

# VIDEO GAME MARKETING

Forecasting Marketing Strategies For  
The Year's Most Anticipated Releases

# OVERVIEW OF VIDEO GAME MARKETING

Video Game Marketing has evolved impressively since the 8-bit days of *Contra* and *Metroid*.



From the legendary *Gears of War* 2006 advertisement featuring the song “Mad World” to the body part treasure hunt for *Resident Evil 5* in 2009, from Activision’s partnership with Mountain Dew and Doritos to promote *Call Of Duty: Black Ops III* to the collectible plush *Angry Birds* toys, video game publishers and developers are continuously pushing the envelope in creative and effective ways.

Though the methods for marketing video games evolve every year, the goals remain the same: attracting the attention of prospective players, making gameplay as immersive as possible, and building a connection with players between logins.

## ATTRACTION

Bringing attention to the game before gameplay, via advertisements, partnerships, collaborations, events, and more.

## IMMERSION

Enriching players' experience during gameplay, via partnered content, story exploration (setting / lore / characters), community experiences, and more.

## EXTENSION

Strengthening relationships with players outside of gameplay, via ancillary content, soundtracks, shareable content, and more.



After another exciting E3, we took a look at 11 games with expected launch dates within the next year.

From indies to AAA, these titles were all created with incredible creativity and passion.

With the goals of attraction, immersion, and extension in mind, we explored the unique opportunities each of them have for creative and effective marketing strategies.

# JOURNEY TO THE SAVAGE PLANET

Typhoon Studios | 505 Games

Early 2020

An upbeat first-person adventure game set in a colorful alien world, *Journey To The Savage Planet* arms players with nothing but hope and a pistol as they determine if a planet is fit for human colonization.

## What Interests Us Most:

The game is rooted in discovery, and the story very layered with comedy. So far, the teaser video reveals a rich (and fun) campaign involving interstellar exploration for the fictional company, Kindred Aerospace, and its quirky CEO Martin Tweed. A new interactive website launched May 2019 that reveals a bit of the explorative possibilities of the gameplay.



# JOURNEY TO THE SAVAGE PLANET

**Marketing Opportunity:** The two interwound stories of *Journey To The Savage Planet* are those of Kindred Aerospace (and by extension humanity) and the “savage planet” itself, representing alien life. By creating and sharing comedic content that explores these stories, 505 will further invest prospective players in both their employer — Tweed, Kindred Aerospace, and all of humanity — as well as this new planet that will be theirs to explore in all its diverse flora and fauna.

**Specifics: Visual Content On Social Media & Website That Immerses Consumers By Increasingly Investing Them Into The World Of Savage Planet & The Community Of Kindred Aerospace.**

**“AT UBISOFT, WE USED TO HAVE A JOKE THAT ANY HIDDEN CONTENT IS WASTED CONTENT BECAUSE IF YOU PUT IT THERE, YOU WANT PEOPLE TO PLAY IT. WE’RE BREAKING THAT RULE ON THIS GAME BY PUTTING MOST OF OUR CONTENT AS HIDDEN CONTENT. EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, YOU SHOULD BE FINDING LITTLE SECRETS AND LITTLE REASONS TO INVEST IN THE WORLD,” SAID CREATIVE DIRECTOR ALEX HUTCHINSON TO VENTURE BEAT.**

# CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE

Infinity Ward | Activision

October 2019

A powerfully reimagined experience of the 16-year-old series, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* delivers an emotionally charged and intense campaign that shines a light on the changing nature of modern war.

## What Interests Us Most:

According to Activision, teams of researchers were sent all around the world to gather real information on the complex reality of today's theater of war. Unanimously, players expressed the desire for emotional connections, morally gray decisions, and complex stories. The world today is not divided between clear-cut lines of good and evil, so the developers went all-in to bring to life an immersive, suspenseful experience — not a “superhero character world.”



# CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE

**Marketing Opportunity:** Activision will no doubt release an amazing launch campaign with brand partnerships, engaging advertisements, and more; however, with a plot founded on so much research and a world divided by ever-changing perspectives, there's a great opportunity for more mature, thoughtful marketing initiatives to develop the story and further challenge players' perspectives.

**Specifics:** Fictional News Articles From Different Perspectives A La The Franchise's *Ghost* Comic Series To Immerse Players' Into The Global Arena & Further Demonstrate The Complex, Competing Perspectives Between Warring Factions.

**"THESE ARE MORALLY COMPLEX STORIES WHERE THERE IS NO BLACK AND WHITE, OR PURE EVIL OR PURE GOOD: IT'S THE GRAY IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THAT, AND FINDING YOUR LINE IS A HARD THING TO DETERMINE SOMETIMES. (...) THIS (AMBIGUITY) IS EVEN MORE COMPLICATED IF YOU'RE SOMEONE THAT FIGHTS LOCALLY. IF YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR YOUR HOMELAND SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND FIGHTING FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS GOOD, FINDING THAT LINE CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING LABELED A FREEDOM FIGHTER OR A TERRORIST," SAID NARRATIVE DIRECTOR TAYLOR KUROSAKI TO ACTIVISION.**

# SOLAR ASH KINGDOM

Heart Machine | Annapurna Interactive

TBD

Through a surreal, vivid, and highly stylized world, *Solar Ash Kingdom* players will experience high-speed traversal, endearing characters, and massive enemy encounters.

## What Interests Us Most:

In Heart Machine's first release, *Hyper Light Drifter*, players explore a dark, detailed world with branching paths and secrets abound — *Solar Ash Kingdom* is expected to push this even further with a rich world and compelling characters. Its predecessor stands out mostly for its darkly engrossing themes, which was supported by composer Disasterpeace's soundtrack. Plus, creator Alx Preston is in active development of an animated series based on the original.



SOLAR ASH KINGDOM

# SOLAR ASH KINGDOM

**Marketing Opportunity:** Dark moods, rich artwork, and abstract gameplay defined *Hyper Light Drifter's* experience. Based on the recent teaser of *Solar Ash Kingdom*, the new title seems to continue with the same motif. Emotionally, these experiences can stick with players long after they leave their console, and the unique collection of senses — color, movement, texture, and sound — allow for Annapurna to sustain players' connection with the world of *Solar Ash Kingdom* for great effect.

**Specifics:** Ancillary Content That Continues The Mood Of The Game, Such As Another Soundtrack From The Game's Composer (Disasterpeace's Previous Soundtrack Has 1.5 Million+ Listens On Spotify), Free-To-Download Desktop Wallpaper Art & Mobile Phone Themes, & Even Physical Media Like Journals & Phone Cases Stylized With The Unique Artwork Of *Solar Ash Kingdom*.

**"WE STRIVE TO TELL A BEAUTIFUL STORY THROUGH OUR WORLD, THE ATMOSPHERE, OUR CHARACTERS AND EVEN OUR GAMEPLAY - EACH ASPECT OF OUR GAMES ARE PAINSTAKINGLY CONSIDERED - WHICH REQUIRES A LARGE INVESTMENT OF TIME," SAID GAME DIRECTOR ALX PRESTON TO IGN.**

# DARK PICTURES ANTHOLOGY: MAN OF MEDAN

Supermassive Games | Bandai Namco Entertainment

August 2019

A series of standalone cinematic horror games, *Dark Pictures Anthology* launches with *Man of Medan*, a supernatural horror story set in the South Pacific in which hurried choices have surprising consequences.

## What Interests Us Most:

While many pundits say the survival horror genre deteriorated with advanced combat, the cinematic focus of *Dark Pictures* feels like a revitalization to the genre, as Supermassive discovered with *Until Dawn*. The suspense of horror video games is even further enhanced by the umbrella of story opportunities within *Man of Medan*, as any and all playable characters can live, and any and all can die.



# DARK PICTURES ANTHOLOGY: MAN OF MEDAN

**Marketing Opportunity:** In all media — video games, movies, comics, etc. — the horror genre appeals to consumers in cathartic and even masochistic ways. The cinematic production of *Man of Medan* allows BNEI to advertise the game very similarly to a horror movie, with gripping trailers that dare consumers to try and save these five castaways. Additionally, with the character-centric style of the game, the more invested in each character players become, as well as the relationships between each, the more suspenseful each decision will be as they play.

**Specifics: Cinematic Advertisements To Attract Horror/Drama Fans To The Interactive Game & Character-Driven Content That Explore Characters' Backstories, Motives, Relationships, & More To Entangle Players' Emotions With Decisions.**

**"OUR BRAND OF HORROR IS ABOUT THE VULNERABILITY OF CHARACTERS THAT YOU CARE ABOUT. CHARACTERS THAT MIGHT BE JUST A LITTLE LIKE YOU. THEY'RE LARGELY UNARMED AND UNSUSPECTING, AND ARE AS TERRIFIED AS YOU'D BE IF SUCH EVENTS HAPPENED TO YOU. (...) THAT'S WHAT EFFECTIVE HORROR IS FOR US. 'REAL' PEOPLE, WITH BELIEVABLE RELATIONSHIPS, SUBJECTED TO EXTREME TERROR," SAID EXECUTIVE PRODUCER PETE SAMUELS TO PLAYSTATION.**

# CYBERPUNK 2077

CD Projekt Red | CD Projekt

April 2020

Set in the fictional metropolis of Night City in the year 2077, *Cyberpunk 2077* is a first-person role-playing game in which players play as V, a mercenary with intensely customizable traits, along a nonlinear story arc.

## What Interests Us Most:

*Cyberpunk 2077*'s Night City, from its unique neighborhoods to its dystopian classism, from its transhumanist economy to its contending factions, from its counterculture style to its rebellious music, is inherently rich in story. After watching the 48-minute-long demo from 2018, it's evident from a storyteller's perspective that even after multiple playthroughs of the game, it may be nearly impossible to feel as if one has wholly explored the story-space of *Cyberpunk 2077*.



# CYBERPUNK 2077

**Marketing Opportunity:** With the right budget, story-rich games like *Cyberpunk 2077* can run the gamut on creative marketing campaigns and still have legs for more long after launch. As with many pen and paper RPGs, the allure lies in the immersion — players don't want to leave this wholly imagined setting. With the world of a single city at their disposal, CD Projekt can create, release, and/or encourage so much content specifically because, however dystopian it may be, players won't want to leave Night City even after they turn off their console or PC.

**Specifics: Night City Boasts Several Unique Subcultures — To Best Foster That Immersion, CD Projekt Can Anticipate The Passions Of Its Players With Ancillary Content From Night City's Culture. Original Music Like More Songs By Fictional Rockerboy Musician Johnny Silverhand, Contextual Soundbites Or A Podcast As Broadcasted By Fictional News Outlet Stanley Media, & Sourcebooks As Released For Previous *Cyberpunk* Games Are Great Ways To Extend The Relationship With Players Outside Of The Gameplay.**

**"FOR US THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THE NARRATIVE, IT'S THE STORY. THAT IS KING FOR US. WE REALLY WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE PLAYER IS HAVING THE BEST EXPERIENCE, MAKING SURE IT'S RELATABLE TO EVERYONE. I THINK THAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR US. LIKE, HAVING GOOD GRAPHICS IS GREAT BUT WE'RE ONLY USING IT TO HELP BENEFIT THE STORY. SO EVERYTHING WE HAVE IS TO BENEFIT THAT AND THAT ALONE," SAID LEVEL DESIGNER MAX PEARS TO METRO MAGAZINE.**

# RAD

Double Fine Productions | Bandai Namco Entertainment

August 2019

Announced at GDC 2019, RAD is a 3D action rogue-like game set in a post-post apocalyptic world where a teenage protagonist must save (what's rest of) the world.

## What Interests Us Most:

Double Fine brought its trademark charm to the post(-post)-apocalypse genre with a set of fun underdog characters and an ever-changing, radioactive wasteland world known as the Fallow. With games funded in part by Kickstarter before, Double Fine is no stranger to the role of community in their games' development and marketing; they are now running a graffiti design contest to feature fans' artwork in-game and rewarding three winners with an exclusive *RAD* prize pack consisting of fun items such as a skateboard, lunchbox, and more.



# RAD

**Marketing Opportunity:** The brand, the game, and its team demonstrate a passion for art, story, and fun in every regard. Art Director Lee Petty is even working on a board game where players battle to take control of a delusional artist's mind. As the game is centered around an adolescent perspective and levity, and Double Fine also produces comics on their website, opportunities abound for players to explore the Fallow outside of gameplay.

**Specifics: Publish A Web Comic Series To Explore The Unique Story Of A Twice-Destroyed World In Which Teenagers Are The Only Hope For Humanity To Extend The Experience Beyond The Game, An Arc That Is More Provocative Than The Fun Gameplay May Reveal At First Look.**

**"AS THE WORLD BECOMES BETTER AND BETTER BECAUSE OF YOUR ACTIONS, YOU AS A CHARACTER BECOME LESS AND LESS HUMAN. YOU BECOME MUTATED AND WEIRD, AND THAT'S YOUR SACRIFICE FOR THE WORLD," SAID ART DIRECTOR LEE PETTY TO GAMEREACTOR MAGAZINE.**

# SEA OF SOLITUDE

Jo-Mei Games | EA Originals

July 2019

Setting sail across a beautiful world rife with fantastical monsters, *Sea of Solitude* follows the journey of a lonely woman named Kay as she struggles between darkness and light to discover what it truly means to be human.

## What Interests Us Most:

The official teaser trailer for *Sea of Solitude* reveals so much about the game, from Ruby Amanfu's haunting cover of "I Tremble For You," to the beautiful world depicted above and beneath the water's surface, and most of all the implicit pain of main character Kay. As Jo-Mei CEO Cornelia Geppert explained, Kay was modeled after Geppert's own personal struggles, and the game itself is a beautiful exploration of the emotional world that lies within all ourselves.



# SEA OF SOLITUDE

**Marketing Opportunity:** To ensure the mental health messaging in the game was soundly rooted, Geppert enlisted the help of Russ Pitts, a former game journalist and founder of Take This, an organization that works within the game industry to educate about mental health issues. Together with the Jo-Mei team, they created a game that is visually amazing, fun to play, and profound in its illustration of navigating the dread and loneliness of mental health issues. That intent can be a great boon in EA Originals' marketing efforts to spread *Sea of Solitude* to even more gamers.

**Specifics: Social Media Campaign Connecting Kay's Methods Of Success To Actionable Ways Players Can Also Combat Loneliness & Mental Health Issues, Plus A Community Page For Players To Come Together & Discuss Their Own Heroic Self-Love Journeys Just Like Kay.**

**"IN SEA OF SOLITUDE, WE TRY TO SHOW HOW PEOPLE EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT KINDS OF LONELINESS, BUT ALSO HOW OUTSIDERS (FRIENDS AND FAMILY) SEE THOSE WHO STRUGGLE. (...) WE ACHIEVE ALL OF THIS IN PLAYFUL WAYS, SO THAT PLAYERS WHO WANT TO SIMPLY ENJOY A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE CAN DO SO, BUT, THE PLAYER WHO WANTS TO LOOK A BIT DEEPER CAN REVEAL A WHOLE EMOTIONAL WORLD BENEATH IT ALL," SAID CORNELIA GEPPERT DURING THE 2018 EA PRESS BRIEFING.**

# THE RIFTBREAKER

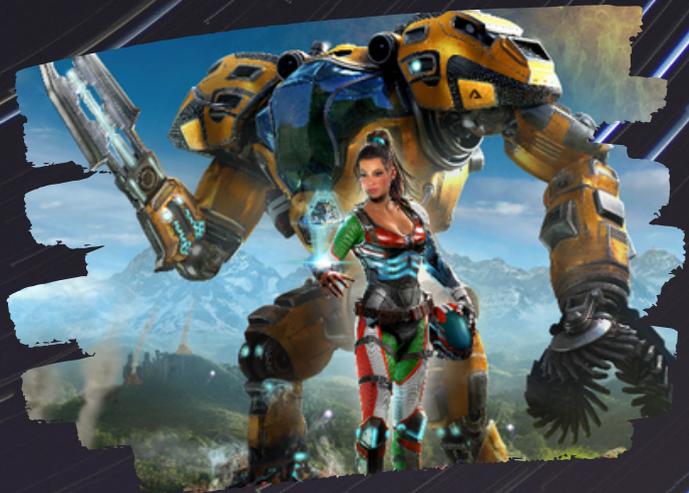
EXOR Studios | EXOR Studios

2020

A base-building survival game with Action-RPG elements, *The Riftbreaker* pits players against alien enemies as they play the role of an elite scientist-commando inside a powerful Mecha-Suit capable of dimensional rift travel.

## What Interests Us Most:

The game will feature built-in integration with streaming services to permit viewers to actively participate in the game in a variety of ways, such as sending waves of new enemies, spawning environmental disasters like a tornado, or donating resources. Further, they are already encouraging prospective gamers to join their official Discord to discuss the game's progress with developers and offer feedback, to help shape the game ahead of launch.



# THE RIFTBREAKER

**Marketing Opportunity:** Even as far back as a year before launch, EXOR Studios is fostering an engaged community of interested fans and prospective players. As a fundamental component of the gameplay will include audience participation, therein lies a logical integration of further community marketing. This will elevate the built-in streaming integration, attract more active gamers as brand ambassadors, and embolden an already interested fanbase with greater engagement.

**Specifics: Create A Community Web Page That Funnels Both Gamers & Viewers; Aggregates Content From Discord, Twitch, Mixer, & More; & Feature Exclusive Content and Rewards.**

**"ONE OF OUR DESIGN PHILOSOPHIES IS TO EMPOWER THE PLAYER. GIVE HIM ALL THE TOOLS AND FREEDOM THAT IS POSSIBLE AND THEN GIVE HIM A SUITABLE CHALLENGE. WE DON'T LIKE IT WHEN PLAYERS FIGHT WITH ARTIFICIAL CHALLENGES OR USER INTERFACE PROBLEMS. (...) AND THERE ARE GOING TO BE INTERACTIVE STREAM FEATURES, SO YOU WILL BE ABLE TO PLAY WITH US," SAID COO PAWEL LEKKI IN THE EXOR STUDIOS DISCORD IN APRIL 2019 AHEAD OF THE DEVELOPERS' FIRST STREAM OF THE GAME.**

# JOHN WICK HEX

Bithell Games | Good Shepherd Entertainment | Lionsgate Games

TBD

A fast-paced action-oriented strategy game, *John Wick Hex* was created in close cooperation with the creative teams behind the films to make the gameplay reflect the series' signature combat style while also expanding its story universe.

## What Interests Us Most:

Announced just days before the release of the third theatrical installment of the series, *John Wick Hex* will leverage much of the film franchise's iconic elements, including a unique graphic noir art design, voice acting from the movies' cast, and an interesting blend of strategy and combat for a Gun-Fu feel. Due to the crossover of fans for both the films and the game, Lionsgate can cross-market the two experiences via shared media, such as the landing page, "The Continental Experience."



# JOHN WICK HEX

**Marketing Opportunity:** The Continental is the hotel safe-haven for hitmen and assassins in the world of John Wick, and is one of the common threads between all media. The John Wick television show in development with the series will focus on this storied locale, and Lionsgate discovered in marketing earlier titles that fans were immediately intrigued by this secret society setting. To promote the film, Lionsgate created an experiential event based on The Continental as well as a feature on the website where visitors can explore the lobby and its denizens — an excellent opportunity to cross-promote *John Wick Hex*, as they feature different narratives but shared themes.

**Specifics: Optimize The Continental Landing Page For Both The Films & *John Wick Hex* With Content & Experiences Specific To The Video Game For Greater Engagement & Attracting Film Fans To The Game.**

**"WE CAN'T WAIT FOR WICK 3, HITTING THEATERS MAY 17TH. HOWEVER, WITH THIS GAME WE ARE TELLING AN ORIGINAL NEW STORY SET WITHIN THE UNIQUE UNIVERSE OF JOHN WICK, THE NARRATIVE OF WHICH IS NOT DIRECTLY TIED TO THE MOVIES," SHARED THE GOOD SHEPHERD TEAM ON THE COMPANY'S OFFICIAL DISCORD.**

# LOST WORDS

Sketchbook Games | Fourth State

December 2019

A 2D platforming puzzle game, *Lost Words* focuses on the writing process of a young girl named Izzy as she copes with her grandmother's stroke by writing the fantasy novel that serves as the game's setting.

## What Interests Us Most:

The story Izzy tells of her grandmother, as well as the fantasy world in which she escapes, come alive in *Lost Words* between the pages of the main character's diary and in the her imagined magical world of Estoria. The plot, however, seems to rest on Izzy's dealing with feelings of grief over the loss of a loved one, a heavy topic felt by all players at one point or another, but experienced in the positive light of a fun, emotive, and emotional adventure.



# LOST WORDS

**Marketing Opportunity:** Written by renowned game writer Rhianna Pratchett, *Lost Words* is split into eight chapters, with each one set half in the pages and half in her imagined world, and likely each level designated to a different stage of grief. Developers shared that they leveraged environmental storytelling a lot in the game to link level design to the narrative arc, and worked with the Wellcome Trust, a company focused on mental health and psychological issues, for the game. This in-depth exploration of grief and recovery, adaptive throughout the game, reveals tons of possibility for further exploration in the marketing strategy to extend that experience beyond the gameplay.

**Specifics: Social Media Strategy That Shares Visual Content Based On The Game Levels & Grief Stages To Continue The Game's Narrative & Mental Health Dialogue For Further Longevity.**

**"WHEN HER GRAN GETS ILL, IZZY STARTS USING THE FANTASY WORLD OF ESTORIA THAT SHE IS WRITING ABOUT, AS A MEANS OF COPING WITH WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE REAL WORLD. (...) I KNEW I WANTED IT TO BE A TOPIC THAT COULD POTENTIALLY HELP PEOPLE OVERCOME REAL WORLD ISSUES," SAID CREATIVE DIRECTOR MARK BACKLER TO THE SIXTH AXIS MAGAZINE.**

# PHANTOM: COVERT OPS

nDreams | Oculus Studios

2019

Set in the wake of the Cold War, *Phantom: Covert Ops* pits players on an elite covert operative in a VR tactical kayak maneuverable with the Oculus Quest or Rift platforms.

## What Interests Us Most:

Similar to horror games, stealth may be the next big genre for virtual reality, and *Phantom: Covert Ops* has kicked it off notably. Even on traditional platforms, stealth games rarely (if ever) featured a military kayak as its primary feature, yet it seems a natural mode for playing VR. With weapons, tools, and imagination at your disposal, nDreams says there are numerous ways to play *Phantom: Covert Ops*, from relying more on stealth or on your combat weapons.



# PHANTOM: COVERT OPS

**Marketing Opportunity:** The breadth of options players have at their disposal, from tinkering with exposed wires to take out a tower or dropping extra ammunition into the water to distract guards, demonstrates the re-playability of *Phantom: Covert Ops*. Basically, players can customize the game experience according to their own tactical style, shaping main character Phantom into themselves. This extra level of immersion can be enhanced in the marketing of the game, too.

**Specifics: Social Media Strategy With Choice-Based Content From In-Game & Real-Life To Encourage Followers To Immerse Themselves Into Their Personalized Version Of Phantom**

**"WE ALSO WANT TO MAKE SURE THE MISSIONS ARE FULL OF REPLAY VALUE. YOU SAW AT THE END OF THE DEMO THAT YOU GET THESE MEDALS. WE AWARD MEDALS FOR PACIFISM AND SPEED, BUT WE ALSO AWARD MEDALS FOR KILLING EVERYONE. WE WANT TO HAVE REAL, MEANINGFUL REPLAY VALUE, WHERE PLAYERS WANT TO COME BACK TRYING DIFFERENT EQUIPMENT, TRYING DIFFERENT APPROACHES, AND TRYING TO UNLOCK EVERYTHING," SAID GAME DIRECTOR LEWIS BRUNDISH TO VENTURE BEAT MAGAZINE.**

# ABOUT TEAM WEASAL

Founded by author, marketer, and entrepreneur Zach Miller, we provide full-service business solutions for startups and enterprise clients alike with a focus on storytelling to grow your business, servicing the B2B, B2C, and Video Game industries.

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