9 PROVEN WAYS TO GET AND KEEP PLAYERS IN YOUR GAME
Whether you’re a mobile, PC, or console game developer or publisher, you likely wonder what it takes to meet player expectations throughout the acquisition and retention funnel.

We wondered too. So we commissioned Electronic Entertainment Design and Research (EEDAR) – the largest specialty video game research firm in the world – to conduct a study on player sentiment and online gaming infrastructure.

This handbook presents the study’s findings along with best practices based on Akamai’s experience helping game developers and publishers maximize the performance of online games for over a decade. Read on for smart ways to:

• Prepare for Day 1 launch
• Acquire new customers
• Retain customers
Dealing with Day 1

There is no second chance to make a first impression. Highly orchestrated marketing events are often the first chance for online gamers to understand what your brand is all about – and a site that flops is not a great start. Once players are on your site, there’s no way to profitably convert those who don’t even make it past the install.

Here’s what we know about gamers – and how to ensure your online game will be a huge hit:

• The vast majority of video game players are connected to the Internet. Unsurprisingly, smartphone users and PC players are the most well connected, with 96% or more of these platform owners having Internet access. Tablets are the next most connected devices at just over 86%.

• More than 90% of users have shopped for a mobile game online or downloaded a mobile game via Wi-Fi. Ninety percent of current PC gamers have played online and about 70% have played a mobile game online.
Shopped for a Game
Downloaded Via Data Plan
Downloaded Via Wi-Fi
Downloaded a Game That Required an Additional Download
Played Online

Mobile Gamers include both smartphone and tablet gamers who have played games, even if not currently.
Shopped for a Game Via Online Store

Downloaded a Video

Downloaded an Update

Played Online

PC Gamer includes respondents who have ever played PC games, even if not currently.
Prepare to be Overwhelmed. You can’t predict where in the world your new players will live, and you can’t know just how successful your buzz building will be. Forrester found that 34% of site visitors will abandon a website if they have a bad web experience. That’s why you have to be ready to host a global audience, at a global scale. That said, it’s not practical to build out a global network of data centers. Instead, rely on a company that has invested in a flexible CDN infrastructure to deal with the crowd.

Give Your Best Fans a Front-row Seat. Whether distributing highly sought-after beta codes or kicking off a midnight launch, you’d do well to manage the crowd gracefully. Your hardcore fans might be the first to complain loudly when your origin server struggles to manage the crush. To avoid this nightmare scenario, prioritize your visitors and give your rabid fans a great web experience while managing expectations properly for everyone else.

Quickly Deliver Landing Pages. It’s not enough to pull off rich, engaging campaigns that drive visitors to your site. You also have to make sure the site loads quickly and flawlessly every time. After all, 50% of visitors abandon websites after just four seconds of waiting for a page to load. Twenty-five percent of consumers expect pages to load in just 1 second or less. Use the best infrastructure possible to make sure the very first experience with your brand is just as good as the game itself.
Acquire New Customers

Did you know that as many as 26% of games purchased or downloaded never get opened?

The EEDAR study found that: 44% of players would be extremely unlikely to play a game due to lag/connection speeds and 52% would be extremely unlikely to play due to disconnects/connection issues. Another 86% of users stated they are extremely unlikely to play if hacks were an issue, and 71% would be extremely unlikely to play due to DDoS attacks.
Technical Issues Most Likely to Limit Play

Account hacks are the #1 reason gamers won’t play.

Source: EEDAR
Here’s what you can do about that.

Track Download Success Rate. How many of those expensive clicks you paid for convert to a completed install? If you’re seeing low conversion rates, one issue might be a particularly large install file. Akamai has seen download failure rates as high as 50% for our gaming customers with large install files — before they came to us. Make sure your CDN performs consistently and provides in-depth actionable data.

Measure Activation Rate. If the software download takes too long, players may forget they even installed your game. If they don’t launch the game on day one, the chances of them ever playing it go down sharply. One of our clients found that a 30% improvement in software download delivery speeds resulted in a 10% increase in day-one activations. Rely on solid media analytics at the download and activation steps to tell you if the game users you acquired are actually turning into players.

Optimize for the Device. Are you publishing mobile games? Your marketing engine drove customers to your app-store page, but when they clicked “Get” a good percentage of them were denied. Why? One possibility is that, when a gamer is trying to download your game while sitting on a bus or at a café, the over-the-air (OTA) data limits prevented them from completing the install. As a solution, some of our most successful customers are developing app containers that fit under the iOS and Android OTA file-size caps and sideloading the bulk of the content using our lightning-fast, proprietary delivery protocol.
Retain Customers

The fastest path to profitability is keeping existing customers happy and playing your game. Here are reasons that they may choose not to engage – and what you can do to keep them coming back for more.

EEDAR found that while 44% of mobile gamers have downloaded additional updates or patches, issues that completely cripple the ability to play — such as game-breaking bugs, in-game lag, and disconnects — rank as the most severe problems and technical reasons for churn. Of those three reasons, in-game lag tops the list at just over 80%. More than 40% of players who experienced such issues churned from the game. An additional 12% left due to excessive download times, and another 25%+ left due to disconnects.
Technical Issues Experienced by Audience

- Account Hacked
- DDoS
- Graphics Lower than Advertised
- Save Corrupted
- Excessive Download Times
- Game Breaking Bugs
- Disconnects
- Lag/Connection Speeds
- Mild Bugs/Glitches

Source: EEDAR
Regular, meaningful updates are proven to keep online gamers engaged. Finding and fixing tricky bugs and designing great content updates can be hard to do — and harder to measure. There are some easy steps you can take to mitigate the gamer retention challenge without distracting your online game developers.

Jump to the Front of the Line. The current average wait for Apple app-store approvals is eight days. This translates to finding a funnel-killing bug, racing to develop a fix, and then waiting eight days for app-store approval before customers see the improvement! Forty-four percent of players who spend money in an app wait until their tenth interaction to do so. You can’t afford to lose mobile game players along the way because of red tape. Building your app from the beginning to support robust in-app sideloads and updates would make it easy for you to launch fixes and new content as soon as you’re ready.

Accelerate Every Touchpoint. Nobody likes a loading screen. Forty percent of players told EEDAR they abandon a mobile game title that “Takes too long to load”. Your login page, leaderboards, and in-app storefront could all be faster. Speed up your API calls and offload some of that work to a cloud platform that can do the heavy lifting for you. Optimize your updates to keep file sizes down, and use a high-performing distributed CDN to keep retention high.
Players generally stated that they were concerned with hacks and DDoS attacks in relation to purchasing future games. About 93% of players said hacks were a concern when considering a game, while 86% of users said the same regarding DDoS.

Keep Your Game Servers Online. Gaming is constantly under attack from disgruntled fans, vengeful players, and extortionists looking to take game websites and servers offline. We’ve seen the games industry targeted in one out of every three attacks on the Akamai Content Delivery Network. If your fans can’t play, they won’t stay. Take cloud security measures to protect yourself from an ever-expanding range of cyberattacks that can drive high player churn and disrupt your revenue stream.

For more in-depth information and research findings, visit the full EEDAR study by visiting [www.akamai.com/playerstudy](http://www.akamai.com/playerstudy).
As the global leader in Content Delivery Network (CDN) services, Akamai makes the Internet fast, reliable, and secure for its customers. The company’s advanced web performance, mobile performance, cloud security, and media delivery solutions are revolutionizing how businesses optimize consumer, enterprise, and entertainment experiences for any device, anywhere. To learn how Akamai solutions and its team of Internet experts are helping businesses move faster forward, please visit www.akamai.com or blogs.akamai.com, and follow @Akamai on Twitter.

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