DOMINATING INFLUENCER MARKETING

FEATURE STORY: HOW PONOS BUILT A DEDICATED COMMUNITY THROUGH YOUTUBE CONTENT CREATORS

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WHY INFLUENCER MARKETING IS THE FUTURE OF MOBILE GAME MARKETING

There’s a force that gives mobile game developers power. It’s an energy created by certain types of people. It surrounds devs and penetrates devs. It affects the purchase intent of every customer. No, it’s not the Force from Star Wars. It’s gaming influencers.

YouTube and Twitch video creators, otherwise known as influencers, have become the premier source for information on mobile games. According to Google, 90 percent of gamers watch YouTube videos at least once a week for game advancement tips, gameplay and game discovery—with more than half of all views occurring on mobile devices.

Likewise, consumers trust what influencers have to say. A recent Nielsen study found that two-thirds (66 percent) of consumers said they trust consumer opinions posted online—the third-most-trusted advertising format. Marketers have taken notice of influencers and influencer marketing—a form of marketing that identifies certain types of people that have influence over potential customers, and conforms activities around these influencers. According to Altimeter Group’s State of Social Business study, 61 percent of U.S. marketers planned to increase influencer marketing budgets in 2015.
In the saturated mobile game market, developers are in dire need for new app discovery mechanisms. As of today, players are able to choose from two million apps in both the Apple App Store and Google Play—making it harder than ever for mobile game devs to stand out from the crowd. For devs, influencer marketing is the key to cutting through the noise and connecting with highly engaged players.

The time is now for mobile game developers to start their influencer marketing strategy. For this reason, the latest Power-Up Report examines this form of marketing from A to Z—detailing why influencer marketing is an essential part of a holistic user acquisition strategy. This exhaustive guide will provide you with everything you need to know to master influencer marketing. We'll explain why influencer marketing is so hot right now, reveal what games YouTubers want to showcase, provide influencer marketing pro tips straight from top YouTubers, and much more.
Yesterday’s mobile game marketing strategy of building audiences through paid acquisition has pushed costs into the stratosphere. Today, even great games are finding that they need a more innovative marketing strategy to compete. And for many, the most powerful new tool is influencer marketing.

The path is well-established. Over in the PC gaming space, YouTube and Twitch influencers have been a force for more than three years. Mobile has been slower to follow because its players are newer to the hobby. But as mobile gamers have become more experienced, they’ve learned to venture outside of the app stores—finding tips, strategies and new game recommendations through outside services.

In many ways, mobile is even more primed than PC for influencer marketing: video content, not written, is the primary way that mobile users explore content. Across YouTube, mobile devices account for over half of all views and mobile gamers are an important segment of these views.

Here are the four trends driving the growth of mobile influencer marketing:
TRADITIONAL USER ACQUISITION CHANNELS ARE CROWDED

The two “traditional” channels for mobile user acquisition have been the app stores and mobile game ads. As the value of being featured in an app store has declined and mobile UA costs have risen, many developers have responded by narrowing their releases to a few profitable genres. But this is a strategy with no long-term future—gamers love variety and originality.

VIDEO HAS AN ENGAGED AND GROWING MOBILE GAMER AUDIENCE

The problem to date has been that attempts to create app discovery outside the app stores have failed. Mobile video is the first channel that has provable traction, with games like Agar.io or Clash Royale getting millions of views as a reward for their fresh and entertaining gameplay.

YouTube is quietly becoming great for mobile gaming. The network’s statistics show that 90 percent of avid mobile gamers head to YouTube for gameplay tips and app discovery at least once a week. Streaming is also growing quickly, with mobile-only sites like Kamcord and Mobcrush seeing rapid expansion in views and channels.

None of these sites are breakout hits yet. While the most active mobile gamers are regularly visiting video content sites, less engaged players are slower to arrive. But it’s likely that by the end of 2016, one or more of the streaming sites gain a lead in mobile.
Mobile gamers tend to play only a few games and they aren’t always looking for new games to play. Ads for mobile games have to fight for attention against this basic reality, which is why most mobile video ads are short and punchy. But on YouTube, mobile gamers are engaged and open to seeing something new—as long as it comes from one of their favorite video creators. The effect is that gamers see and decide to play new games, without ever making a conscious decision to do so.

YouTube also acts as a useful research source for gamers to take a look at games they’ve heard about or seen elsewhere. Let’s Play and gameplay videos serve as long-tail advertisements for the games they cover, convincing gamers to play for months or years after they’re created.

PAID CAMPAIGNS LEAD TO ORGANIC COVERAGE

Paid marketing on YouTube can defy expectations. Where developers might expect that players would put less value into a paid endorsement, the reality is that fans see their favorite YouTube creators as people like themselves and trust their recommendations.

YouTubers deserve this trust: those that are smart and hard working enough to build a large channel know better than to undermine their work by covering a game that bores or annoys their audience. Typically, YouTubers accept paid campaigns for games they like, which is why they often follow up paid coverage for a game with free coverage later.

The long-tail effect to paid campaigns provides an ongoing discovery effect, proving YouTube is more than a short-term promotional technique. Roostr, a marketplace that connects gaming influencers with mobile game developers, found that 30 percent of views come after the end of a paid influencer campaign. Influencer marketing is a channel with staying power, as will be seen in the months and years to come.
While influencer marketing is currently exploding in popularity among mobile game marketers, the concept isn’t new. From actress Lily Langtry’s Pears soap advertisement to YouTube star PewDiePie’s various mobile game endorsements, influential individuals have been shaping the consumer’s buying decisions for decades. What follows is a look back at how influencer marketing has evolved into one of the most effective forms of marketing today.
Greek philosopher Aristotle’s thoughts profoundly influenced many subjects and individuals during Ancient Greece and throughout other time periods.

Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz published Personal Influence, which found that most people form their opinions under the influence of opinion leaders.

Dr. Pepper paid influencer Tay Zonday a flat fee to create Cherry Chocolate Rain, which was one of the first hit sponsored videos on YouTube.

Amazon gobbled up Twitch for $970 million, which represented the importance of live streaming to the gaming industry.

Gaming content creator PewDiePie surpassed then leading channel Smosh to become the most subscribed YouTube channel.

Lily Langtry, who was known as one of the most beautiful women of her time, became the first woman to endorse a commercial product.

Google purchased YouTube for $1.65 billion, which catapulted the search giant to the lead in online video.

Disney completed its acquisition of Maker Studios, a video supplier focused on short-form YouTube content.

Chartboost acquired Roostr, the first performance-based marketplace that connects mobile game influencers directly with mobile game developers.
STREAMING SUCCESS: HERE ARE THE GAMES INFLUENCERS WANT TO PLAY

Video personalities, or influencers, are the new stars of the gaming scene. Fans gather to watch them play mobile games online, streaming live as well as recording for later viewing on platforms such as Twitch, Mobcrush and YouTube.

YouTube stars like PewDiePie (who earned $4 million from his YouTube channel in 2013) get a lot of press attention, but even smaller personalities can have a big impact on a mobile game’s bottom line. The more people see a game being played enthusiastically on YouTube, the more likely they are to download that game, which translates to more users playing—especially highly engaged users who spend.

Genre matters, however. Not all games lend themselves to being watched on the internet. Here, influencers discuss what types of games and gaming mechanics are best for the hot new marketing strategy.

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Matthew Chase started posting mobile gaming videos on YouTube three years ago under the channel name iChase. He started with shooters like Respawnables, Modern Combat and Critical Ops, but he also makes videos for Clash of Clans and Clash Royale, the well-known multiplayer mobile games from Supercell.

Even though many gamers like to complain about free-to-play mobile games, says Chase, they tend to download and play them more than pay-to-play games. This trend gives gaming influencers like himself a unique opportunity.

“People want to see stuff in the game that they don’t have,” he says. “So if I make a video showcasing something in the game, people get to know if they should invest money in that game to get the same perk.”
Seth Sivak, CEO of Proletariat, is convinced that streaming games is a new genre unto itself. He calls them "stream-first" games, and his team—fresh off of hit mobile multiplayer game World Zombination—is creating their first stream-first game right now, called Streamline.

Sivak thinks that in order to be stream-friendly, mobile games should focus on having high replay value. If there are multiple ways to "beat" a level or dominate in a multiplayer setting, viewers will come back to see influencers try different things.

HIGH REPLAY VALUE
Games that do the best for streaming broadcasters tend to be those that allow for competitive and cooperative play with others. Single-player games do well enough the first few days of streaming, but don’t offer enough unique scenarios to keep viewers coming back for more.

“What makes a free-to-play game good, that people actually want to play,” says Chase, “is that it has to have social settings.”

These can include such things as chat features, the ability to create clans with friends, leaderboards and actual multiplayer gameplay—whether that’s competitive (playing against other users) or cooperative (teaming up into clans or fighting AI opponents as a team).

These features allow for a wide variety of video content approaches, from tips and tricks videos to involving viewers in the actual game stream.

“What makes a free-to-play game good, that people actually want to play,” says Chase, “is that it has to have social settings.”
Francisco Albornoz, also known as TheGameHuntah on YouTube, has had big success creating videos for games like *Slugterra: Slug it Out!*, a match-three puzzle game that utilizes a children’s TV show IP. He’s also seen success with titles such as *Star Wars: Commander* and *Transformers: Earth Wars*.

Albornoz believes that while strategic multiplayer features are critical to the success of any streaming mobile game, it’s also possible to find an audience with a single-player game if it’s tied to a strong IP.

“A game without multiplayer can be successful if they add a strong story behind it,” Albornoz says. “That can allow the influencer to create a special bond with the characters and keep the audience entertained.”
If multiplayer games are popular, customizable content within those games make a YouTube video or live broadcast even more fun to watch. Games with decks of digital cards—like Hearthstone—or those with various bases to defend—like Clash of Clans—are popular gaming video destinations because they allow YouTubers and broadcasters to teach viewers how to best utilize the customizable content.

If a given viewer’s specific deck or base configuration is used by an influencer, so much the better, Sivak says.

“Developers need to make it easy to inspect or view this content,” he adds, “which lets the viewer feel special and get a callout.”
HOW PONOS BUILT A DEDICATED COMMUNITY THROUGH YOUTUBE CONTENT CREATORS

Mobile developers looking for alternative ways to promote their mobile games would be crazy not to think about YouTube. The global video service and its army of content creators wield a lot of power and influence, beating Facebook for daily video watching *eleven times over* and reaching more 18- to 49-year-olds than any U.S. cable network.

So it’s no surprise that mobile game developers are linking up with popular YouTubers to help direct eyes in the crowded and competitive app stores.

_PONOS_, a mobile developer based in Kyoto, Japan, recognized the power of YouTube early on, after organically creating videos around its popular _Mr._ arcade series (_Mr. AahH!!, Mr. NooO!! and _Mr. Ninja_) helped the mobile titles flourish. Since then, Sean Koble, localization specialist and international business coordinator at PONOS, says that tapping into the power of mobile game influencers on YouTube has been a key marketing strategy for the studio—particularly for its quirky tower defense game _The Battle Cats_. YouTube videos—both organic and collaborative—have helped the game reach over 25 million downloads worldwide.
RECOGNIZING AUTHENTICITY

Mobile gamers see a lot of ads, many of which are unrepresentative of the actual products and leads to an element of suspicion, says Koble. Seeing a game played on YouTube, however, offers an accurate—and often entertaining—picture of what to actually expect, and it’s delivered in an authentic manner.

“Having a game demonstrated to you in a funny and engaging way—by someone who you trust to be a gamer with common interests and irritations—gives a much more authentic sense of what you can hope for as a player,” Koble says.
Partnering with YouTube influencers to help promote *The Battle Cats* was an easy marketing call after online gaming communities responded so well to the game itself, says Koble.

“When we saw the strong response to *The Battle Cats* in gamer communities in Japan, Asia and North America, we realized that the best way to reach out to our target players was to simply show a respected fellow gamer enjoying the game,” Koble says.

One of PONOS’s most successful partnerships has been with YouTube star *iHasCupquake*, who has over 4.6 million subscribers. Koble says it worked because her personality aligned well with the offbeat nature of *The Battle Cats*. Finding that kind of match is tough, says Koble, but it’s a key to success.

“Finding channels that are followed by the right balance of casual users who enjoy the game for its weirdly cute design and character collection aspects, and the core users who appreciate the intense strategy of the late-game is a challenge,” he says. “But Cupquake provided that mixture perfectly and in high volumes. Her bright, genuine personality and willingness to be goofy really helped to present the game’s cute irreverence and the straightforward fun of the experience.”

More recently, PONOS teamed up with YouTuber *Generikb*, which, Koble says, has been a fantastic promotion for casual players. “We’ve been seeing great results from a series of ‘Let’s Play’ videos,” he says. “Thanks to Generikb’s friendly way of guiding potential players through the early-to-intermediate stages of the game while effectively highlighting the fun scattered throughout with exuberant reactions.”
YouTube video creators can give a mobile game a real jolt in install numbers. Koble explains that teaming up with iHasCupquake, for example, sent “a strong and steady flow of installs our way.” That included a spike of several thousand new users when the videos first came out and a sustained positive effect over the following weeks.

And while community word-of-mouth is what really ignited *The Battle Cats*’s initial growth, Koble says that YouTube influencers have proved a valuable part of maintaining that organic momentum.

“The presence on YouTube of *The Battle Cats*-related content has been critical in keeping the game fresh in players’ minds across dozens of updates and integration of new features,” he says.
While PONOS’s influencer partnerships have generally revolved around larger channels, *The Battle Cats* also has a wealth of organic YouTube content created by fans, too. Proving that once the game gets played on a platform like YouTube, others will join in to stream the content, too.

These smaller fan channels have been valuable in helping build a brand image and community for *The Battle Cats*, says Koble, and it’s important not to undervalue their role in user acquisition and retention, particularly in the early life of a mobile game.

“Personally, before I take a risk on downloading a new game app, I like to check out gameplay videos of mid-game stages to confirm that a game is going to head to a place that is worthy of my investment,” says Koble. “The smaller channels are often more able and willing to fill that niche than larger channels who feel the need to maintain general appeal by constantly changing up their gaming focus.”
PONOS plans to continue with influencer marketing partnerships moving forward, seeing them as an ideal complement to more traditional mobile game marketing efforts. “It’s always a treat to see the power of a fresh take on our game to be able to draw in new players,” Koble says.

And it’s also a great way to keep in touch with The Battle Cats’s player base, says Koble. “The perspective we gain by seeing the response to influencers’ presentations has definitely helped us to stay in tune with player needs even after years of development,” he says.

Overall, Koble sees the growth of the game’s users through influencer marketing as a no-brainer: “You could say that the dozens of dedicated player-influencers showing off their accomplishments and sharing strategy via YouTube is perhaps the greatest unofficial asset we have for mobilizing our core players when we release new content. We definitely have them to thank for helping us to maintain long-term retention rates over months and years.”
Influencer Marketing by the Numbers

Audiences across the globe gather to watch influencers play mobile games every day. In particular, Google found that 90 percent of gamers watch YouTube videos at least once a week. This is the new reality for gaming information consumption. The following infographic includes a handful of astounding stats to help you see the power of YouTube and influencer marketing.

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INFLUENCER MARKETING BY THE NUMBERS

144 BILLION MINUTES OF GAMING VIDEO WATCHED MONTHLY

30% VIEWS POST CAMPAIGN

0.86 CORRELATION COEFFICIENT FOR GAMING YOUTUBE SUBSCRIBERS & VIEWS

Sources: Roostr, Tubematter, YouTube
*Conversion Rate: Click to Install
INFLUENCERS: THEY’RE JUST LIKE US

Brittany Roark has a knack for making YouTube videos. She started out with lifestyle posts at first, but eventually switched focus. Playing mobile games was a hobby she’d always enjoyed. When Roark realized she could make videos about games, combining her two hobbies into one, her business was born.

Turns out, YouTubers and indie game devs are a lot alike: creating something they love while building a viable business in the process. As YouTube influencers become a key channel for mobile game marketers and UA specialists (over half of all brand-sponsored videos take place on gaming-related channels), it’s important for game creators to actually understand who they’re working with—the people behind the handle.

Meet four video creators to learn how they got into the growing business and what they love about working with game devs.

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Images vis BBPaws
Alex Noon aka Arekkz Gaming
Years as a video creator: 3

Favorite games/genres: Noon says he’ll play anything, but he currently produces weekly content based on PC and console games like multiplayer game *The Division* and first-person shooter *Destiny*.

Why he started creating videos: Noon’s YouTube channel is run by two people: Noon fronts the videos and produces the content, and his co-founder Matthew Weathers manages SEO and other back-end work.

The two started producing videos together when working at Microsoft, taking advantage of easy access to games and their love of PlayStation Vita-imported games to build the channel. By January 2015, the channel had 40,000 subscribers.

After Noon was laid off from Microsoft in early 2015, the duo took the opportunity to turn the channel into a full-time affair. It now boasts a subscriber base of over 300,000 users.

Pro-tip for devs—Keep the pitch short: YouTubers can get busy and are not always easy to reach. They might be out and about at an event or waiting for a video to upload. To reach them on the go, a short, sharp pitch is often more effective than a lengthy note—especially since they’ll likely be reading on their phones.
Brittany Roark aka BBPaws

Years as a video creator: 2

Favorite games/genres: Story-based games such as RPGs like *Undertale* or point-and-click games like *The Walking Dead* and *Minecraft*.

Why she started creating videos: Roark started her video career running a lifestyle channel on YouTube, but she found it challenging to create videos for the vertical. “When you’re doing a sit down and talk style channel…it’s actually really hard to come up with topics that are interesting to everyone,” she says.

So she changed her focus and set up a new channel dedicated to her lifelong passion: gaming. “I started [my channel] and it was so much fun,” she says. “I’ve had a blast every single day doing it.”

Pro-tip for devs—Be genuine: The best way to capture Roark’s attention is with a personal touch. She and other influencers get many requests irrelevant to their interests and style; standing out means having a genuine interest in working with her.

“Tell me about yourself and some cool stuff about the game,” she says, “And if it’s something I’m interested in playing, then usually I’ll go for it.”

“I’ve had a blast every single day doing it.”
Kyle Carnegie aka Kclovesgaming

Years as a video creator: 3

**Favorite games/genres:** Mobile titles like city-building game *The Simpsons: Tapped Out* and fighting game *Marvel: Contest of Champions*.

**Why he started creating videos:** Carnegie started creating videos as a way of becoming a more confident speaker. After attending speech therapy classes, he decided that he needed to keep practicing his speech to overcome his problems. Inspired by other YouTubers, he decided to start creating his own videos to help him achieve this goal.

“I thought, I’ll give it a shot and see how it goes.” He explains. “It was horrible, but I loved it.”

Emboldened by his efforts and by reassuring words of support from his audience, Carnegie continued creating videos—eventually establishing his channel as a business a year and a half after launch.

**Pro-tip for devs—Be more open to influencers:** Despite all the talk about how valuable influencers are, Carnegie often struggles to get game codes from companies whose games he’s interested in playing on his channel. Companies should therefore look for ways to open channels of communication. Something as simple as making contact details more available on the site can go a long way in helping interested individuals with an audience of mobile fans cover their game.
**Jud Chapman aka Generikb**

*Years as a video creator: 5*

**Favorite games/genres:** Chapman got his start streaming Minecraft in 2011, and still plays today, but is increasingly playing sandbox survival games like *Dying Light* or *Stranded Deep*.

**Why she started creating videos:** When his girlfriend went back to school, Chapman says, “I found I had a lot of free time I had to fill.” He started playing Minecraft to fill the void, but encountered a problem he needed to solve in-game.

Finding the solution on YouTube, Chapman realized that it was possible to create and upload your own user content and began to create his own. Staying up until 2 a.m. most nights to create new videos, he eventually gained enough subscribers to monetize his channel and turned it into a full-time job.

**Pro-tip for devs—Do Your Research:** Chapman advises devs to be selective about who they pitch their games to. “You have to target the right person,” Chapman explains. By researching a video creator’s interests beforehand, devs can save time—and, quite possibly, money—by focusing attention on influencers who might cover their game.
WHY INFLUENCER MARKETING IS THE NEW GO-TO UA STRATEGY FOR INDIE AND AAA DEVS

In 2013, a group of AAA game veterans (employed by the likes of Nintendo, Zynga and Kixeye) decided to leave their comfy gigs behind to create a small, independent studio in hopes of changing the way mobile games are experienced.

This team behind Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Turbo Studios didn’t have a groundbreaking technology up its sleeve or a new genre to introduce. What they did have was the willingness to acknowledge that the current system of mobile game user acquisition and community building was broken: high CPI costs and the big guys—their former bosses—always ending up on top.

Instead of releasing a suite of mobile games to combat this on day one, Turbo took its time to study the industry. Eventually, they landed on what they think is the key to a new wave of UA and engagement: influencer marketing.

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“More than 90 percent of our marketing strategy and our UA strategy is going to be focused towards streaming platforms, towards video creation through content created by social influencers,” says Ray Bautista, who worked at Sony Games before becoming head of business development at Turbo.

After three years of research and development, Bautista and team are gearing up to release their debut title: turn-based strategy game Super Senso—which has already gained momentum in soft launch as a result of their influencer strategy.

Here, Batista talks about why the team of vets is all-in on influencer marketing, how the strategy has affected the game’s soft-launch strategy and how they plan to continue to utilize influencer marketing post-launch.
How have you seen the marketing and UA strategy for mobile games change over the years?

The mobile audience has matured. I think when it comes to the old-guard philosophy of casting the widest funnel possible to see what sticks, continuing to pump money into a UA campaign to help with churn...the mobile community is no longer accepting of that.

I can really see the shift now with companies like Super Evil Megacorp. Even though Hearthstone was originally developed for PC, their success was based on mobile. And even Supercell, with Clash Royale. It’s all pointing toward games of substance, games that have strategy behind them, games that are competitive. And the audience is savvy enough to understand.

And these strategic games rely heavily on community, which the influencers have. Is this why you’ve focused so much on influencer marketing for Super Senso?

Super Senso is unapologetically going after the core, mid-core competitive audience. Yes. For us, it really boils down to community building. Even if we had the funds to have the current traditional user acquisition campaign, even if it’s our main strategy to acquire new users in our title, it wouldn’t work for our game because I really believe that the return on investment and the type of user you get and acquire from those traditional campaigns is throwaway. These traditional UA methods aren’t targeted towards a core gamer, an individual that will actually understand our game and our play style. Sure, players from a traditional UA campaign will download the game, they’ll install—which, at that point, counts as an acquisition—and probably delete it 10 seconds later. The influencer space, on the other hand, really hits that community we’re after.

How have you seen influencer marketing affect your soft launch?

It’s really been about determining not only who the evangelists and champions of our community can be; but it’s also about building a foundation of players that not only get the game, but also are loyal to it and really help us, at an organic level, spread the word about how awesome the game is.

From an influencer perspective, there isn’t any better way to do that and to reach these folks than through them. The influencers have built these amazing communities that trust what they say, trust that if they are actually cosigning on a game and saying, “Hey, you should try this out,” that they would only be streaming it if it’s something that they believe their community would like. And at that point, if it’s something their community’s going to like, we’re talking anywhere between hundreds of thousands to millions of players. That right there is better than any traditional mobile UA that I can think of in terms of investment.

You've seen some success in the soft-launch with influencer marketing, but what does the strategy look like post-launch?

We’re in it for the long haul. Our play is the long tail. When we look at post-launch as it relates to influencer campaigns, we want to try to make everything we do as authentic as possible. What we’re hoping to do, as we want to keep the game going and as we want to continue to build the community out, we’ll continue to not only creating community hooks that will get streamers and content creators and gamers excited, but also pick top-tier content creators to work with them to create the content they’d like to see.

“The influencers have built these amazing communities that trust what they say...”
HOW A TWEET FROM PEWDIEPIE MADE INDIE MOBILE GAME STUDIO OUTERMINDS A BREAKOUT SUCCESS

In 2014, a small, Montreal-based studio called Outerminds decided to enter a Game Jolt-sponsored game jam. The goal was to spark new ideas and passion among the then three-person team. With 800 other entrants, they didn’t expect to win—in fact, they didn’t. But their entry proved a major turning point for the team.

Before all entries were even submitted, one of the judges got in touch: PewDiePie (Felix Kjellberg), of YouTube gaming fame. Outerminds’s entry caught PewDiePie’s eye, perhaps because their game idea—PewDiePie’s Paradise Island—was created, quite literally, with the YouTube influencer in mind. Though the title didn’t win the game jam, PewDiePie asked the team to build a similar mobile game with his input. By January 2015, they started full-time development and released PewDiePie: Legend of the Brofist in September of the same year. Bolstered by PewDiePie’s coverage of his own game, Brofist became the top paid app in over 50 countries.

A random game jam and a Tweet exchange later, Outerminds has grown from three to eight people and is a few months away from releasing a second PewDiePie-led game. Through it all, Outerminds learned how to harness the power of influencers in the mobile game ecosystem.

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LOOK FOR PARTNERS, FOSTER FUN

Outerminds learned early on that if they were going to feature PewDiePie, they were also going to include other video content creators in the game. That, says Outerminds’s community manager Ghislain de Pessemier, is how it works and is something every YouTube star knows by instinct: being open to partnerships, attention and fun is what makes for a viral hit.

“At one point PewDiePie said, ‘Is it OK if my friends join in?’ And we said, ‘Hey, you can bring as many 10-million-subscriber people as you want,'” says de Pessemier referencing PewDiePie colleagues who also have huge YouTube subscriber counts. As such, Legend of the Brofist ended up with in-game voice-overs (and YouTube coverage) from five YouTubers besides PewDiePie.

The same fun PewDiePie embraces on YouTube and with other game influencers, is the most important ingredient for Outerminds, which has made a mantra out of the theme of the Game Jolt jam: “fun to watch, fun to play.” But somewhat counter-intuitively, fun doesn’t imply good. Whether a game is great or not so great, the fun of the entire spectacle—either playing or watching—is what gets the attention of YouTube video creators and fans.

“Even a bad game can be fun to play, fun to watch,” says de Pessemier, noting that while Brofist has stellar reviews, bad games covered by YouTubers often generate sales anyway. A game that isn’t particularly eye-catching or remarkable, on the other hand, probably won’t sell or be downloaded much even if a YouTuber happens to feature it.

Similarly, ongoing coverage can keep a game afloat. “Every time we’re releasing an update, PewDiePie’s playing it on his channel, and we get a huge spike in sales,” Pessemier says. “We didn’t invest a penny in advertising. PewDiePie is the advertisement.”
THINK LIKE AN INFLUENCER: BE OPEN, BE YOURSELF

At latest count, PewDiePie has 45 million followers on YouTube alone. Interacting with even a single-digit percent of his engaged audience is no small feat.

Outerminds quickly found itself having to juggle Herculean community management tasks. For example, PewDiePie asked the community to help name the game. A flood followed. “People were so creative, but there were 30,000 suggestions,” de Pesseimer says. “I had to ask one of the coders to do an algorithm to sort all the nouns.”

The studio decided to go all-in, announcing and promoting some big milestones as a marketing strategy. PewDiePie went along with the plan, often mentioning the company by name with each new bit of news or update. Outerminds, in turn, worked to be open, interacting with fans on social media and posting pictures of themselves. As such, Outerminds took a cue from the subject of their game: show players who you are.

“They see us chilling in the studio, doing stupid stuff, being ourselves,” de Pesseimer says. “They see the eight faces of our company, not a big corporation hiding behind a logo.” The openness has worked—at least on social media. Outerminds amassed over 20,000 Twitter followers in 2015.

He emphasizes that there’s no way to control the chaos of YouTube. All you can do is show up and be open to whatever arises. “We could have played Super Smash Bros. instead of going to that game jam,” he says of the serendipity of Outerminds’s success. “What were the odds that out of 800 teams PewDiePie would play our game first? We’ve been very lucky. If I could go back in the past, I would not change anything.”