

# Gamification and marketing - a match made in heaven?

 By [Charné Munien](#)

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Going into 2023, many brands will continue to experiment with emerging technologies such as AI, AR, NFTs etc. In contrast to this, gaming, which is as old as time, has still been underutilised in the South African marketing space with most brands only experimenting with incentivised engagement drives or simple gamified promotions.



Gamification and marketing can be a match made in heaven, if you play your cards right says Charné Munien, strategy director at VMLY&R

The reality is the gaming opportunity for brands is a lot more sizeable and mature than we think. After running some focus groups with some of South Africa's top gamers, we've uncovered some useful tips for brands wanting to expand their presence into the elusive world of gaming.

## Tapping into the sub-Saharan gaming market

Despite challenging economic times, the gaming market in sub-Saharan Africa is still experiencing exponential growth and this can be linked to the post-pandemic need for connection, escapism and relaxation.

Respondents expressed that "because the games feel so real, it allows you to live a reality that you may not be able to access IRL (in real life)".

Further psychological benefits that have attracted the estimated 24 million sub-Saharan gamers include the emotional outlet for anger, frustration and stress, as well as the confidence and a sense of achievement from conquering impossible odds.

Tapping into this evolving, growing tech fuelled alternate reality could be one of the more effective ways to capture the hearts and mental availability of GenZ.



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## 3 ways brands can get involved

So how can brands get involved in 2023?

### 1. Be there for a long time, not just a good time

Respondents were positive about brands being involved in gaming in meaningful and sustainable ways. However, the audience is savvy to brands who participate in quick flash in the pan campaigns with the sentiment that “we’ll support brands that support us”.

A clear value exchange, purpose and sustained support from a tech, sponsorship or engagement perspective will aid brands in finding an authentic space that does not come across as a “one-and done marketing hype campaign”.

For marketers, this means striking the balance between short-term experimentation and carving out a meaningful long-term strategy based on shared value.

### 2. Disrupt but don’t interrupt

Interruption of gameplay is not appreciated. Most in-game ad formats often centre around forcing a user to watch a video to unlock rewards or boosters in the game.

This is not the preferred means to reach the audience, with participants of the focus group expressing that they prefer tailored in-game or IRL experience that fits seamlessly within the gaming environment and does not take users out of their game-play mode.

More programmatic ad experiences are on the rise and allow marketers to have real estate inside the natural worlds of online console games. So brands can consider how their communications can become contextual, and make use of language, behaviours, and nuances familiar to the audience.

### 3. Speak to the gamer, not the game

Gaming communities in singular games are quite small, thus the scale isn’t attractive for brands.

The trick is to find a ubiquitous reason to engage, synonymous with various groups of gamers. A great example of this is to look at how gamers deal with load shedding, a local challenge that has forced them to get creative to be able to play continuously without interruption.

A great global example is how Wendy’s entered organically into the gaming space a few years back with the “Keeping Fornite Fresh” campaign using the food fight challenge as a way to connect one of their brand differentiators into a

fun quest that resulted in increased loyalty with the community.

We can expect more brands to start tapping into this space in 2023, as the youth market gains access to increasing spending power. If brands can strike the balance between authenticity and scale in the gaming space, the possibilities will become limitless. Game on!

## ABOUT CHARNÉ MUNIEN

Charné Munien is a strategy director at VMLY&R, specialising in digital strategy and passionate about consumer centricity.  
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