

Game-playing via the web is growing in popularity

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Over a third (35%) of GB internet users aged 15 or above play games online, according the latest wave of BMRB's Internet Monitor, a quarterly survey of internet users. This has increased from 31% 2 years ago. As an activity, online gaming is more popular than downloading music (32%), watching video clips (27%) or participating in online chat (20%). Online gamers in GB (aged 15+) now number 9.3 million.

Online gamers display a demographic skew towards men but one that is less pronounced than might be expected with over two-fifths (44%) of players being female. Online gamers are younger but no more upmarket than the population as a whole. Four in five are aged 15-44 (compared to half of all adults) and just over a half (54%) are social grade ABC1 (similar to the 56% for the adult population).

Amongst online gamers the average length of time per month spent gaming via the Web is 19 hours. This rises to 26 hours amongst men, 35 hours amongst the upmarket ABs and 37 hours amongst the 20-24 year olds. This is obviously a significant amount of time – and it excludes the additional hours that some of them will also spend gaming on their PCs or consoles rather than via the web. For perspective, though, it's an interesting comparison that 7% of 20-24 year old ABC1 men spend around 7 hours per week or more playing games online. However, 84% of 20-24 year old ABC1 men spend at least 7 hours watching TV each week.

The consumption patterns of online gamers strongly reflect their relative youth. Compared to all GB adults, online gamers are 45% more likely to eat instant snack meals, 51% more likely to have spent £100 or more on a pair of jeans and 30% more likely to have the intention to buy a car in the next 12 months. Conversely, they are 31% less likely to have investments in unit trusts than the average adult.

Previous BMRB research into gaming (conducted amongst 16-44 year olds who game via a computer, console or the Web) shows that action adventure is the most popular genre (58% have played this type in the past six months) followed by racing (56%) and then other sports related games (46%). Half of these gamers say they have noticed "passive" advertising – ads that are displayed in the background such as round a football pitch. Slightly more (56%) say that they have noticed "active" advertising, where the branding is integral to the game itself, as with a racing car, for instance. Around two-fifths of gamers said that seeing in-game branding and advertising added to the gaming experience. Amongst those who played games online this was higher at 50%.

The appeal of the growing online gaming audience and the opportunity that the medium presents for delivering advertising dynamically means that marketing investment is increasingly being channelled into web-based gaming.

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