

The Top Performing Ad Platforms for PC and Console Games

Industry Report
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About Gamesight

Here at Gamesight, we build technology to help games build, understand, and grow their fanbase. We do this by empowering game companies with tools, data, and experience so they can better understand their players. We bring community, marketing, and analytics together to provide valuable insights. We work with some of the top gaming brands in the world like Warner Brothers, Microsoft, Wizards of the Coast, Capcom, Bungie, Riot Games, and SEGA. In 2021, Gamesight worked with thousands of influencers and ran many of the largest influencer campaigns on Twitch.

Gamesight was founded in 2015 in Seattle, Washington. Our dedicated team is funded by the top VCs in Seattle and is currently hiring for multiple positions.

To learn more visit www.gamesight.io or follow us on Twitter [@gamesight](https://twitter.com/gamesight). If you have a passion for gaming, games marketing, and data visit www.gamesight.io/jobs

Overview

As experts in the digital marketing sphere, Gamesight is strategically positioned to answer a common question we regularly receive from our customers, which is “**What is the most effective marketing channel?**”.

Everyone is continuously searching for the best methods to optimize ad spend, and this analysis aims to answer those questions in broad strokes. This report offers an in-depth look at the most popular advertising platforms for PC and console gaming, ranking them using data gathered from the Gamesight engine.

While reading this report, remember that **every game is unique**. We're reporting the trends that we see across many of our customers' games. It is critical to test different channels, platforms, and strategies for your game in particular. In the end, we hope this report gives you a baseline of where to begin your next marketing campaign.

Methodology

Data capture:

The goal of our research was to uncover which ad platforms offered the highest value to PC and console game publishers. We thought it would be prudent to briefly go over some of the methodology we used for calculating many of these scores, values, and percentages included in this report. To determine value, we used several crucial factors to grade performance including:

Prevalence - Frequency, reach, and volume run through the platform.

Performance - Click-through, conversion rates, and game fit of players referred.

Retention - How long the average player referred by this platform was retained in the game.

To measure these traits, we used the Gamesight platform to examine the frequency of individual ad platforms, what platforms grossed the highest engagement, and at what rates they converted players.

The data we calculated for retention and conversion percentages is attributed via conversions from ad campaigns we ran in 2021. Conversion rates include DLCs and reactivations, while retention rates do not. Retention and conversion rates were log normalized across the various games under each platform to prevent high volume titles from having a disproportionate influence over the final rankings. We only looked at platforms that had broad adoption across our customers to prevent a handful of small campaigns from skewing the overall results. Additionally, for both conversion and retention rates, we filtered out any platform that had less than two applicable games for similar reasons.

F2P vs premium statistics were manually vetted and decided by game title and not necessarily by the promotion itself. Conversion volume was decided by the amount of conversions for applicable titles under each platform. Reach score was decided by the total countries present across all applicable campaigns for each platform.

Non-programmatic data collection:

All data unrelated to campaign performance was collected from publicly available sources, or in response to specific inquiries. We endeavored to use as many primary sources (game websites, publisher press releases, official statements, etc.) as possible. However, in many cases, we pulled from credible journalistic sources to fill in gaps.

We have cited all our sources in our endnotes section. If you are a developer or publisher of a game in this report and would like to provide us with corrections or updated data, please reach out to info@gamesight.io

Key Definitions

Ad Platform - An ad platform is an app, program, or company utilizing technology for monetizing online traffic. Generally, they serve as the middleman between a digital publisher and advertiser.

Impressions - The point at which an ad is viewed once by a visitor or displayed once on a web page. The number of impressions of a particular advertisement is determined by the number of times an ad is viewed or by the particular page that is located and loaded.

Clicks - The number of times a user has engaged with an advertisement after having it appear in their web browser.

Conversion - The act of converting an ad viewer into an install or purchase.

Retention - The rate at which users continue to return to and engage with the product advertised.

Search Ads - Relevant advertisements that return following input to a search engine.

Display Ads - Display ads (also known as banner ads) are designed images that appear at the top of a webpage or are intertwined throughout the content.

Social Ads - Ads designed specifically to run social media platforms. Often, they resemble organic content.

Video Ads - Promotional videos generally displayed before, during, or after watching an online video.

F2P - Acronym for “free-to-play.” Games that are free to play but monetized through in-game purchases.

Programmatic Ads - The process of buying and selling advertisements, generally through an automated broker.

Premium - Games that are sold for a fixed amount upfront.

The Top Platforms



venatus



webedia.

Note: The preceding networks are displayed in no particular order

The Top 5

The top 5 platforms were selected using a combination of both prevalence, performance, and their success across various titles. They are:



Google Ads



Bing Ads



Snapchat Ads

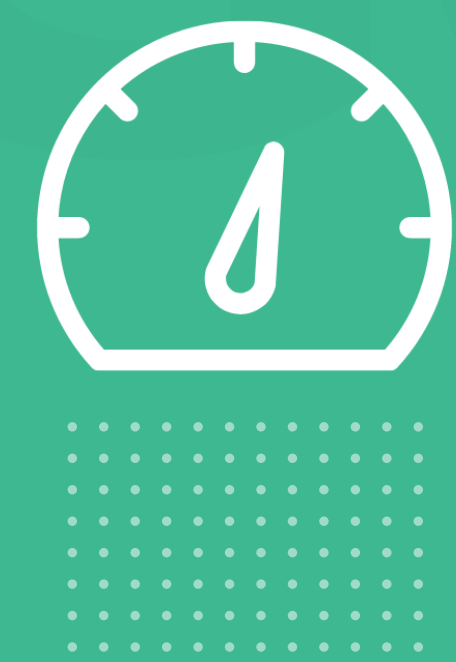


Facebook Ads



Influencer Marketing

Google Ads



Widest Reach and Highest Volume

Google Ads had the widest reach and highest volume amongst ad platforms in 2021.

Valuable for reaching a wide range of players, Google Ads² was the [most-used platform](#) among PC and console games. The all encompassing platform maintains three major network types: the Google Search Network, the Google Display Network, and the YouTube Network. All fall under the aegis of Google, and all are useful for game advertising.

Google Ads had a lower aggregate conversion rate this year than compared to last year (2.8% vs. 4.6%), due to the fact that we saw [increased usage in premium titles compared to F2P games](#) in 2021 vs. 2020. Overall the paid conversion rate was 1.27% and the F2P conversion rate was 4.43% in 2021. It's also important to note the campaign volumes we tracked for Google Ads increased 65% between 2020 and 2021, which increased the sample size and provided more generalizable data.

24.49%

7-day retention
rate

2.81%

Average conversion
rate

1.27%

Premium conversion
rate

4.43%

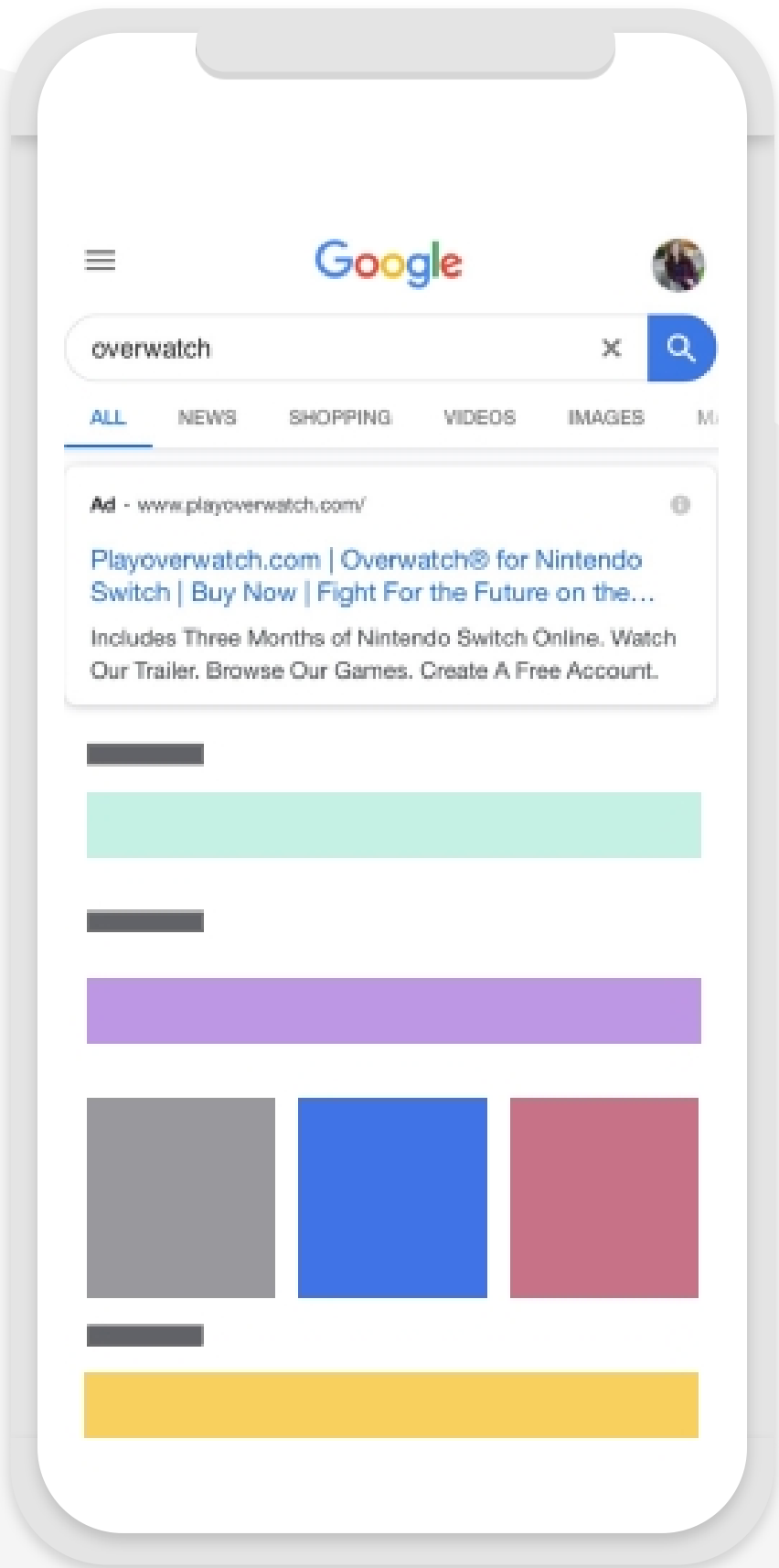
F2P conversion
rate



Volume Score



Retention Score



In both desktop and mobile browsers, search engines will return advertisements relevant to the user's input



Bing Ads



Highest Conversion

Bing had the highest overall conversion rate amongst ad platforms.

Microsoft's flagship search engine and [third most utilized in the world](#), Bing offers many of the same search services that Google does¹⁵. Bing is a component of the Microsoft Search Network along with AOL, Yahoo, and other various third party websites. Microsoft incorporates both search ads and Microsoft Audience Ads, which is their form of programmatic advertising, across the search network⁸.

Bing was extremely effective in it's conversion rate, pumping out the [highest percentage](#) (6.67%) of all ad platforms utilized in our 2021 campaigns. Like Google, the campaign volumes we tracked on Bing between 2020 and 2021 increased, but at a more modest 27.86%. While Bing earns a gold star in it's conversion rate, it had a modest 13.62% 7-day retention rate. Part of the low retention score can be attributed to the fact that we ran markedly more F2P campaigns than premium campaigns on Bing this year. F2P games generally have low retention rates because consumers are more willing to download a free game, but less willing to stick around as a regular user.

5/5

Conversion rate score

13.62%

7-day retention rate

6.67%

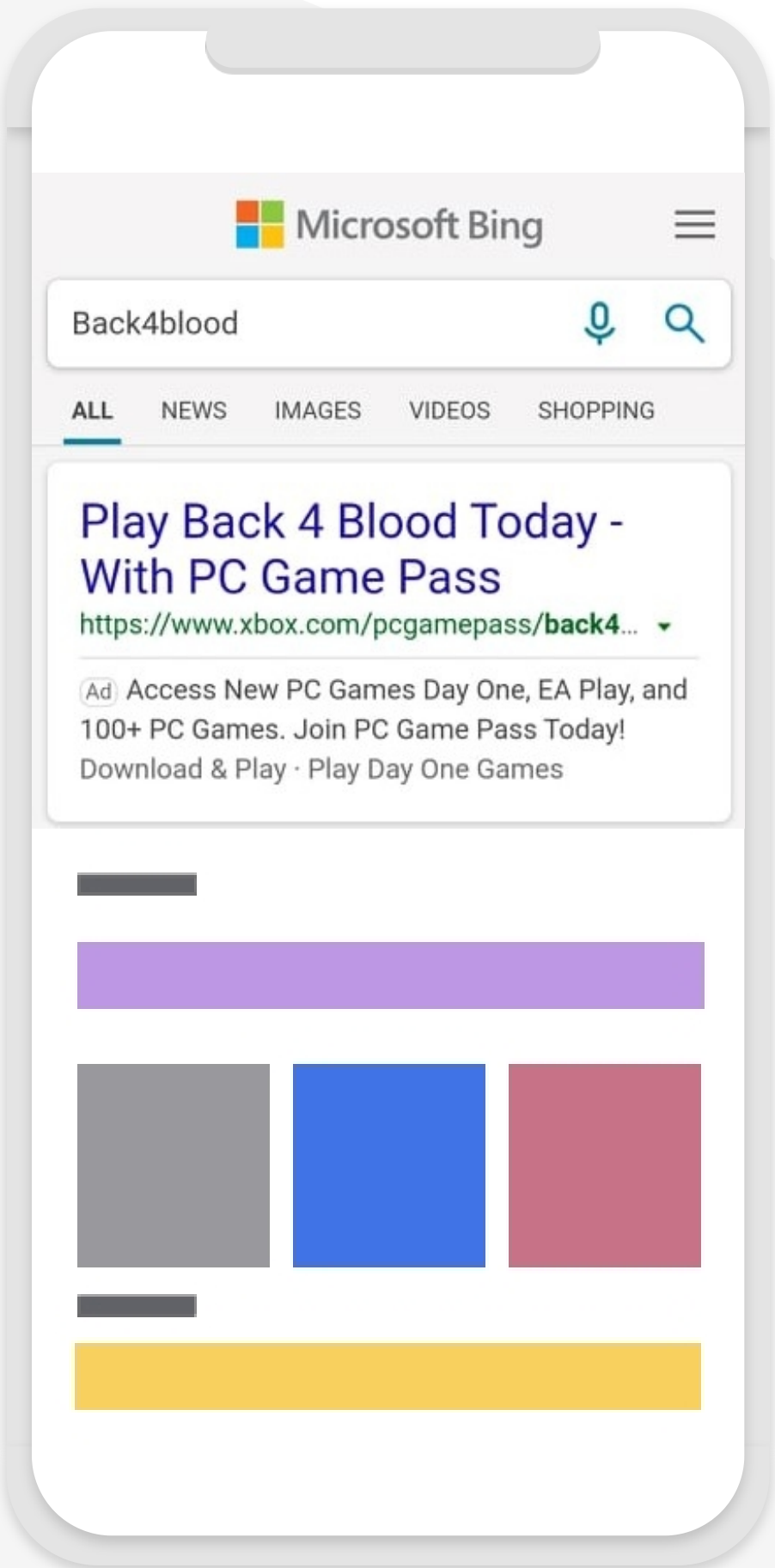
Average conversion rate



Volume Score



Retention Score





Snapchat



Highest Retention

Snapchat had the highest 7-day retention rate among all major advertising platforms in 2021.

Snapchat, the popular multimedia social messaging platform, has become particularly effective at user retention with their ads service. They had a 40% retention rate in 2021 compared to a 23% retention rate in 2020. High retention rates are an indication of how good a game is and how good the ad is; so the difference between rates in 2020 and 2021 can also be explained by the quality of ad campaigns run. Snapchat Ads are generally geared towards millennials and Gen Z, who continue to become larger contributors in the consumer market with each passing year. According to their own internal data, 306 million users frequent Snapchat every day, spending on average over 30 minutes on the app and sending 4 billion snaps each day⁵.

Many companies tend to be cautious when working with mobile only platforms, due to perceptions that targeting PC and console gamers and measuring results will be difficult. However, our customers that go all in with mobile platforms like Snapchat can generate some highly desirable results in the end. While Snapchat has an impressively high retention rate, it has a middling conversion rate, middling conversion volume, and very low reach, appearing in only 9 countries during our data analysis.



38.72%

7-day retention rate

2.26%

Average conversion rate

2.09%

Premium conversion rate

2.71%

F2P conversion rate



Volume Score



Retention Score



A large, dark gray Facebook logo watermark is centered in the background of the slide. It consists of a circular outline with a stylized lowercase 'f' inside.

Facebook Ads



Second Largest Volume

Facebook Ads was the second most frequently used ad network across all titles

One of the most prevalent among advertisers in our analysis, Facebook Ads have become a go-to platform across industries. A frontrunner in the mobile-gaming space, in particular, Facebook has found success by [optimizing their ads for players](#) who are likely to make an in-app purchase after installing the game. Tailoring advertisements in this way increases the game’s longevity while also maintaining a healthy return on ad spend (ROAS).

While Facebook has a strong foothold in the mobile space, their PC game offering has increased markedly in the past few years. Since our 2019 report, Gamesight’s conversion tracking integration with Facebook has expanded to cover measurement and optimization across the board. In 2021, Facebook has focused on [refining their conversion API \(CAPI\)](#), which is the primary integration point for conversion data with Gamesight⁴. With conversion data becoming readily available, our customers are unlocking the same feedback loops that enable Facebook advertising to be a powerhouse on mobile platforms. Problems with iOS 14’s new method of integrating marketing data have somewhat reduced the features available to customers, even extending to non-mobile ads. But it’s had a [minimal impact on Facebook Ad’s overall performance](#).

28.05%

7-day retention rate

1.41%

Average conversion rate

1.05%

Premium conversion rate

1.94%

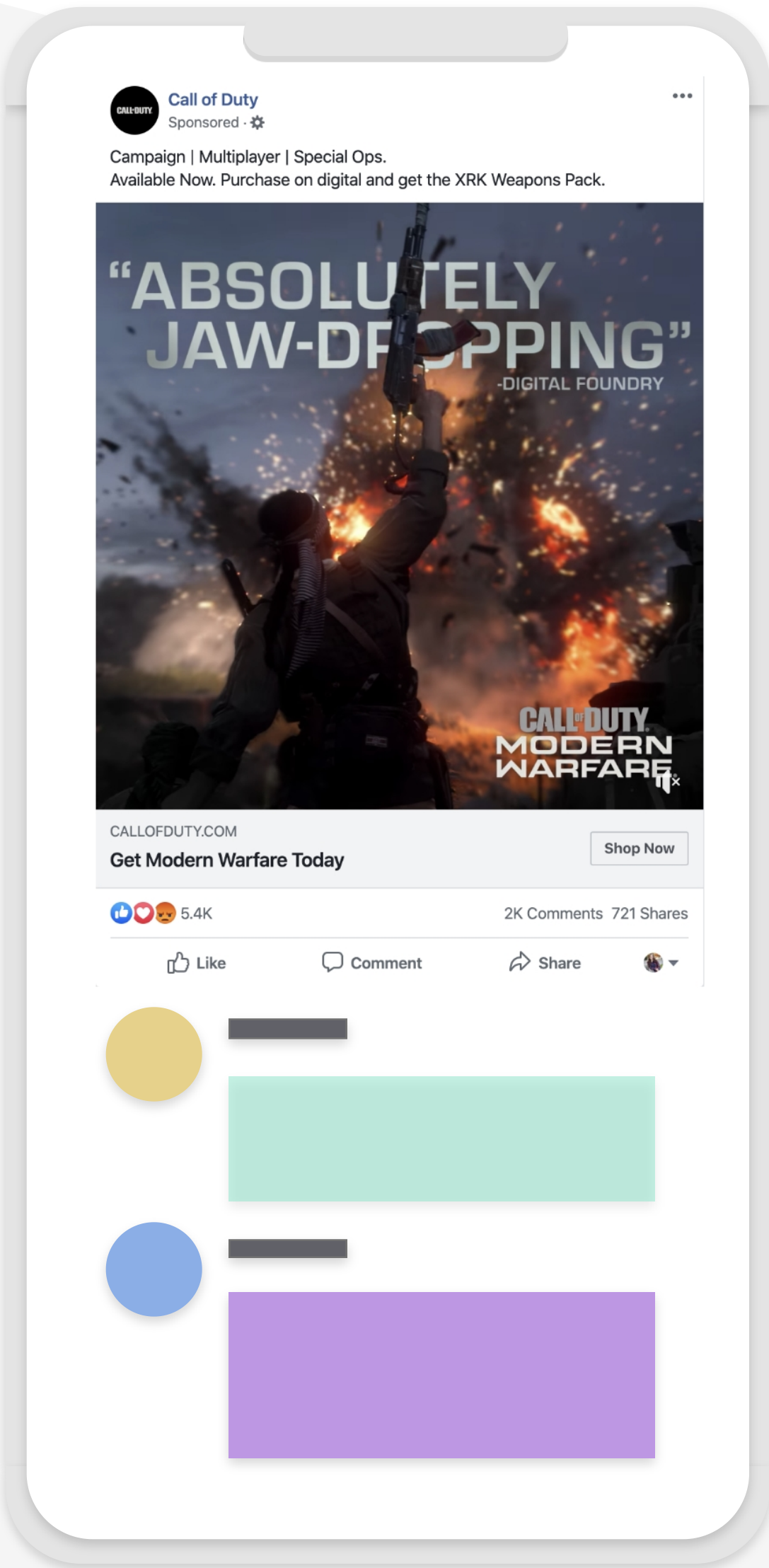
F2P conversion rate



Volume Score

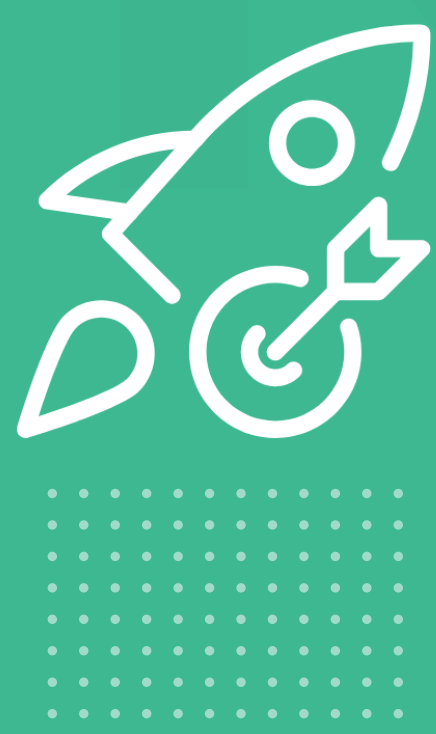


Retention Score





Influencer Marketing



Second Widest Reach, Third Highest Conversion

Regardless of platform, influencer marketing as a whole was incredibly effective in 2021, too effective not to rank in our top 5 analysis

Influencer marketing was the third-most-effective form of advertising based on the total advertising score we calculated, and [ranked highly for all metrics](#) we used. Now more than ever, gamers are discovering new games through influencers. This method may not cohere with each title, but the benefits of sharing a new release via content creators can be crucial in driving decision-making in customers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically increased live-streaming consumption since lockdowns began. Twitch's average content consumption has increased from [29 million viewer hours](#) per day in November 2019 to [64 million viewer hours](#) per day in October 2021 (via our internal data). Nearly two years later, streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube Live are still continuing to gain massive traction. We have also seen Twitch Drops, a form of influencer marketing, be particularly effective at driving installs, especially for F2P titles.

Viewers gravitate towards creators for a variety of reasons. Whether it be their skill-level, sense of humor, or their insight, community members feel connected to their favorite creators. When it comes to live-streaming, audience members are exposed to new titles without having to make a purchase. Viewers have the ability to tune into a live-stream, ask questions, and preview a game from the perspective of someone they trust. Influencer marketing creates an [authentic impression](#), encouraging the viewer to make decisions based on their own experience.

23.95%

7-day retention rate

6.48%

Average conversion rate

2.18%

Premium conversion rate

15.09%

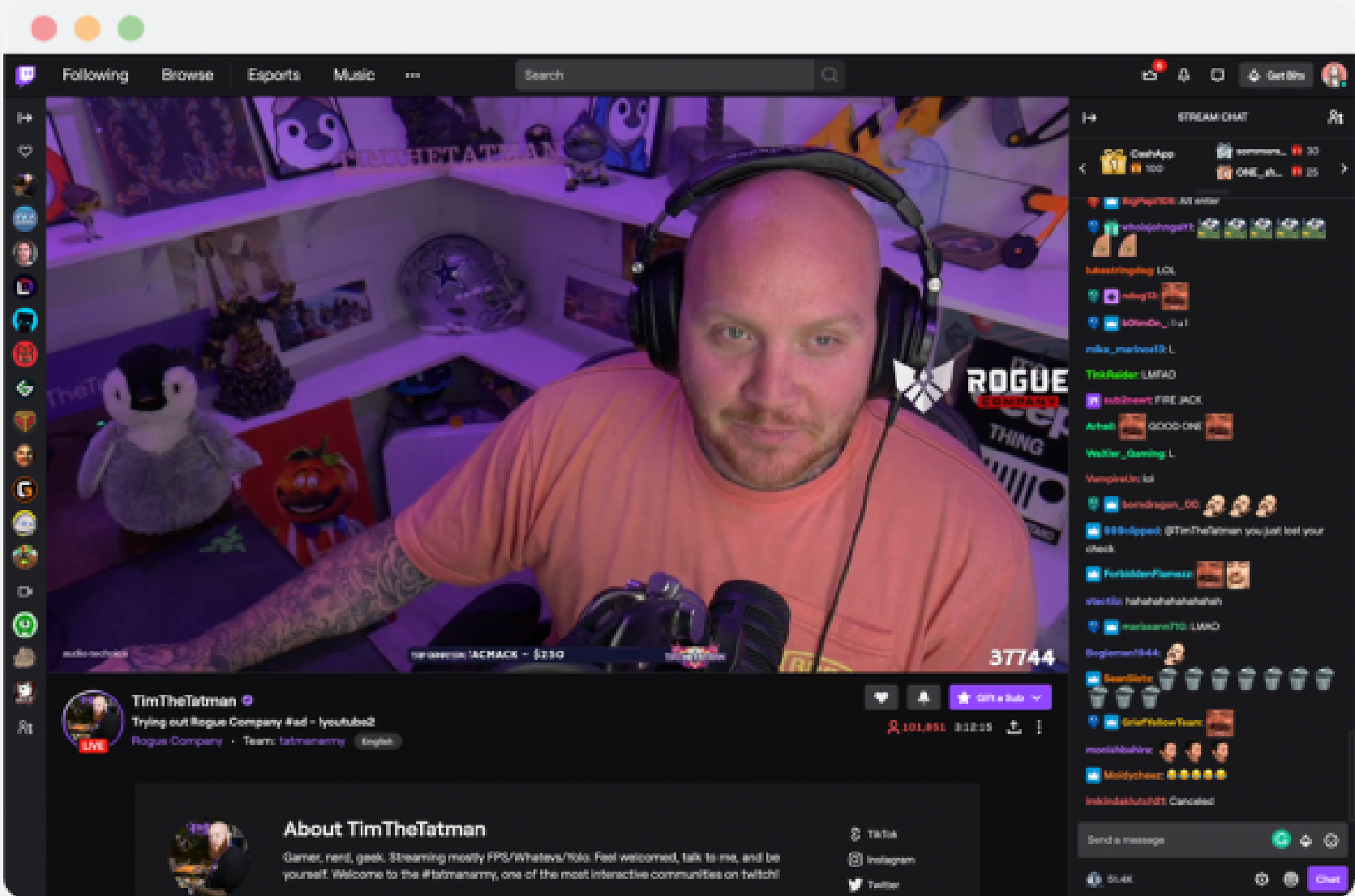
F2P conversion rate



Volume Score



Retention Score



F2P vs. Premium





Free-to-play versus Premium Titles

Working with both free-to-play and premium titles, we understand that it is more common for a free game to see higher conversion rates via advertisements than a premium, \$60 one. Accounting for these barriers to entry, we wanted to compare the overall data of both F2P titles as well as premium games.

Our data indicates that F2P campaigns perform far better on search platforms compared to social platforms. The average conversion rate for F2P games on search platforms we tracked calculates to 5.55% vs. the average social platform conversion rate of 1.56%. Inversely, premium content yielded higher average conversion rates on social platforms (2.24%) compared to search platforms (1.27%). Twitch also had a phenomenal premium conversion rate, coming in at 10.17%, almost entirely due to Twitch Drops.

We also found that premium content never had a below average 7-day retention rate for any of our tracked platforms. Overall it's a great asset for a platform's retention score to have a higher premium content rate. Snapchat (48.86%), Venatus (48.07%), Twitter (46.85%), and Reddit (43.31%) all had the highest premium 7-day retention rates of platforms we tracked in this report. F2P 7-day retention rates on the other hand generated far lower values, with the highest coming from Webedia at 31.98%. F2P games produce better conversion rates because they cost nothing to install, but have lower retention rates because players are more likely to drop F2P games due to paywalls, lack of content, etc.

Key Takeaways

1. In the wake of wide data privacy challenges on mobile devices in 2021 due to IDFA deprecation, our data shows continued growth and strength among social media platforms in the PC and console marketing space. This follows trends that we have seen across the industry in the PC and console market due in part to the pandemic. Social networks demonstrated higher average retention rates compared to search platforms ads. For example, Snapchat had a 7-day retention rate of 38% in 2021, compared to 23% in 2020, which is an incredible performance increase.
2. Search platform advertising still remained highly effective in 2021. Google Ads had a slightly higher premium conversion rate (1.27%) compared to Facebook (1.05%) and Twitter (1.11%). Search platforms also had high F2P conversion rates, with an average of 5.55% (social media platforms only had a 1.56% average F2P conversion rate). Bing had a particularly good F2P conversion rate of 6.67%. An unsurprising outcome as search ads are based on user input situated towards the bottom of the funnel, compared to more prospecting style campaigns run on social platforms.
3. Influencer marketing was already trending upwards in popularity and effectiveness, but the pandemic skyrocketed that process forward. Twitch viewership hours have increased from 11 billion in 2019, to 18 billion in 2020, to 24 billion in 2021 (118% overall increase). Working with content creators on Twitch, YouTube, Facebook Live, TikTok and Instagram, were some of the most predominant ways to market in 2021. Influencers had a 6.48% overall conversion rate and a staggering 15.09% conversion rate when working with F2P titles exclusively, a full 7.5x higher than with premium titles.
4. New contenders emerge. One of the biggest trends observed in 2021 is more companies seriously invested in diversifying their marketing strategies; Utilizing platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, and even Bing, which saw high performance numbers from our campaigns. Bing had a 6.67% F2P conversion rate, TikTok had a 5.28% paid title conversion rate, and Snapchat garnered a 38.72% 7-day retention rate, a 68% increase from 2020.

End Notes

- 1 <https://www.cpmstar.com/>
- 2 <https://ads.google.com/home/>
- 3 <https://twitchadvertising.tv/>
- 4 <https://www.facebook.com/business/ads>
- 5 <https://forbusiness.snapchat.com/>
- 6 <https://www.twitch.tv/p/press-center/>
- 7 <https://ads.reddit.com>
- 8 <https://ads.microsoft.com/>
- 9 <https://ads.twitter.com/>
- 10 <https://venatus.com/>
- 11 <http://specs.webedia-group.com/>
- 12 https://www.youtube.com/intl/en_us/ads/
- 13 <https://backlinko.com/social-media-users>
- 14 <https://blog.telegeography.com/internet-traffic-and-capacity-return-to-their-regularly-scheduled-programming>
- 15 <https://www.netmarketshare.com/>