download at least one title per month for mobile. In fact, 48% download between two and five titles per month for PC or console while 53% do the same for mobile!

Digital downloads make economic sense from the game studio’s perspective—no packaging is needed, no shipping, no physical returns, there is a reduction in theft, improved business efficiencies, improved margins, and more. And it would seem, based on the results of our survey, that consumers want digital downloads. But that isn’t necessarily the case.

Despite their proclivity for downloads, approximately 53% of surveyed gamers would rather purchase their titles from a retail store. It would seem that the game studios, through a digital retailing strategy, have actually altered consumer behavior. When the games are only available digitally, consumers have little choice but to comply even if, as our survey findings indicate, they feel strongly about wanting to purchase a boxed game. It’s possible that this disconnect between consumer desire for the physical and game studio and publisher desire for digital distribution has attributed some to the decline in gaming sales, as consumers opt not to purchase at all if they can’t get a physical copy or there is an age-restriction requirement.

Based on these findings, it would seem that gaming studios and publishers need to take into account the desire for physical copies as part of a strategy for maintaining or increasing overall sales.

Video Is The Future of the Game Experience

In 2013, the League of Legends final championship was live-streamed to over 32 million people with over 8.5 million watching concurrently. It is clear that there is a growing demand by gamers to watch live e-sports events. And gaming companies are beginning to realize it. Rivals to League of Legends such as Dota 2 and Starcraft 2 have also drawn millions of viewers to live tournament broadcasts. This behavior is supported by the findings in our survey—almost 50% of respondents indicated having watched videos of other people playing the video games they are playing at least once per month. Watching video has become a large part of the game experience.

But the growing trend of video isn’t relegated to just watching players. As our respondents answered, there is also a growing desire to post video of their own gameplay. Although the majority indicated that they do not post videos, almost 25% said they do. And this is not relegated to just the hardcore gamers. Of those respondents indicating casual games as their favorite genre (50%), 12% cited that they were posting videos of their gameplay to sites like YouTube, Vimeo, and Twitch.

Perhaps what we will see in the future is tighter integration of video-capture capabilities within the game platforms themselves, enabling players to more easily capture video as they are playing and watching video without having to leave the game itself (i.e., pausing the game with a pop-up search functionality to find video and a lightbox presentation of selected video assets). But clearly studios and publishers must start thinking about how video integrates with their overall game experience.
The Second Screen is Transforming the Way Consumers Play

Mobile continues to make inroads into the gaming industry. According to market research firm Newzoo, mobile game revenue will double from $17.5bn in 2013 to over $35bn by 2017. As the results of our survey demonstrate, mobile is a growing platform with almost 30% responding that they played most of their games over the past six months on smartphones and tablets.

But it would seem that mobile devices aren’t just for playing games. According to survey results, gamers are increasingly employing second screens (like smartphones and tablets) as a way to access supplemental content, such as videos of others playing the game or finding cheats and hints, while they are playing. Over 35% of respondents indicated using mobile devices in this manner. And a few even indicated alternate uses such as “bringing a second avatar online,” “social media sites,” and as a “controller.”

This growing trend to use second screens while playing clearly shows that consumers see value in extending the gaming experience beyond the primary screen. In fact, some games such as Microsoft’s Titanfall and Activision’s Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, actively employ second-screen technology through dedicated mobile applications that enable the gamer to access specialized content as the game unfolds.

It’s clear that game developers need to consider the second screen as they design their titles. It may be a specialized application that allows the user to control different elements of the game or it may just be a branded application that provides social integration and access to complementary media (like video or music). Additionally, there may be an opportunity in the near future to synchronize the gaming experiences, enabling consumers to truly play across platforms.

Whatever the outcome, consumers will continue to employ these alternate devices as a way to extend and transform the gaming experience.
Trends

Consumers Invest In A Game Experience, Not Just One-Time Play

The gaming landscape is clearly divided between casual gamers (50%) and what might be deemed as “hardcore” gamers (50%). Where casual gamers enjoy titles like King’s Candy Crush Saga, hardcore gamers are more interested in First-person Shooters (like Call of Duty), Role Play (like the Elder Scrolls series), MMO (like World of Warcraft), and Real-time Strategy (like Starcraft). What’s clear here is that hardcore gamers are not the sole drivers of the demand in the industry. Casual gamers represent a significant voice that game developers and studios shouldn’t ignore.

Figure 1: What is Your Favorite Type of Video Game (Choose Only One)
But regardless of game genre, gamers have an affinity for the games they play that extends well beyond an “end” to the storyline. As indicated in Figure 2, almost 90% of respondents want some kind of content update, whether it’s once a year or all the time. In fact, almost 50% want multiple content updates throughout the year (with over 20% indicating they want them monthly). What this might portend is that gamers will favor a title (both in purchase and in playtime) that provides frequent content updates, thereby extending the experience past a “point of completion.”

There is a lot of digital downloading happening with video game titles. As Figure 3 and Figure 4 indicate, respondents are downloading multiple titles each month with the majority downloading between one and five games.
Trends

Figure 5: How Do You Prefer to Purchase Your Video Games (Choose Only One)

But the act of downloading may seem to fly in the face of actual consumer sentiment as the majority of respondents in Figure 5 (53%) indicated that they would prefer to walk into a store and purchase their game, highlighting that retail outlet sales might still be a robust channel for game studios and publishers. Despite having invariably helped shape customer behavior by only offering games through digital download, these findings illustrate that a multi-channel strategy might appeal to the broadest set of consumers.

Video Is The Future of the Game Experience

Figure 6: How Many Times a Month Do You Watch Videos of Other People Playing the Video Games You Are Playing for Gameplay Styles, Gameplay Strategies, Game Cheats, or Game Hints?

Although the majority of respondents indicated that they do not watch videos of others playing, it is only a slight margin against those who do. According to Figure 6, approximately 47% of respondents reported having watched at least one video of someone playing the game they are playing, indicating a growing trend in the game experience.
But the integration of video into the gaming experience isn’t just one way. Although the majority of respondents (78%) don’t post videos of themselves playing, a growing number (22%) do. And some even provided alternate locations such as “Facebook” and “Instagram.” This trend is likely to increase as developers find better ways to integrate video capturing and publishing capabilities into their titles making it easier for players to capture their gameplay.

The Second Screen is Transforming the Way Consumers Play

Mobile is continuing to make inroads into the gaming market as a viable platform. As indicated in Figure 8, although Computer and Gaming Console dominated survey responses, 30% of respondents indicated that they played most of their games on mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) over the past six months.
**Trends**

**The Second Screen is Transforming the Way Consumers Play**

![Bar chart showing the use of second screens while playing video games.]

**Figure 9:** How Do You Use a Second Screen (Tablet or Smartphone) While Playing Video Games? (Choose All That Apply)

With mobile devices for gaming gaining consumer mindshare, it’s no wonder that they are beginning to use them in cross-platform gaming experiences. As indicated in Figure 9, almost 36% responded that they are using a second screen device (smartphone or tablet) as they are playing. Although at this point it is only complementary content (like videos, maps, cheats, etc.), there is clearly an opportunity for game developers to incorporate a second screen into their game experiences as a way to capitalize on this growing trend.

**Additional Findings**

**PCs and Laptops Still Lead the Way for Gameplay**

![Bar chart showing the frequency of video game play across different devices.]

**Figure 10:** Where Do You Play Video Games? Rank in Order of Frequency Where You Play Most Often. (4=most often)

Although tablets and mobile phones are catching up, the computer still reigns supreme as the primary choice for gaming.
Additional Findings

Digital Downloads are Frustrating

Figure 11: What is the Most Frustrating Part of Downloading Video Games? (Choose Only One)

Consumers are clearly frustrated by the length of time it takes to download content and interruptions to the download process. Some other responses included:

- The size of the download file
- No physical copy if the file gets corrupted
- Amount of bandwidth used during download

Casual Gamers Play a Lot Every Day

Figure 12: How Many Hours a Day Do You Spend Playing Video Games?

Over 50% of respondents (filtered by those that indicated their favorite genre of video game was “casual”) indicated that they spend between one and four hours each day playing games.
Additional Findings

Poor Gameplay Frustrates Gamers the Most

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td></td>
<td>14.11%</td>
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Figure 13: What Causes You to Become Upset With or Stop Playing a Video Game? Rank in Order That Frustrates You the Most. (5=most frustrating, 1=least frustrating)

There are many reasons that gamers become frustrated when playing. But topping that list is “poor gameplay.” Perhaps of equal interest is the weight given to “latency,” indicating how slowly the game plays or downloads.

Casual Games Are Hot

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<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Casual (like Candy Crush Saga)</td>
<td>50.15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First-person Shooter (like Call of Duty)</td>
<td>25.56%</td>
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<td>Role Play (like Elder Scrolls)</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
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<td>MMO (like World of Warcraft)</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
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<td>RTS (like Starcraft)</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14: What Is Your Favorite Type of Video Game? (Choose Only One.)

50% of respondents indicated that their favorite game genre was “casual” games (similar to Candy Crush Saga), perhaps pointing to an evolution in the industry. Although AAA titles tend to generate the bulk of game-industry software revenue, this interesting finding might point to an untapped revenue stream in casual games.
Consumer Gaming Trends

Conclusion

The game experience has changed. Where it was once just about the gameplay (controls, storyline, and playability), the experience has become much more intensive through related user activity such as complementary content (like video) and the second screen. What’s more, the experience has extended to game performance as well—gamers are concerned with how fast the game or game content downloads and other forms of latency that interrupt gameplay. The findings in this report point to a need for game studios and publishers to pay attention to more of the experience as user frustration over different game experience elements (i.e., downloading, video content quality, etc.) could color user perception about the game itself.

Appendix

The following represent survey respondent demographics:

- Countries surveyed—North America, Canada, UK, Australia
- Gender—51% female, 49% male
- Age range—14-64

1 Game genres surveyed included “Casual (like Candy Crush Saga),” “First-Person Shooter (like Call of Duty),” “Roll Play (like Elder Scrolls),” “MMO (like World of Warcraft),” and “RTS (like Starcraft).”

2 Once purchased and installed, most incremental content uploads are provided through digital download.

3 In fact, it could be argued that these platforms are helping promote more casual gaming titles.

4 Especially when coupled with Internet-connected games


6 Consumers may also be put off by the continued increase in the size of game downloads with many reaching 10 GB or more in size as indicated by open-ended questions to Question 7 “What Is The Most Frustrating Part of Downloading Video Games.”.

