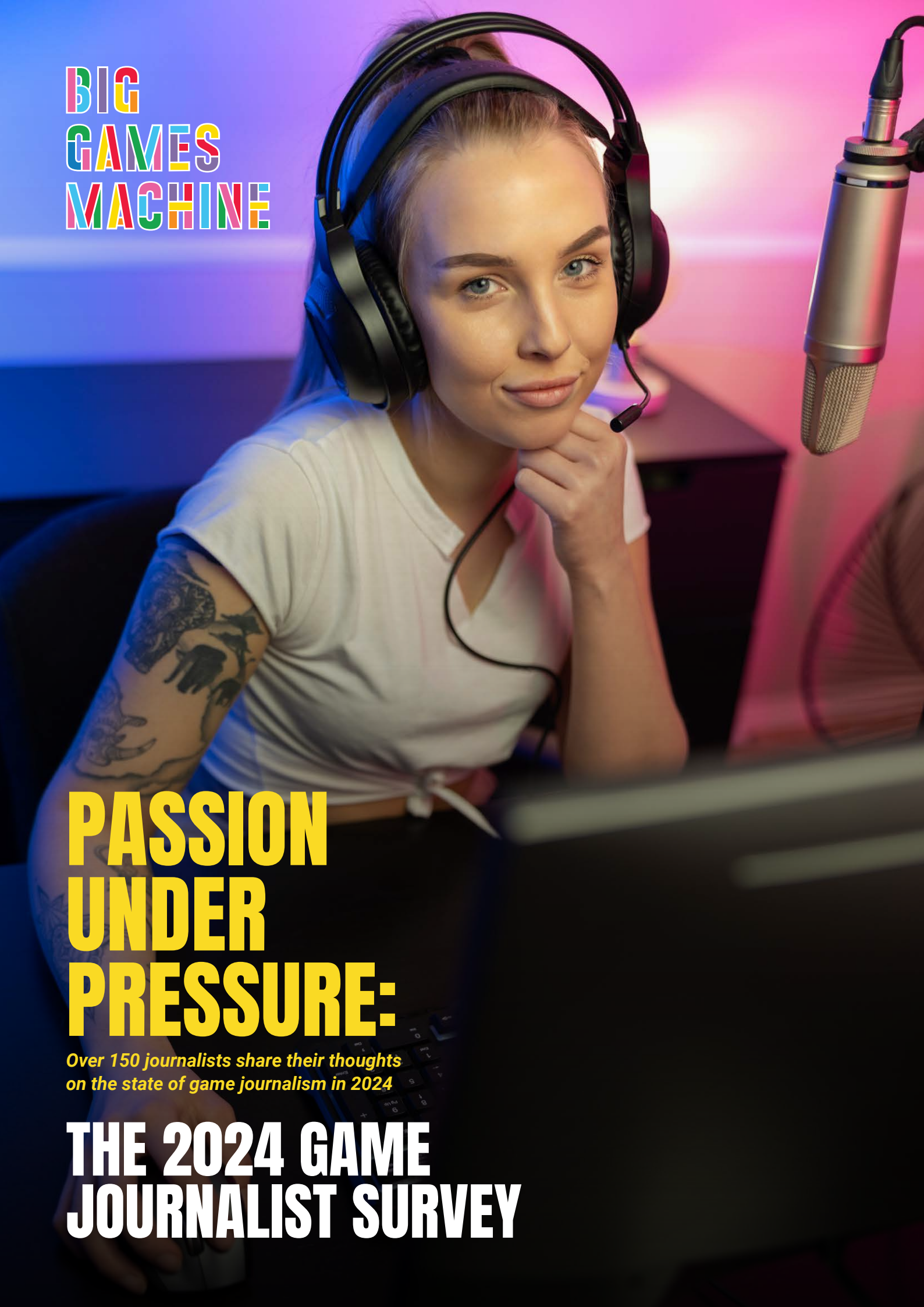
BIG GAMES MACHINE



PASSION UNDER PRESSURE:

Over 150 journalists share their thoughts on the state of game journalism in 2024

THE 2024 GAME JOURNALIST SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

It's been a rough couple of years for the video game industry. As well as the significant layoffs at major video game developers and publishers, games media is also feeling the impact of the sector's post-pandemic rebound, with national outlets such as Vice and the Washington Post shuttering their gaming verticals while others respond by reducing their headcounts and budgets.

Not only is this putting video game journalists under more pressure than ever before, but it's also making the lives of PR professionals more complicated – as if getting coverage for your game wasn't difficult enough already!

There's no easy fix for this problem. But as an agency of problem solvers, we wanted to do our best to understand the challenges facing those in games media and some of the lessons that PR professionals can learn to improve their methods of communication and ultimately build better relationships with journalists.

This 2024 Games Journalist Survey is the outcome. It features input from over 150 video game media professionals working in full-time, part-time and freelance roles across editorial, video and radio for publications such as IGN, Game Informer, Eurogamer, Gamesindustry.biz, PC Gamer, The Gamer, BBC, Kotaku, GameSpot, The Guardian, PocketGamer and more.

Their responses reveal:

- **The areas of video game coverage which generate the most traffic**
- **How they feel about the future of games journalism**
- **The intensity of their workload**
- **Their thoughts on AI, blockchain and metaverse platforms**
- **How they decide which games to review**
- **The key elements of any successful PR pitch**
- **How to improve your chances of coverage**

Most of these questions were multi-choice, and many featured the obligatory 'Others' box where we warmly invited additional comments (expecting to be ignored, in all honesty). Thankfully, the opposite happened. Most people went out of their way to provide in-depth answers on the issues worst affecting them, from the threat of AI and information overload to practical advice for PR professionals and game studios shooting for coverage.

Before we dive into the findings, we'd like to thank all the journalists who contributed to this report. Thanks to you, we've raised £500 for video games charity Special Effect.

Whether you're an independent video game studio, PR professional, or content creator, we're confident this report will improve your understanding of video game journalism and the steps you must take to build better relationships with game journalists.

James Kaye
Co-Founder
Big Games Machine

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All of the respondents in this survey work in full-time, part-time or freelance roles at media organisations or independently owned websites reporting on video games. We focussed our questions on consumer media rather than trade media, i.e, traditional video game publications rather than specialist B2B publications.

Our respondents are mainly based in the UK or US, although we heard from people worldwide in locations including Peru, Poland, Turkey, Columbia, Mexico and Malaysia.

If you're in a rush and don't have time to read through the full report right now, we've left a TL;DR of the key findings below.

That said, there's so much good stuff in here that we'd encourage you to find the time to read through all the pages, even if your busy schedule means you'll need to work through it one page at a time. Grab a cup of tea or coffee and get stuck in!

Trust us, it'll be worth it.

- The survey features responses from over 150 video game journalists and media professionals across print, web, video and radio.
- 63% of respondents think AI is having a 'negative impact' on video game journalism. Only 12% think it has a 'positive impact'.
- 87% of game journalists are unlikely or very unlikely to cover blockchain games in the next six to 12 months, while only 4% are likely to cover them.
- Game journalists are overworked. Nearly half of respondents (47%) say their workload has 'slightly' or 'significantly' increased compared to 12 months ago. Only 15% of respondents say their workload has lightened.
- Lack of time (64%), too much of a focus on SEO (43%), and insufficient pay (40%) are the three biggest challenges facing video game journalists.
- The vast majority of respondents (95%) create editorial content for online blogs or news sites, but more than a third also create video content (40%) and podcast content (35%).
- The future of games journalism is bleak. More than half of respondents (56%) feel 'somewhat' or 'very' negative about the future of games journalism, and only 19% feel 'positive' about its future.
- Video game news (63%), reviews (60%) and guided content (50%) were chosen as the top three content formats generating the most site traffic.
- Despite the challenges and pressures of games journalism, 43% of respondents feel somewhat or very positive about their future job prospects and security over the coming 12 months. That's in comparison to 28% feeling somewhat or very negative.
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents receive between 11 and 50 pitches every single day. 12% of respondents receive more than 50 pitches every day!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
(CONTINUED)

- When considering what games to review, the following three factors were the most important:

    1. The game seems like a good fit for the publication's audience
    2. They genuinely like the look of the game
    3. The game came directly from a developer or publisher they trusted

- When asked about which elements are the most important in pitch emails, the following three factors were the most important:

    1. Provides clear dates
    2. Gets the point across efficiently
    3. Contains access to a media kit/ relevant resources

- More than two-thirds of respondents (67%) said they want to receive review copies three weeks or more in advance. 25% of respondents would prefer four weeks as a minimum, and 10% would like more than four weeks.

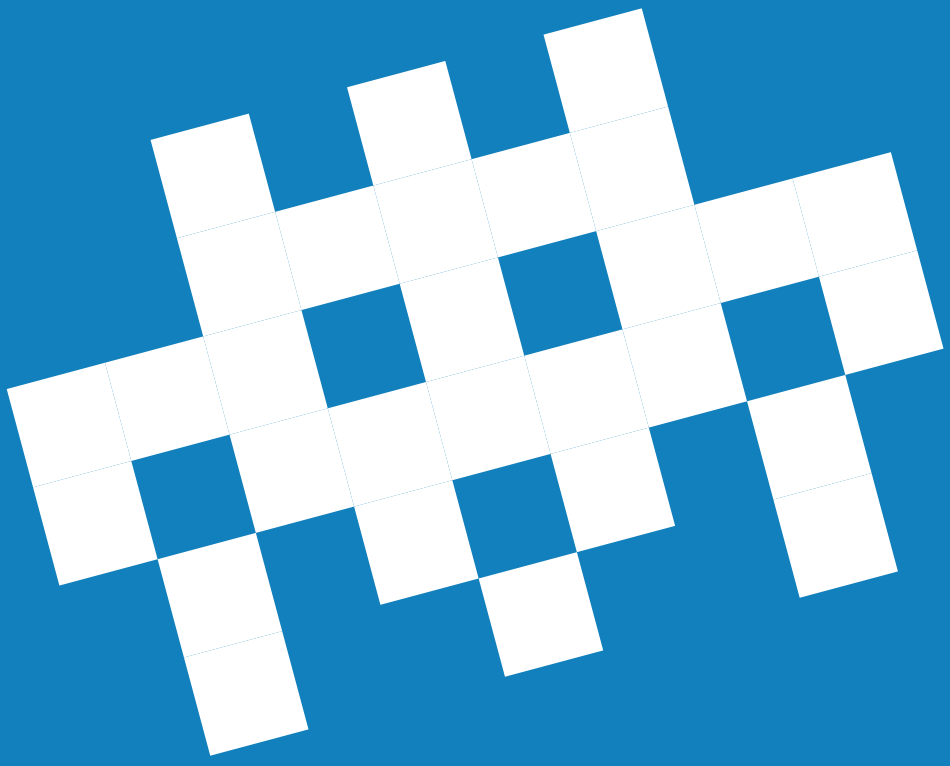
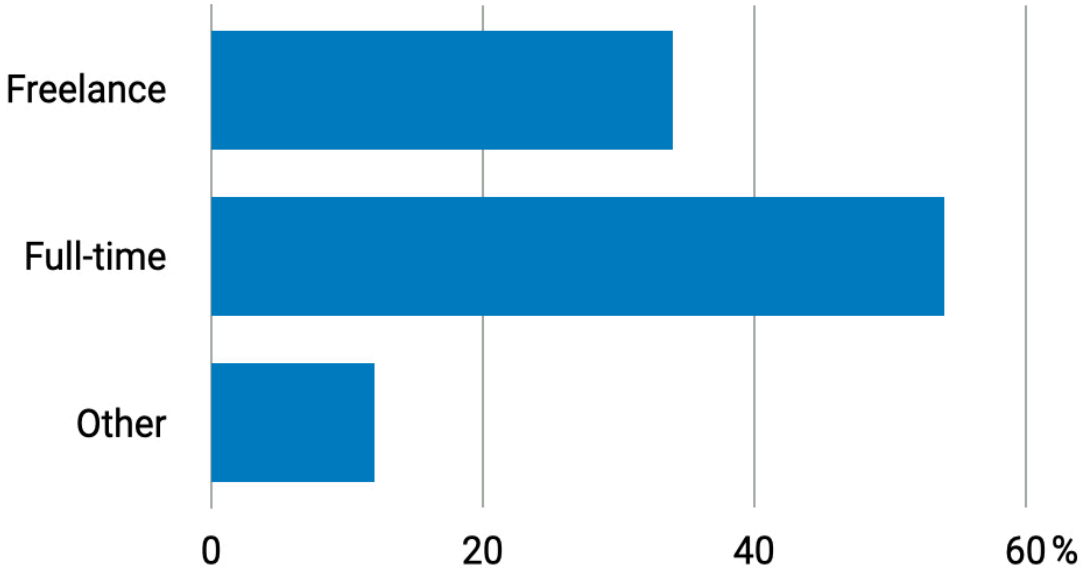


Image credit: Sword of Convallaria, XD Inc.

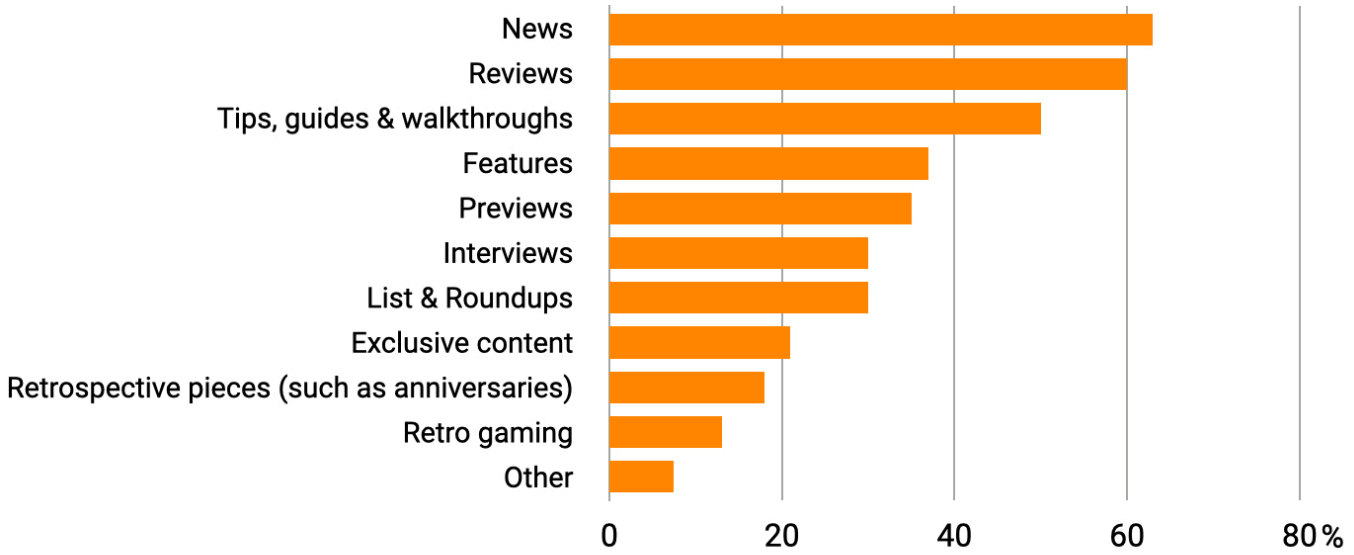
Q1: ARE YOU FREELANCE OR FULL-TIME?



Freelancers are the backbone of most news media publications, and the video game industry is no different. 54% of respondents told us they hold full-time roles in games media, while 34% are freelance. As for the other 12%, they were a mix of part-time roles, contributor roles, or owned their own website.

With over a third of game journalists working in part-time or freelance roles, this highlights the importance of building relationships with freelancers. Of course, there are some challenges here. Most freelancers have to pitch to get their work commissioned, and this requires a budget from their respective publications, which are under more financial pressure than ever before.

Q2: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING EDITORIAL AREAS GENERATE THE MOST TRAFFIC FOR YOU?



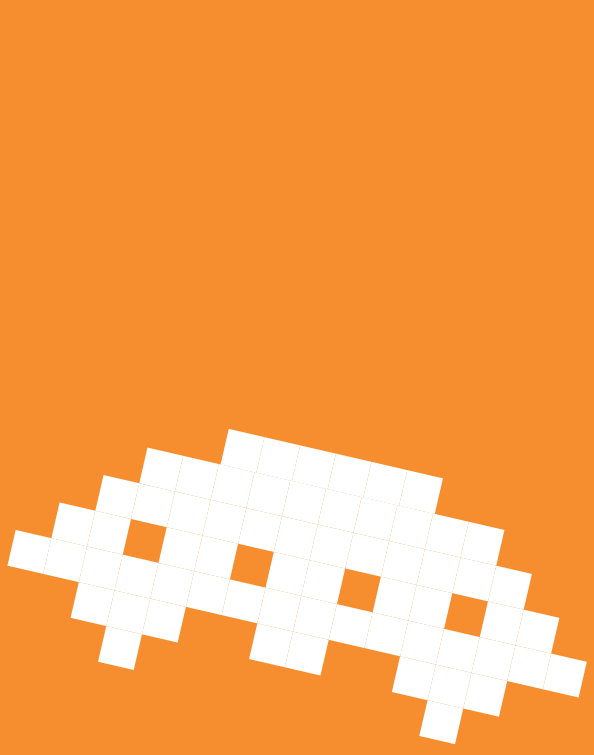
SEO is a major consideration for journalists these days when it comes to selecting what to cover. As you may expect, news (63%), reviews (60%), guides and walkthroughs (50%) are the most effective editorial areas for gaming journalists when it comes to driving web traffic. Features and previews aren't too far behind either, so PRs and studios pushing for coverage should ensure they have exciting angles and spokespersons lined up to create stories around a game's release outside of reviews.

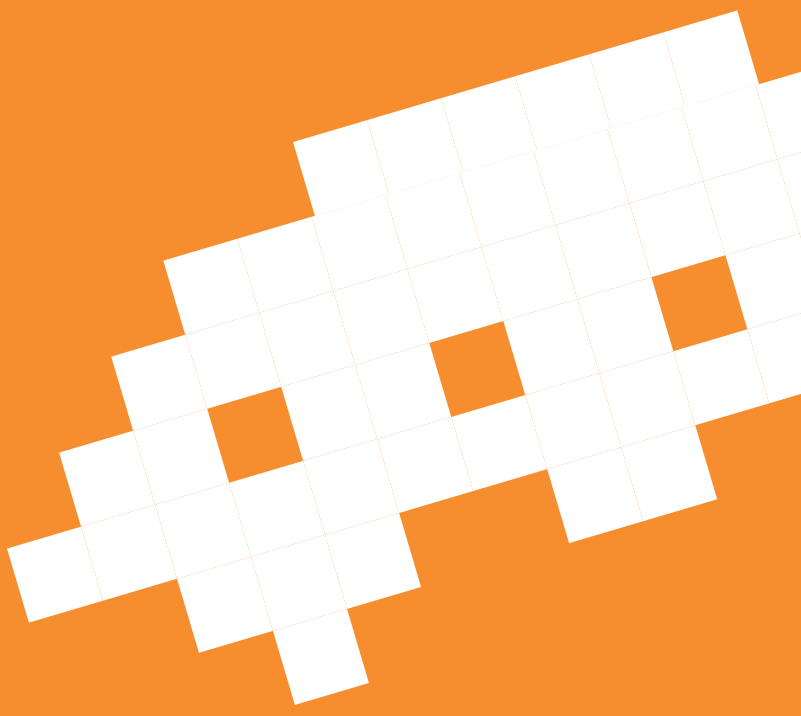
It's only in the last few years that video game websites have made a big push to grow their staff teams with specific roles specialising in guided content, and it's also a growing area of work for freelancers, as guided content takes a lot of work to pull together. Guided content generates a lot of web traffic as it's essentially evergreen content - people will always be searching for tips and walkthroughs for specific games whereas news stories might only be relevant for a few days.

Guided content is so popular that it even has its own category for embargoes when review copies of video games are distributed. "A ton [of traffic] comes from guides," a former games editor told Vice reporter Patrick Klepek back in 2022. "In a year where there are fewer releases and big news moments, guides traffic also suffers, but it becomes the bedrock of stability, generating search traffic and volume that helps offset lower traffic cycles."

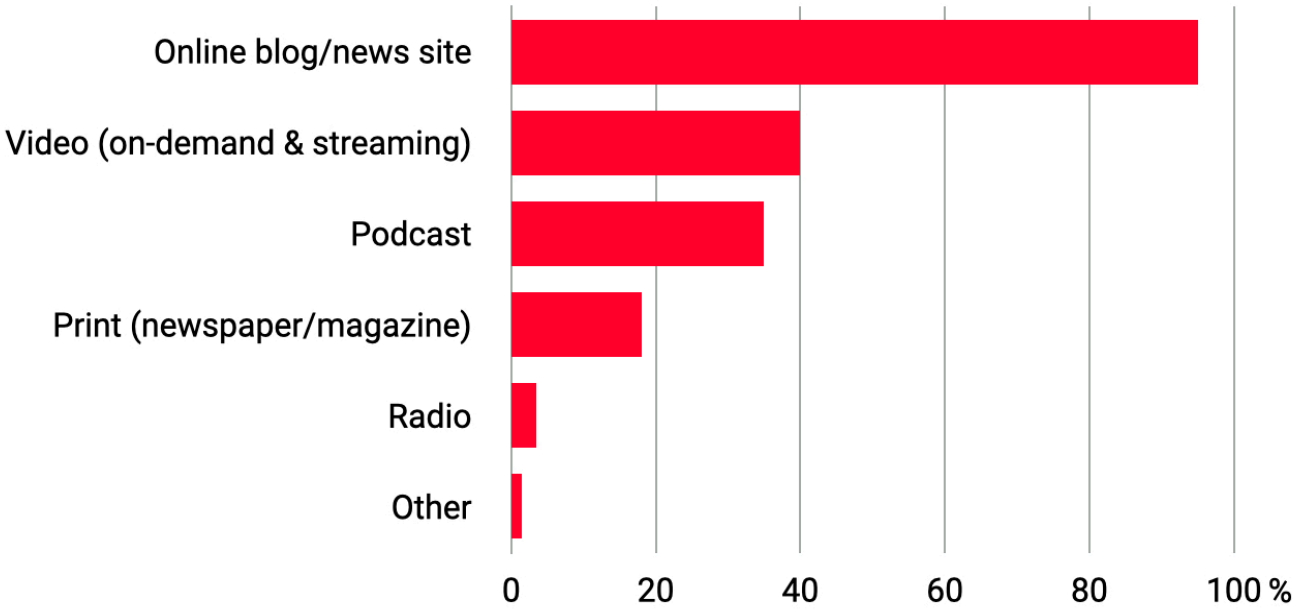
PRs and game studios should consider how they can support video game publications with their coverage, whether that's by providing more detailed and in-depth player guides in review kits, revealing locations of in-game collectables, or supplying tips and secrets post-release.

“I DON’T HAVE ACCESS TO ANALYTICS ANY MORE, BUT GUIDES TYPICALLY MAKE UP ABOUT 80% OF TRAFFIC ON GAMES WEBSITES.”





Q3: WHAT MEDIUMS DO YOU CREATE CONTENT FOR?



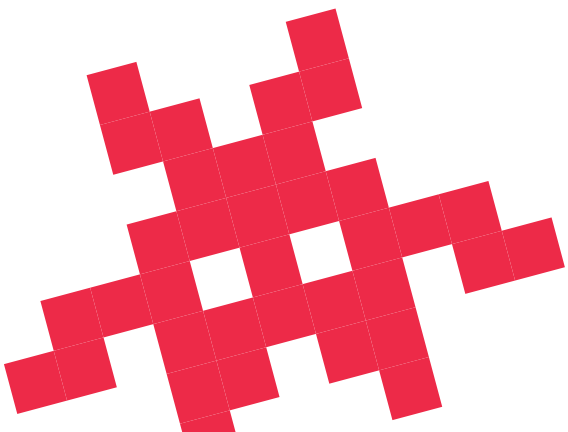
95% of respondents in games journalism create content primarily for online blogs or news publications. Video content is also proving popular, with 40% of respondents generating content for on-demand platforms such as YouTube or streams. While print media might seem like it's in decline, physical media is making a resurgence in video game media, with gaming journal Lost in Cult and gaming magazines, A Profound Waste of Time and Debug Magazine joining the likes of Edge (UK), PLAY (UK) and GameInformer (US).

When you pitch to journalists, it's important to include video footage of the games being promoted in media kits. Any image assets included in media kits should also be suitable for video platforms, such as transparent PNGs that can be used for YouTube thumbnails or incorporated into video content.

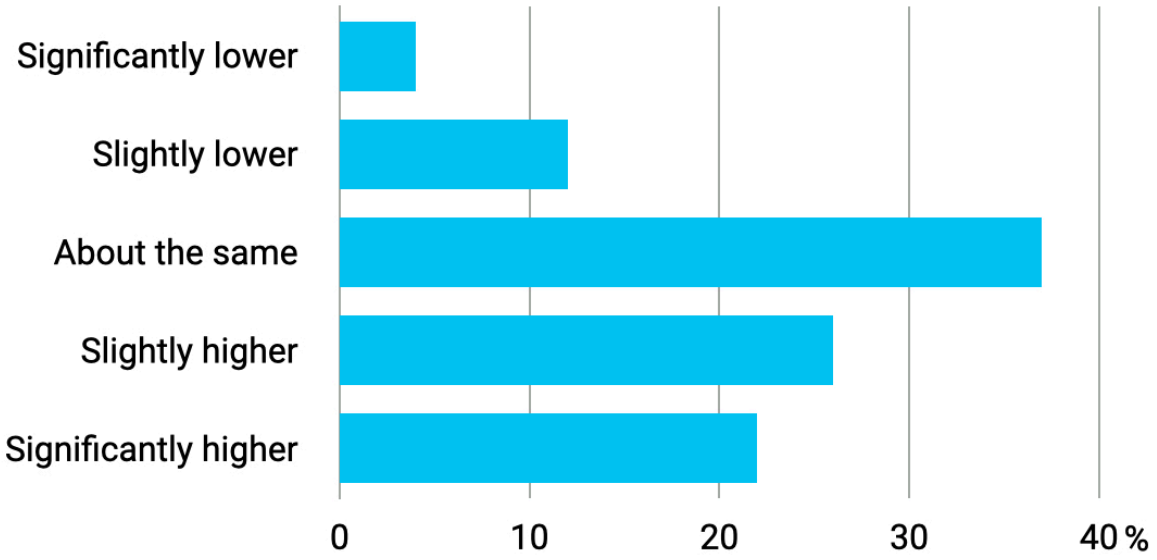
By providing journalists with everything they need, such as game footage, you can save them time and effort that they would otherwise spend capturing their own content.

Everyone seems to have a podcast nowadays, so perhaps it's no surprise that 35% of respondents create podcast content. Again, PRs can do journalists, podcast producers and editors a favour by providing them with in-game audio clips or music where it's relevant.

If you're a PR person, then be sure to pitch your clients as podcast guests, too, as long as they're interesting and relevant to the podcast you're pitching for. One respondent who works across numerous sectors outside gaming noted they receive far fewer guest invitations than other sectors.



Q4: HOW WOULD YOU SAY YOUR CURRENT WORKLOAD COMPARES TO 12 MONTHS AGO?

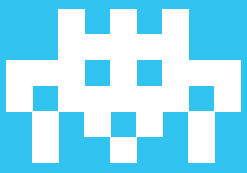


Whether it's the next live-service release or an epic JRPG, journalists are expected to invest a lot of time getting to grips with the games they're reviewing. It doesn't help when those games take 50+ hours to complete, and there's a never-ending onslaught of new releases, which can be particularly challenging for smaller publications.

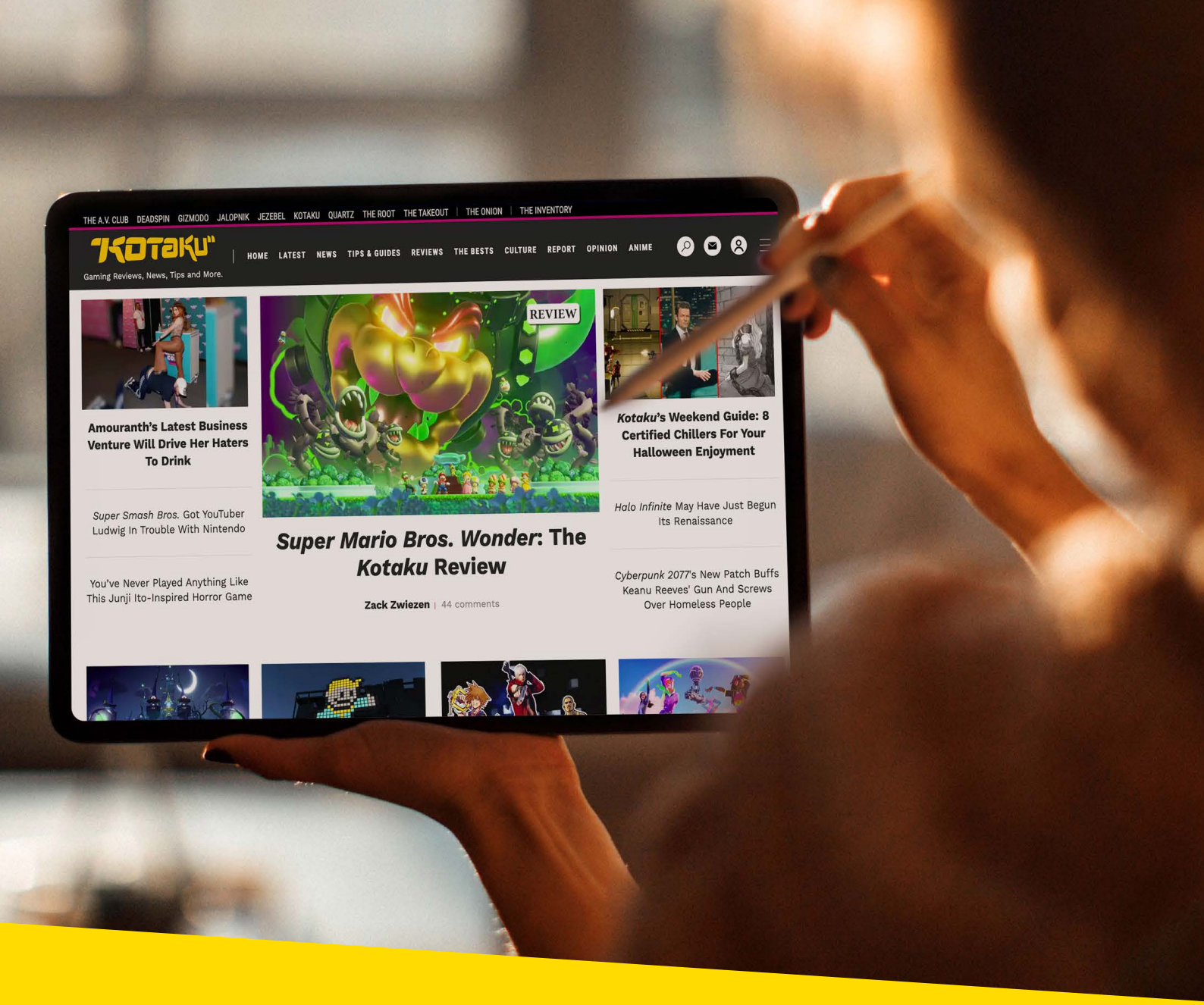
This, coupled with a growing focus on SEO, workload and poor lead times on review copies, means many video game journalists struggle with their workload.

Nearly half of respondents (47%) say their workload has 'slightly' or 'significantly' increased compared to 12 months ago, while only 15% say their workload has lightened. Other comments from journalists referenced the SEO challenges posed by the ever-changing nature of Google's algorithm and their site's reliance on ad revenue as a primary revenue driver.

Image credit: Speed Crew, Wild Field Limited

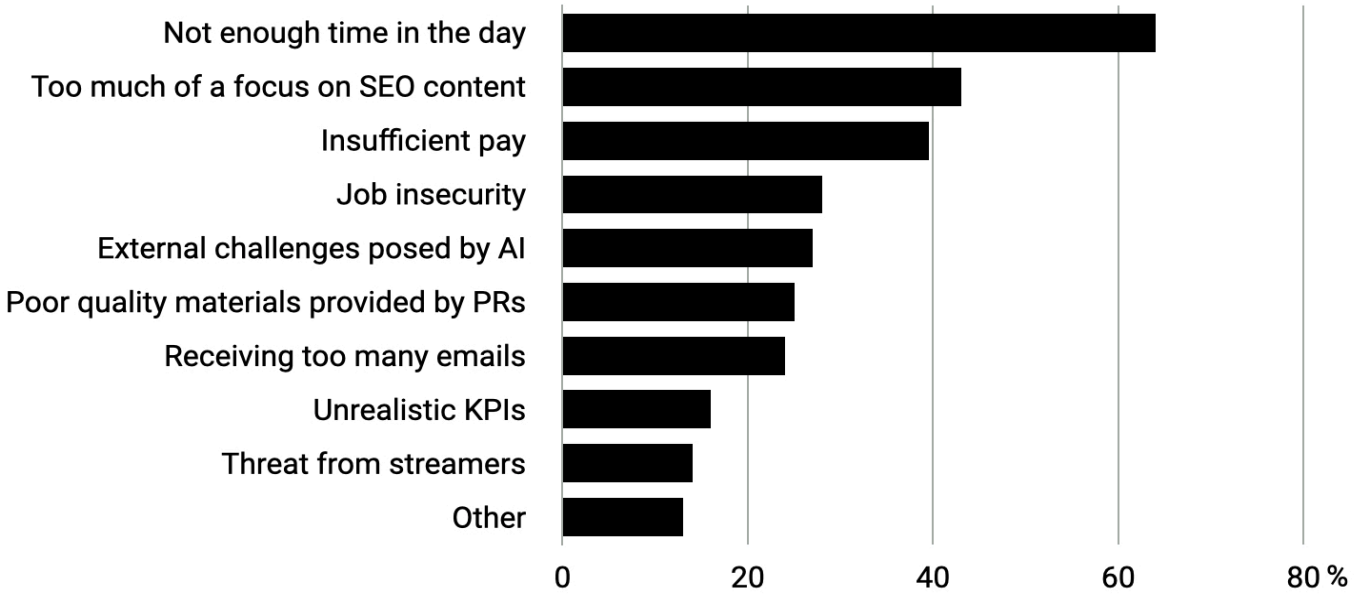


"[WE GET] UNREALISTIC TIMEFRAMES FOR REVIEW GAMES - I.E. A 40-HOUR GAME PROVIDED THREE DAYS BEFORE RELEASE."



"[THERE'S A] CONTINUING SHIFT BY THE INDUSTRY IN COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY DISREGARDING ONLINE BLOGS/WEBSITES IN FAVOUR OF SOLELY YOUTUBE CONTENT CREATORS AND STREAMERS TO THE POINT WHERE THEY ARE NOW ACTIVELY PART OF THE PRODUCTS AND SUBSEQUENT PRESS RELEASES/MARKETING MATERIAL."

Q5: WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE CHALLENGES FACING YOU AS A GAMES JOURNALIST?

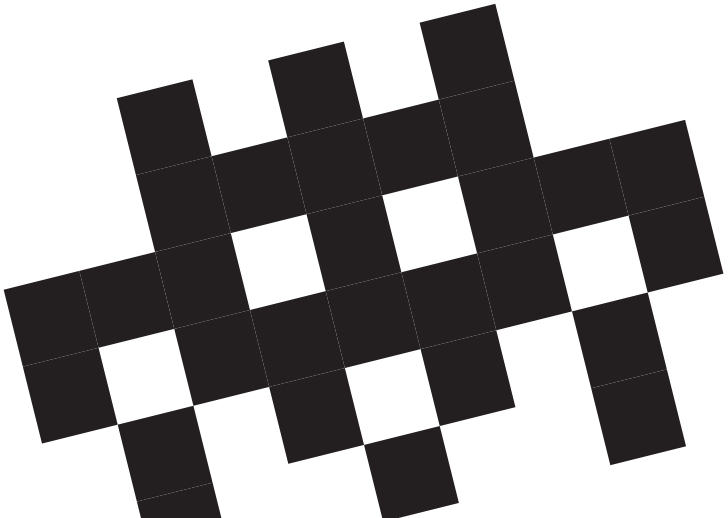


To get a better understanding of the pressures facing video game journalists, we identified more than 10 challenges, from unrealistic KPIs and poor quality PR materials to insufficient pay and job insecurity, and asked them to choose the three that impact them the most. They were also given the option to leave their own challenges.

“My department was halved, with the others being moved to a different department to try and cut costs.”

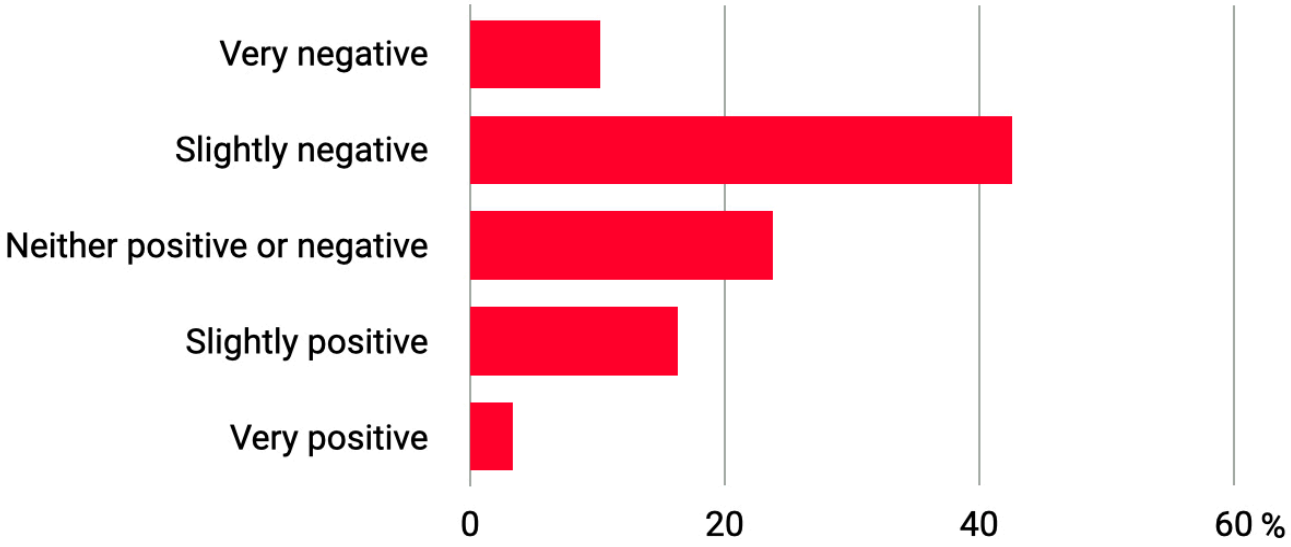
Ultimately, it seems the biggest issue is that there simply isn’t enough time in the day for video game journalists to get their work done, with 64% of respondents identifying ‘lack of time’ as a significant challenge. This lines up with evidence from other questions, such as journalists not getting review copies early enough.

Other major challenges that were highlighted by journalists include too much of a focus on SEO (43%), insufficient pay (40%) and job insecurity (28%).



“SEO AND THE ‘TIKTOK GENERATION’ OF USERS IS MAKING PROPER GAMING JOURNALISM BLEED OUT SLOWLY. MORE AND MORE CONTENT IS OF NOTICEABLY LOWER QUALITY TO BE FASTER AND HOOK USERS BASED ON THEIR SEARCH NEEDS.”

Q6: RIGHT NOW, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FUTURE OF GAMES JOURNALISM?



These are turbulent times in games media, but is the storm set to pass, or can things only get worse? Unfortunately, most respondents didn't feel too optimistic about where video game journalism is heading.

More than half of respondents (56%) feel 'slightly' or 'very' negative about the future of games journalism, while only 19% feel 'slightly positive' or 'very positive'.

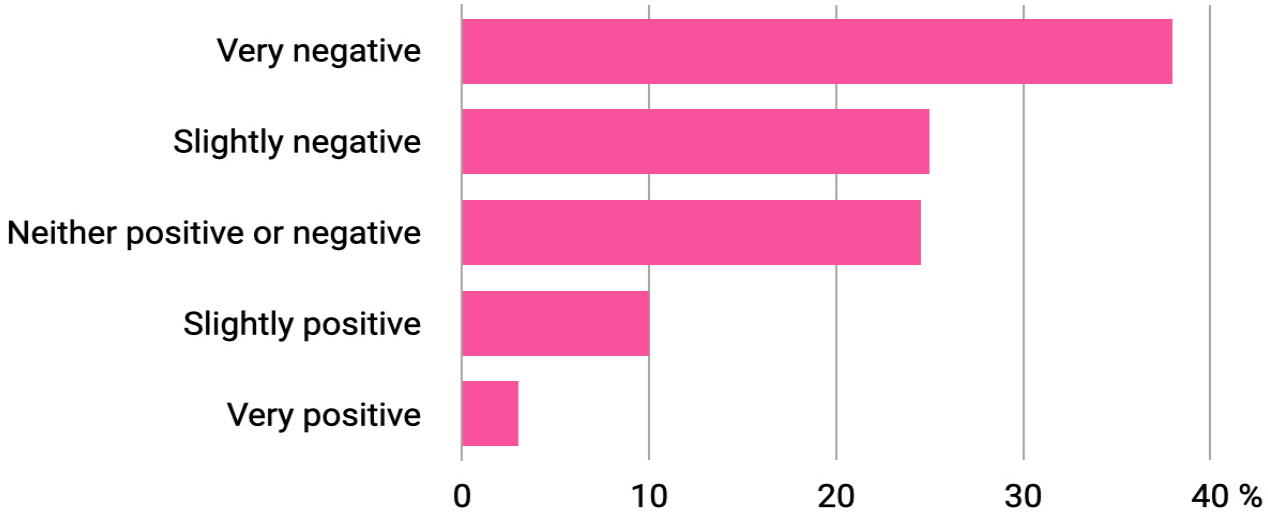
Rather than contextualise what they're saying, we wanted to share their thoughts in full.

"Games journalism has always felt like swimming upstream, but now it feels like most of us are swimming against a tsunami current."

"I think [games journalism] will continue in its current form for the foreseeable future, though much may change depending on how Google implements generative AI in search, and whether they get their act together with their EEAT policies to penalise useless content farm sites, or blatant SEO grabs from irrelevant/non-gaming focused websites."

“GAMES JOURNALISM IS ALREADY A DIFFICULT, COMPETITIVE FIELD THAT IS BROADLY MISUNDERSTOOD BY THE VCS WHO OWN THE MAJORITY OF MEDIA CORPORATIONS AROUND THE WORLD. CHASING GOOGLE CLICKS HAS DONE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO THE FIELD, AS HAS THE LEGITIMISING OF UNCRITICAL ENTHUSIAST PRESS BY PR AND MARKETING TEAMS FROM MAJOR PUBLISHERS; IT’S HARDER TO BE CRITICAL, OR YOUR ACCESS MAY BE REVOKED. IT’S HARDER TO STAY AFLOAT AS GOOGLE CLICKS COUNT FOR LESS, TIME-CONSUMING VIDEO PRODUCTION COUNTS FOR MORE, AND CORPORATIONS LOOK TO AI AS A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO PRODUCE CONTENT AT SCALE. AND ALL THE WHILE, THE AUDIENCE TELLS US WE ARE FRAUDS OR SELL-OUTS.”

Q7: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE IMPACT OF AI ON THE FUTURE OF GAMES JOURNALISM?



Generative AI is here, and it's here to stay – but most people working in video game media don't share the same enthusiasm for AI as the tech overlords instilling its virtues on LinkedIn. Why? Because the rise of generative AI has led to a massive rise in new websites that post nothing but AI-generated video game content to dominate search rankings, most of which is often plagiarised from legitimate video game websites.

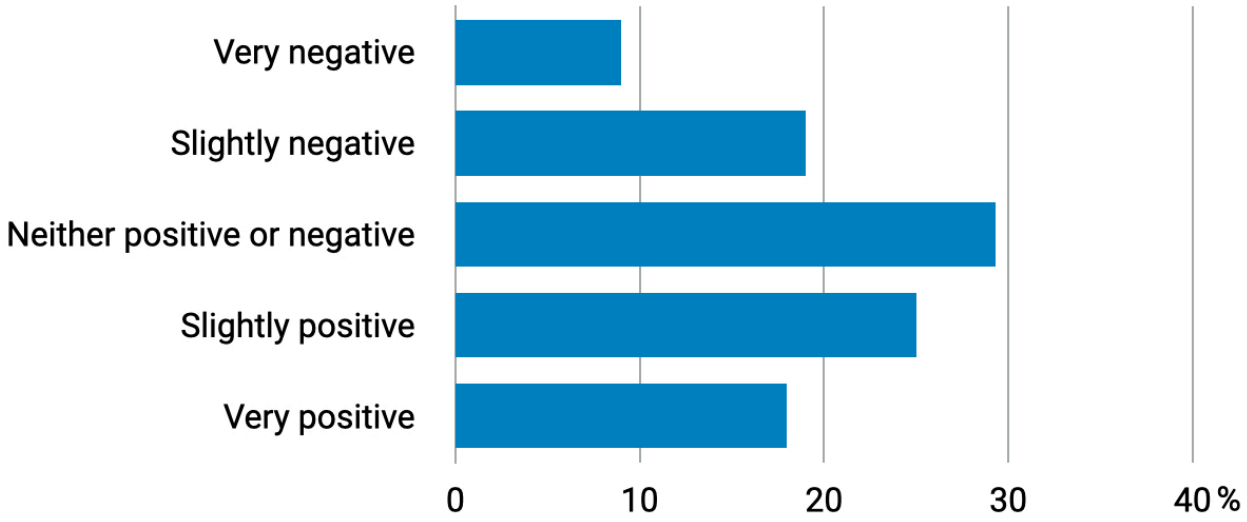
63% of respondents believe AI has a slightly negative (25%) or very negative (38%) impact on games journalism, while 12% feel it has a positive impact. That said, we should highlight that some video game journalists – particularly the more time-strapped ones at independent websites – recognised AI's role in helping them cut their workload by eliminating menial writing tasks.

"Games journalism will survive the coming AI apocalypse, but it will be in the form of substacks and subscription-based, creator-owned outlets. At the commercial level, games journalism will be a wasteland."

"I worry that AI will exacerbate issues regarding SEO farming and clickbait. However, it could be a useful tool if done properly and ethically."

“THE PUSH OF AI IS A KILLER FOR WRITTEN CONTENT. WE CAN ALREADY SEE THIS HAPPENING OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS, GOOGLE IS PUTTING ITS OWN AI CONTENT FIRST, THEN YOUTUBE VIDEO, AND THEN THE ACTUAL WRITTEN CONTENT, WHICH IS EATING A LOT OF THE TRAFFIC FROM MOST OF THE SITES. THIS IS A VERY QUESTIONABLE SITUATION FOR THE MEDIA OUTLETS WHO ARE ONLY FOCUSED ON WRITTEN CONTENT.”

Q8: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR JOB SECURITY AND PROSPECTS OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



Despite the challenges and pressures of games journalism, it's interesting to see a note of optimism among journalists, with 43% of respondents feeling somewhat or very positive about their future job prospects and security over the coming 12 months.

That's in comparison to 28% feeling somewhat or very negative, while the remaining 29% of respondents sit in the middle.

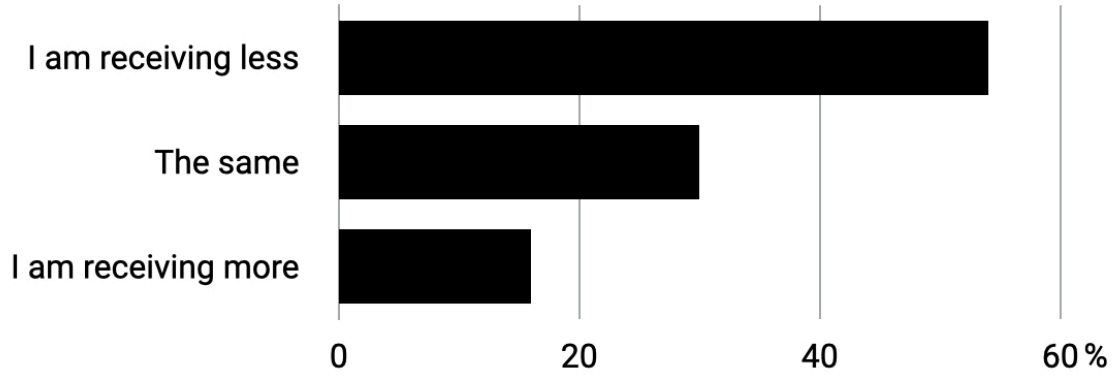
"Pros: Freelancing means that no one can lay me off anymore. Cons: It's difficult to find 'permalancing' and full-time gigs because of how competitive it is right now, and that's realistically one of the most effective ways to make money. We are all broke."

"Being 100% reliant on ad revenue for income is difficult: we've seen a significant drop in the last 12 months, with both a loss of traffic and a reduction in CPMs to blame. Things are stable enough for now, but I don't imagine a huge uptick in 2024."

“BETWEEN TWITCH AND YOUTUBE DIDDLING THEIR ALGORITHMS (AND SHEDDING HEADCOUNT), GOOGLE’S CONSTANT EFFORTS TO ‘IMPROVE’ ITS ENGINE, AND THE SHOCKING AMOUNT OF LAYOFFS AND STUDIO CLOSURES IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY, IT’S HARD NOT TO FEEL LIKE ONE’S JOB SECURITY IS SHAKY.”

Image credit: Executive Assault 2, Hesketh Studios

Q9: HOW MANY BLOCKCHAIN/WEB3 GAME PITCHES ARE YOU RECEIVING NOW COMPARED TO 12 MONTHS AGO?



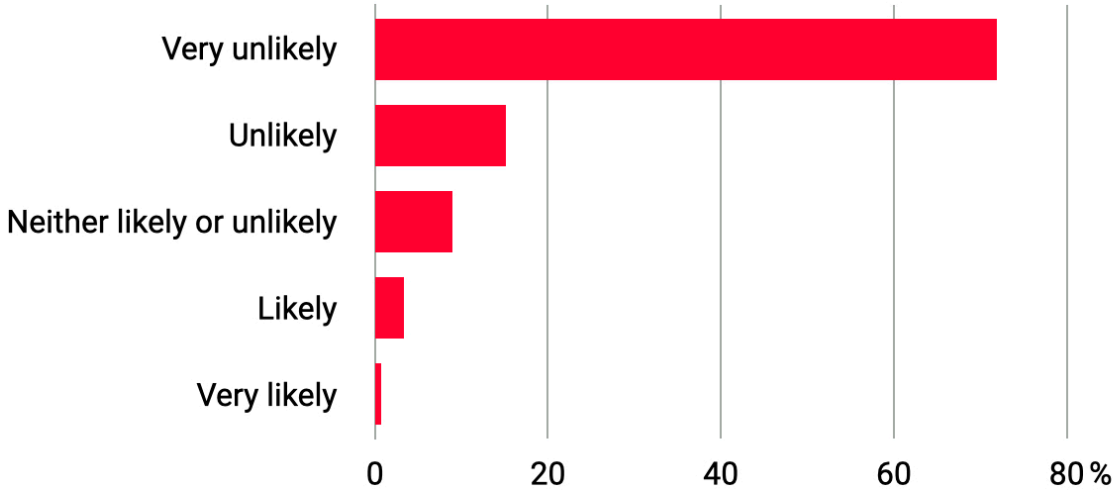
Is the web3 and blockchain gaming boom over? When we last ran this survey two years ago, web3 and blockchain games showed no signs of slowing down, but the crypto winter of 2023 ended that. Token values came crashing down, and play-to-earn games with their own tokens were worst affected as the value of cryptocurrencies plummeted.

Studios developing unreleased play-to-earn games were also severely affected as external investment dried up – and all of this is on top of the overwhelmingly negative sentiment from the video game industry toward NFTs, with Team17 and GSC Game World cancelling projects because of player backlash.

As a result, journalists are getting fewer pitches for blockchain and web3 games, with more than half of our respondents (54%) receiving fewer pitches than 12 months ago. While enthusiasm for play-to-earn is waning, the market has shifted from speculative investment punts to projects that prioritise great games first and foremost and blockchain elements second.

“I’d only cover [Blockchain] if it was tied to a major company or franchise in some surprising way or part of some wider industry trend or news.”

Q10: HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO COVER BLOCKCHAIN-BASED GAMES IN THE NEXT 6 TO 12 MONTHS?



So, journalists are getting fewer pitches for blockchain and web3 games – but how likely are they to report on developments in the sector? According to our survey, not very! 87% of game journalists are unlikely or very unlikely to cover blockchain games in the next six to 12 months, while only 4% are likely to cover them.

This highlights that sentiment towards most blockchain and web3 gaming projects amongst games media and their readers is still largely negative, illustrated by negative stories about such projects from major gaming studios and publishers.

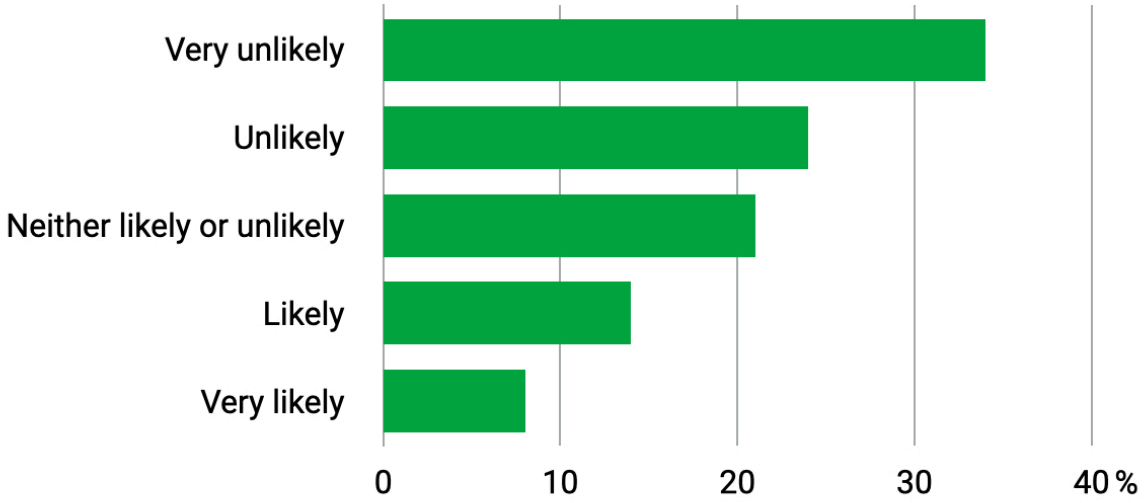
Of course, this doesn't mean securing coverage for a blockchain or web3 game is impossible. Some respondents left additional context to their answers, highlighting that stories about blockchain projects from major gaming studios such as Square Enix and Ubisoft are relevant to their audiences.

However, stories about lesser-known blockchain and web3 games are probably best served to specialist blockchain game or crypto publications.

“BLOCKCHAIN GAMES ARE STILL BEING DEVELOPED BY HIGH-PROFILE STUDIOS SUCH AS SQUARE ENIX OR VIDEO GAME CELEBRITIES LIKE PETER MOLYNEUX. GOOD GAME COVERAGE SHOULD INCLUDE THEM. I DO NOT THINK THEY ARE GOOD FOR THE INDUSTRY, BUT READERS SHOULD KNOW WHY AND HOW THEY EXIST.”

Image credit: Mighty Fight Federation, Forthright Entertainment

Q11: HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO COVER 'METAVERSE ACTIVATIONS' IN GAMING PLATFORMS LIKE ROBLOX/ FORTNITE/THE SANDBOX IN THE NEXT 6 TO 12 MONTHS?



The continued growth of gaming platforms such as Roblox and Fortnite means we're seeing more activations from major brands and gaming IP in these spaces, notably Disney's $1.5 billion deal with Epic to integrate with Fortnite.

But for every press release we see regurgitated on entertainment websites announcing a major brand, band or product 'stepping into the metaverse', how many smaller announcements are going unnoticed?

We asked respondents how likely they were to cover such metaverse activations.

For the most part, games media doesn't believe these stories are relevant to their readership, with more than half (58%) of respondents 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to cover metaverse activations.

Others believe the overwhelming player populations on these platforms, such as Roblox's 70m monthly active users, warrant coverage, as these stories can be beneficial from an SEO perspective.

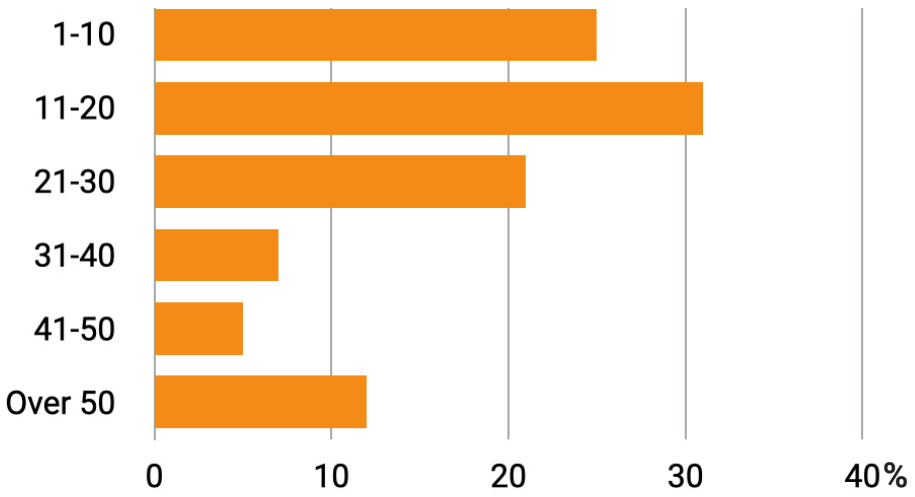
"I'm personally not a fan of [metaverse activations], but when Fortnite announces in-game events, you can't not cover them."

"Metaverse platforms are slightly outside our scope and editorial direction but we cover their economical impact and updates when possible."

Image credit: Fortnite, Epic Games

> **“FORTNITE HAS ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS THE KIND OF JUGGERNAUT THAT WE SIMPLY CAN’T AVOID COVERING, ESPECIALLY IF IT’S SOMETHING LIKE A CONCERT EVENT. ROBLOX WILL LIKELY START TO BE COVERED MORE ON OUR SITE SINCE ITS ARRIVAL ON PLAYSTATION CONSOLES IN 2023.”**

Q12: ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY REQUESTS/PITCHES FOR COVERAGE DO YOU RECEIVE EACH DAY?



With our respondents citing 'lack of time' as one of the biggest challenges facing their workload, we couldn't help but wonder how their inboxes are looking and how much time they can spare to sift through PR emails.

While it's nice to get a response from a journalist (even if it's a no!), don't be disheartened if you don't hear back. Nearly two thirds (62%) of respondents receive between 11-50 pitches every single day. As most PR pitches are essentially invitations to take on more work, there's only a limited number of emails that journalists can acknowledge and reply to.

12% of respondents receive more than 50 pitches for some kind of coverage every day! That's an eye-watering 18,250 pitches every year.

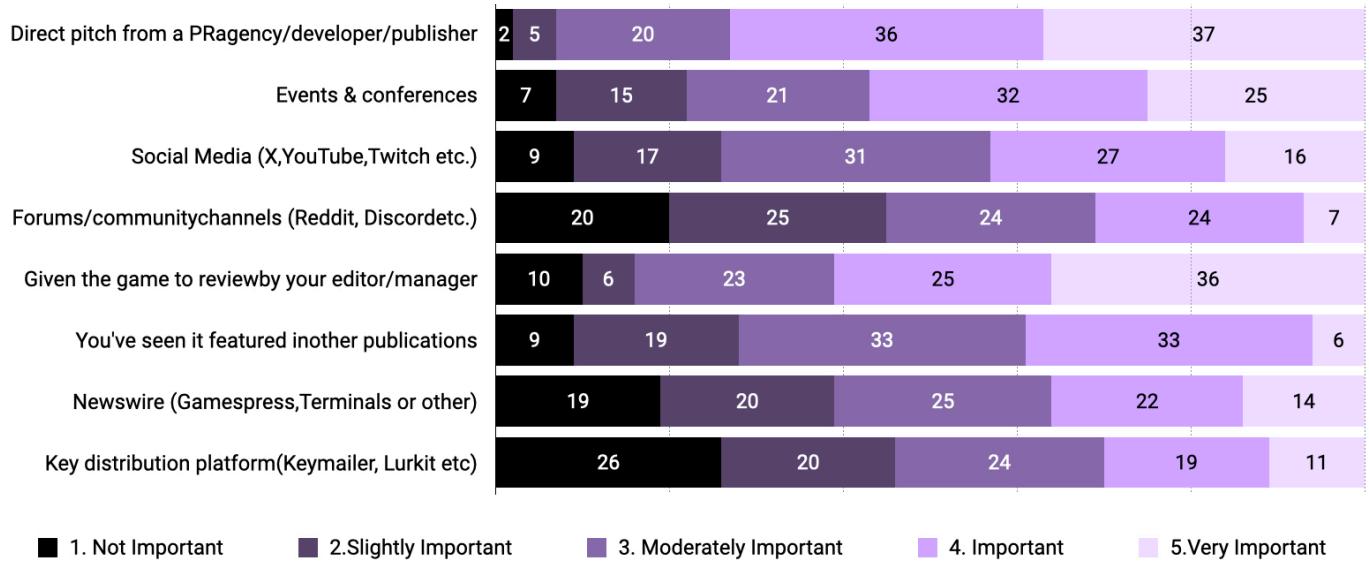
With journalists receiving so many PR pitches amongst everything else that lands in their inbox, you should do your best to minimise the amount of work they need to do. This means including a complete media kit with all the assets they need, clear timelines for release dates, and any other information they might need to write a story on your game.

And under absolutely no circumstances should you ever send a press release as a PDF (why are people still doing this in 2024?!)

GAMEPLAY IMAGE: Project Winter, Other Ocean Group

"I PERSONALLY RECEIVE OVER 250 EMAILS EVERY SINGLE DAY - IT WOULD BE LITERALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP UP WITH IT EVEN IF I MADE IT MY ENTIRE JOB. I WOULD SAY BE SELECTIVE AND DECIDE WHICH GAMES YOU'RE WORKING ON ARE ACTUALLY RELEVANT TO THE PUBLICATION, THEN GO FOR ONE PERSONALISED, IN-DEPTH PITCH."

Q13: ON A SCALE OF 1-5, HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING CHANNELS FOR VIDEO GAME DISCOVERABILITY?



How do game journalists discover the games they write about? Which channels and platforms should you focus the most attention on to make sure you capture their attention?

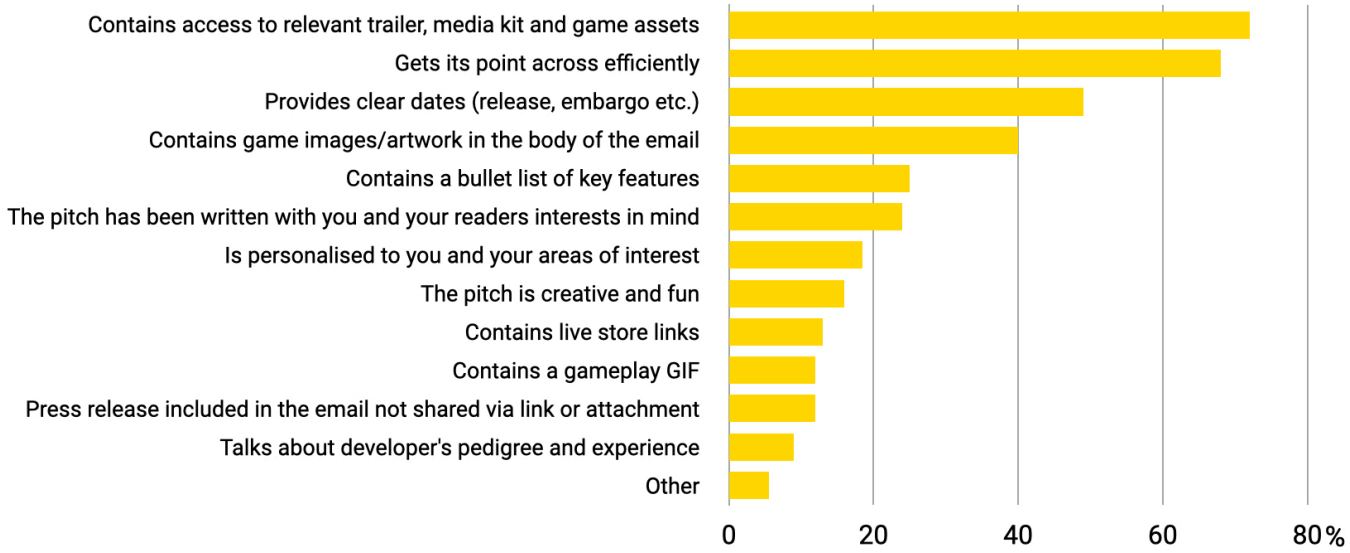
We asked game journalists to rate eight different discoverability methods on their importance (1=not important to 5=very important), ranging from events and conferences to direct pitches from PR agencies or studios/publishers.

The most popular method of game discoverability seemed to be direct pitches, with 73% of respondents saying a direct pitch from a PR agency or studio/publisher was ‘important’ or ‘very important’. 61% of respondents said their editors or line managers play an ‘important’ or ‘very important’ factor in deciding how they hear about new games, while events and conferences were rated ‘important’ or ‘very important’ by 57% of respondents.

Social media platforms were also an important part of game discoverability, with 43% of respondents rating them as ‘important’ or ‘very important’. Interestingly, key distribution platforms and forums/community channels were deemed the least important for discovering new games, with 45% saying key distribution platforms were ‘not important’ or only ‘slightly important’ while 45% said the same for forums and community channels.

“TWITTER/X IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR GAME DISCOVERY. I ROUTINELY BROWSE #SCREENSHOTSATURDAY AND #GAMEDEV TAGS TO SEE MID-DEVELOPMENT GAMES AND PROTOTYPES WORTH COVERING.”

Q14: WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS OR FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A SUCCESSFUL PR PITCH?



We've already gone through the high number of pitches that journalists receive daily, so what can you do to make yours stand out? For a start, it helps to spell the name of the person you're emailing correctly, but there are plenty of other things that you can do to improve your chances of coverage.

Our respondents were given 12 different factors/features that contribute to a successful PR pitch and asked to choose the three that they believe are the most important.

The most important factor determining the success of a PR pitch was emails, including 'access to a relevant trailer, media kit and game assets', as 72% of respondents voted for. A picture says a thousand words, and journalists can't write up stories without the assets they need.

Our respondents also highlighted the importance of accuracy and brevity within emails, with 68% of respondents choosing 'gets its point across efficiently'. With that in mind, try to keep PR pitches short and sweet – don't fill emails with unnecessary fluff if it can be avoided. 49% of respondents say 'providing clear dates', whether that's for embargoes or release dates, is important to include in a pitch email.

"If you are pitching a game for review, make sure your email is clear about that. Sometimes telling between pitches and standard emails is complicated."

"ALWAYS include images. Nothing gets published without them."

Image credit: Legends of Kingdom Rush, Ironhide Games Studio

“JUST MAKE IT CLEAR. THE AMOUNT OF PR EMAILS THAT DON’T INCLUDE A BASIC STORE LINK IS REALLY BLOODY ANNOYING. DON’T MAKE ME HUNT FOR IT. GIVE ME SIMPLE, CLEAR LINKS, AND A SIMPLE, CLEAR LIST OF FEATURES ON WHY I SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO [THE GAME]. THE SHORTER [YOUR PITCH] IS, THE MORE LIKELY ANYONE WRITING ABOUT GAMES IS LIKELY TO LOOK INTO IT.”

Q15: WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD COVER A GAME YOU'VE BEEN PITCHED?

With so many games to play, how do journalists decide which ones are worth reviewing? We pulled together a list of 12 different reasons shaping how journalists decide which games to review and asked our respondents to choose the three they believe are the most important.

The most popular reason highlights the importance of knowing who you're pitching but, most importantly, their audience. 80% of respondents chose 'The game seems like a good fit for your audience/readership' to determine which games get reviewed, so better 20 targeted emails that are well-researched than 100 spammy ones.

The second and third most popular responses were a general preference for the game (68%) or pitch emails coming from or being attributed to a developer or publisher they trust (41%).

As for the most important factors influencing why a journalist would decide to cover a game, it comes down to that being the right fit for their audience (80%), a general preference (68%) or the game coming from a developer or publisher they trust (41%).

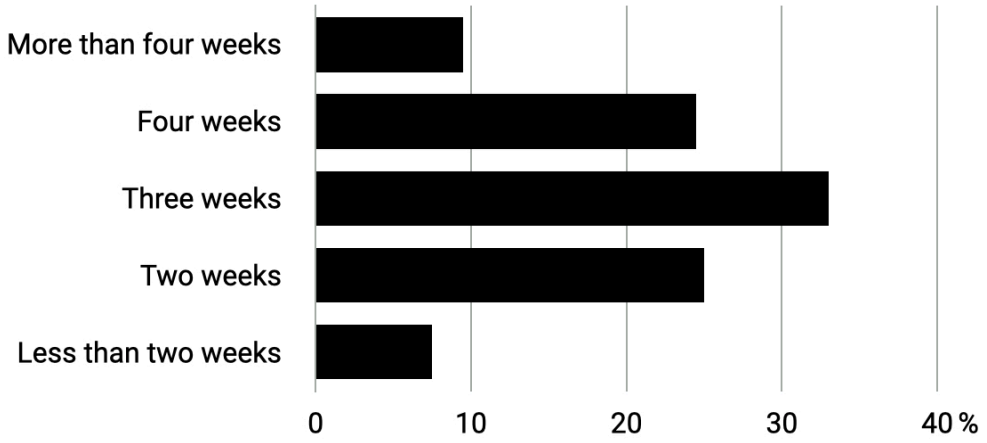
While well-known IP can often be a determinator of a game's success, it's interesting to see the least two popular answers were 'The game is part of a franchise you've played before' (14%) and 'The game is part of a successful, pre-existing franchise'.

"I mostly choose to cover games I've already seen in showcases, promoted on social media, and the like. Direct PR emails are more like the cherry on top of effective marketing."

"When sending emails, be as detailed as possible. As an Xbox-focused site/writer, confirming 'console type' is a near must - 'Coming to console' is little help."

“KEEP IT SIMPLE AND TO THE POINT. TOO MANY OF YOU WAFFLE ON WITH PARAGRAPHS OF (RESPECTFULLY) NONSENSE. WE’RE ALL OVERWORKED ACROSS ALL MEDIA SITES, RESPECT OUR TIME AND HOOK US IN QUICKLY AND CLEARLY. DON’T MAKE US HUNT FOR ANYTHING. WANT US TO COVER [THE GAME] SOON? PUT A SINGLE EASY KEY IN THE EMAIL. DON’T MAKE US REQUEST A KEY AND POSSIBLY WAIT WEEKS FOR A REPLY BECAUSE YOU MISSED OUR EMAIL ASKING.”

Q16: HOW LONG BEFORE A GAME LAUNCH DO YOU LIKE TO BE OFFERED A BUILD FOR REVIEW?



It's not unusual for review code to be sent out less than two weeks or sometimes even one week before the full release of a game. This isn't good enough, especially for larger games that can take over 50 hours to complete. Journalists must find time to play the game (often to completion) and factor in time for any additional edits, capture video footage (if it's a video review) and upload the review.

Over two-thirds of respondents (67%) want to receive review copies three weeks or more before a game's release. 25% of respondents would prefer four weeks as a minimum, while 10% would prefer more than four weeks.

It's important for PRs, marketing professionals and the in-house decision-makers who decide when review keys are distributed to ensure that people reviewing their games have enough time to do so.

Not only can poor lead times on review keys and copies impact the overall quality of a review if journalists have to rush through the game, but they can also lead to reviews being published after the release date, as there's a growing trend of editors who don't want to put their staff or freelancers under the pressure of overworking to meet arbitrary deadlines.

"I wish that game keys were given earlier if possible, even to smaller content creators. It's really awful when you get a key for a lengthy game such as a JRPG that's 50+ hours long and have three days to play and finish a review before the embargo is up."

Q17: DO YOU HAVE ANY PARTING COMMENTS/ TIPS FOR PR AGENCIES AND DEVELOPERS LOOKING TO PITCH THEIR GAMES TO YOU?

Given this survey is also about improving relationships between games media and anyone communicating with them for video game coverage, we ended our survey by asking them if they have any parting words of wisdom on how PRs, marketing professionals, and game studios can increase their chances of coverage.

Here are some highlights:

"It's always good to see that you're not just part of a random email blast when something is sent to you that both addresses you by name and is being shown to you based on games that PR person knows you've enjoyed before."

"To smaller/indie developers, finding publications that fit the niche would be more beneficial to get your games in front of eyes that would actually buy your games. Bigger publications might have bigger numbers, but your game may get lost in the sea of the many games also vying for attention."

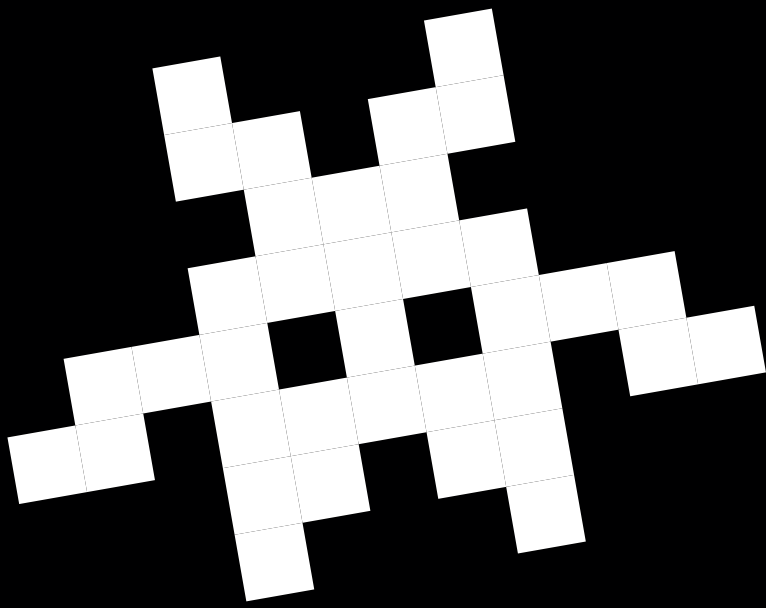
"The most important thing is to tailor emails towards the writer and their platform: is the game something they would typically cover, is there an exciting angle for them to write about? Could you imagine this being an article on their website? Write an enticing title then follow it up with gifs, images and useful press kit links in the email body - without overwhelming the reader with a huge chunk of text."

"If your game trailer is being debuted at an event (e.g. The Game Awards), please do send through the details in advance under embargo. This will give writers time to prepare a nicely-written article rather than rushing something out in the moment, and will increase the odds of your game being covered, rather than lost in the news rush. Also, it relieves some stress for journalists!"

"Embedded images and GIFs inside pitch emails increase your odds of coverage consideration immensely, as I receive dozens of pitch emails daily."

"Remember that real games journalism does not exist to support your marketing plan. Negative coverage should not mean removal from a mailing list or future opportunities."

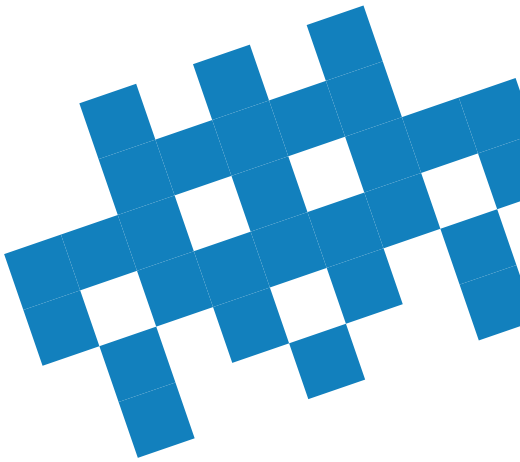
"On all pitches, it's business on both sides. Agencies are looking to serve a client's goals, but the receiver (media) has goals, too and are the one party NOT getting paid. Any pitch needs to inherently be able to drive a positive ROI for the journalist, or it's not worth looking at."



OUR RECIPE FOR A (NEARLY) PERFECT PITCH TO GAMING JOURNALISTS

This survey highlights the daily challenges facing video game journalists and what PR professionals and game studios can do to get better results when pitching for coverage.

As a final takeaway, here are our top 10 tips for pitching and improving your working relationships with journalists based on our own experience and the findings of this survey.



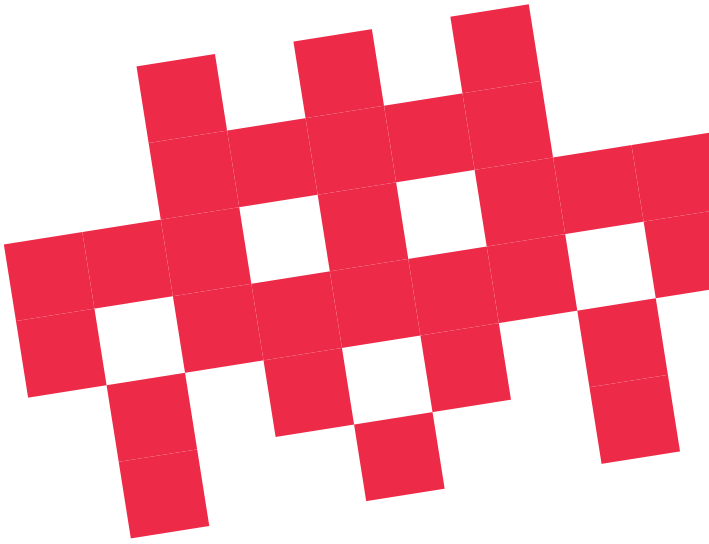
1	Targeted pitching is better than mass pitching. Don't blanket-fire press releases to as many people as possible. Take time to build your media lists, understand the preferences of the people you're emailing and personalise your emails. The results will be better long term.
2	Journalists are busy, so follow up on emails that don't get a response after a couple of days in case they've been missed. You can use this as an opportunity to add new information to your pitch, too, but be reasonable with your follow-ups. Spamming them daily won't win you any friends.
3	Respect the pressures that journalists are under and take the time to build relationships with them by being timely, not ghosting them, and ensuring they have everything they need.
4	Make sure journalists have as much time as possible to review your game. Where possible, issue review codes three weeks before launch (and remember to include details on the estimated time needed to complete the game).

5	Be wary of pitching blockchain and web3 games to outlets that don't cover them or risk potential negative publicity.
6	Think about how you can support journalists across all formats, not just editorial. Make sure your assets are suitable for podcasts, video and other mediums.
7	Keep your pitches clear and concise, and get straight to the point. Don't force comedy, and avoid hyperbolic buzzwords (Leading, World's biggest, etc. etc.)
8	When you pitch, make sure the journalist has everything they might need for coverage in that initial email. Don't make them chase or ask. Check out https://dopresskit.com/ that's free and was developed to help solve that problem.
9	If you're emailing to offer a review key, consider just including a key in that initial email. This avoids wasting time at both ends.
10	ALWAYS think of the publication's target audience as your own – is your game something they will genuinely be interested in, or are you pitching to the wrong audience?

ABOUT BIG GAMES MACHINE

Big Games Machine is a full-service PR and marketing agency specialising in strategic communications and consultancy for the global video games industry, covering both B2B and B2C audiences.

Founded by games industry veterans with decades of experience in PR and marketing, we support our clients with everything from media relations and outreach for new video games and product launches to global events management and content creation.



BIG GAMES MACHINE

www.biggamesmachine.com
hello@biggamesmachine.com

@biggamesmachine

search “Big Games Machine”