Beyond the Console: Xbox Maps the Gaming Ad Ecosystem



> The future of brands gets decided here. Join the industry's top marketers at Brandweek for the ideas, insights, and connections shaping what's next. **Get your ticket.**

The perception of gaming as a niche hobby is rapidly fading as it transforms into a dominant force in global culture and connection.

In this episode of The Speed of Culture podcast, Matt Britton welcomes Claire Nance, senior director of marketing communications at Microsoft's Xbox Media Solutions.

Claire highlights the staggering reality of billions of active participants and the technological advancements that have turned every smartphone into a high-powered gaming device.

This conversation reveals why immersion is the ultimate superpower for brands looking to build authentic relationships

with an audience that is already deeply engaged. Claire provides a look at how Xbox is leading this transition by prioritizing the player experience above all else.

The discussion focuses on the global reach of 3.6 billion gamers, the role of mobile gaming in providing universal access, and why the industry must move past outdated stereotypes to understand the modern gaming audience.

Claire also shares her philosophy on player-first advertising and her non-linear career path that led her into one of the most immersive sectors of entertainment.

About our guest:

Claire Nance serves as the Senior Director of Marketing Communications at Microsoft's Xbox Media Solutions. She oversees B2B marketing communications for the gaming advertising business, focusing on educating brands about the power of gaming for modern entertainment and connection.

Claire joined Activision Blizzard as one of the first marketing communications hires for their early stage ads business, helping to build the team and strategy from the ground up before the company was acquired by Microsoft.

Her career history includes roles in television, media, and advertising at agencies like IPG, reflecting a non-linear path that eventually led her to the gaming industry. Today, she leads the storytelling for a portfolio that includes iconic titles like Candy Crush and Call of Duty across mobile, PC, and console platforms.

Key Takeaways:

[00:03:50] The Scale and Ubiquity of the Global Gaming Community – The sheer number of people engaging with games globally has reached a point where it is impossible for marketers to overlook. With 3.6 billion gamers worldwide and

roughly 80 percent of people in the United States playing in some capacity, the medium has become a primary channel for social connection. Many participants do not even identify as gamers because the activity has become such a seamless part of their daily lives through mobile devices. This section highlights how the industry has moved beyond the living room console to become a ubiquitous part of modern culture.

[00:09:25] – A Philosophy of Player First Brand Experiences – Maintaining the integrity of the gaming environment is the highest priority when introducing brand messages into the ecosystem. The strategy centers on creating value exchanges, such as rewarded video or playable ad experiences, that happen during natural breaks in play. Because the developers are protective of the user experience, only high-quality and non-disruptive integrations make it into the final product. This approach ensures that brands are additive to the entertainment rather than an interruption that players want to skip.

[00:11:53] Navigating the Complex Gaming Ecosystem via the Simple Rubric – Understanding where to start in gaming can be daunting for brands due to the variety of platforms and genres available. A helpful framework for simplifying this complexity involves looking at opportunities that are in the game, adjacent to the game, or outside of the game. Whether it is intrinsic billboards within a racing title or connecting with communities through esports and streaming, each entry point serves a different objective. Success in this space comes from returning to first principles and knowing exactly which audience a brand needs to reach.

[00:15:32] Educating the Market and Breaking Cultural Stereotypes – A significant portion of the work involves dismantling the outdated image of the teenage gamer in a basement. The modern gaming audience is diverse, spans all age groups, and is more engaged than viewers on almost any other platform. Immersion is the key differentiator, as players are

fully focused on the task at hand rather than second-screening. This provides a unique opportunity for brands to be part of a seamless environment where attention is already guaranteed.

[00:17:40] – Navigating a Non-Linear Path to Success – Professional journeys in the modern era rarely follow a straight line from point A to point B. Claire reflects on how her experience in traditional media and advertising agencies provided the foundation needed to thrive in the gaming sector. The industry offers a vast array of roles beyond engineering and development, from marketing to human resources, many of which are still being invented as technology evolves. Staying curious and being crystal clear on the benefit of every action is the best way to make progress in such a fast-paced environment.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/beyond-the-console-xbox-maps-the-gaming-ad-ecosystem/