

ABOUT TIME.

Popcultr MARKETING SUMMIT

MCM LONDON 23RD OCT 2026

Summit Report

OCTOBER 2026

POWERED BY: experience12

the popcultr marketing agency

Foreword

We embarked on this summit with a simple premise that everyone in pop culture is competing for the same thing, and it isn't really money.

It's time.

People can't make more of it, so every film, game, show and match is up against everything else they could be doing, including just spending time with their families.

For about the last ten years we've all lived in the attention economy. The ad system and the social system are built to grab a fleeting moment. Underneath that, the thing that actually matters has always been the relationship.

We've talked a lot about fandom at this summit. About Time started off as a homage to a much underrated Working Title film and ended up being about moving that fandom conversation on.

Saying you're working with fandom is all very well, but how do you make it work? How do you get given time by fans, not just take it? Marketing done well is the difference.

Chris





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Sessions Overview

The Data Drop - Some highlights from our May 2026 fan research: 957 face-to-face interviews at MCM London, and what they say about where fans spend their time

The Popcultr Edit - Dani Rayner's six-month review of the work that actually moved culture, with a hit and a miss from each panellist

Zoe Scaman - fans pay a tithe of time, IP runs on it, and AI has to stay out of the parts fans come to make

Games: The Long Game - the first 48 hours can make or break a game, but keeping it relevant takes years

Partnerships: Common Ground - a rights holder, two brands and the agency in between, on finding the brand's role inside the story

Tabletop: Cards on the Table - the biggest panel of the day, on the card shop as a third space and planning with kindness

Theatrical Film: The Big Picture - what's driving people back to the cinema, and the work that turns a screening into an event

Creator: Watch, Like, Comment, Follow, Subscribe - the biggest shift in how the industry works with creators in years, and what to do about it

Lea Karam - a behavioural scientist on why time is marketing's last honest metric



About Time

Everyone in pop culture is competing for the same thing, and it isn't really money. It's time. People can't make more of it, so every film, game, show and match is up against everything else they could be doing, including spending time with their families. For about ten years we've worked in the attention economy, where the ad system and the social system are built to grab a fleeting moment. Attention is a transaction. Underneath it, the thing that matters is the relationship. We've talked a lot about fandom at this summit. About Time moves that conversation on: not how to take time from fans, but how to be given it.

How to read the day:

Each session takes that question from a different angle: the fans in our own research, the work that moved culture, games, partnerships, card shops, cinemas, creators and, to close, how to measure time that's given.

As Chris put it on the day, marketing is the difference.





CHRIS WHITTLE

Experience12 Data Drop

Most of the Room Plays

Games are the default - plan for players even if you don't sell games

84%

of fans play video games.

76% of players say games are good for their mental health. 51% pick PC as their favourite platform.
Experience12 fan research, May 2026. All fans n=920; players n=767.

Every Age Group Has Its Own Feed

Platforms are closed loops

66%

of under-18s say TikTok is their main platform.

ONLY 12% SAY INSTAGRAM. 26% OF OVER-35S STILL SAY FACEBOOK

ex12

Live Activations Matter

You show up, you get rewarded

69%

would recommend a brand after a live activation.

74% among fans on their fourth visit or more. Base: May 2026, n=892.

People come back for each other

Cosplay keeps the regulars coming: fans on their fourth visit or more come mainly for cosplay at twice the rate of first-timers (20%). People come to MCM to meet their mates in real life. Chris called it Glastonbury for geeks. Only 2% now come mainly for the celebrity panels, down from 28% in 2018, and everyone in the room was part of that 2%.

In Chris's words, "Live activations matter to [fans]. You show up, you get rewarded for it." 69% would recommend a brand after a live activation, rising to 74% among fans on their fourth visit or more. It's about showing up, and showing up consistently.

Takeaways

PLAN FOR NON-PLAYERS

84% of fans play, most on PC. The ones who don't are mostly women into film and beauty, so give them their own plan

PLAN MEDIA BY AGE GROUP

Two-thirds of under-18s live on TikTok, heavy players on Discord, a quarter of over-35s on Facebook. Each is a closed loop, so book more than one platform

PLAN REACH VIA STREAMING

83% pay for Netflix and only 3% watch live TV. Plan reach through streaming and social rather than the TV ad break

SHOW UP WHERE FANS RETURN

At MCM only 2% come mainly for the celebrity panels, and regulars come for cosplay at twice the rate of first-timers. Fund presence where fans keep coming back

SHOW UP CONSISTENTLY: FANS COME BACK TO MEET THEIR MATES AND REWARD THE BRANDS THAT KEEP SHOWING UP



Panellist:
Calvin Innes
Consultant Strategy Director
Innes Consulting / Experience12

Panellist:
Gena-mour Barrett
Senior Social Marketing Manager
Netflix

Moderator:
Dani Rayner
Fandom & Pop Culture Consultant
Formerly Netflix, BBC, BAFTA

Panellist:
Cameron Robertson
Content Creator,
Nick & Cam

THE POPCULTR EDIT



“Culture isn't being dictated by brands in the way that it used to, but it's being shaped by the communities themselves. There's a real power shift underway that some brands are identifying and leaning into.”

DANI RAYNER
FANDOM & POP CULTURE CONSULTANT, FORMERLY NETFLIX, BBC, BAFTA

Every six months the Popcultr Edit looks back at the work that moved culture, which isn't always the work that won the awards. Dani asked each panellist for one hit and one miss.

The panel talked about what the last six months got right and wrong. The hits knew exactly who they were talking to: a trainer film that spoke only in its crowd's slang, a game launch that told players the truth, creators building IP for audiences they already had. The misses, as Dani put it, made the marketing call before anyone understood the culture. Star power was the one real split. Cameron thinks big names have lost their pull. Gena-mour wasn't so sure: talent still draws if the film makes sense. On what's next, the panel agreed. As AI floods the feed, people will go looking for live events, analogue hobbies and work with a human hand in it.

Takeaways

SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

The hits used their crowd's own slang and told players the truth. Do both, and watch creators building IP for audiences they already have

CREDIT TREND STARTERS

The misses made the marketing call before understanding the culture. Credit whoever started the trend, and find out what fans want first

SHOW THE EFFORT

As AI fills the feed, people will go looking for live events and things made by hand. Put your effort where they can see it

RESEARCH FIRST

You can't manufacture culture. Understand the communities you're speaking to before you brief the work

UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNITY BEFORE YOU MAKE THE MARKETING CALL: THE HITS DID, AND THE MISSES MADE THE CALL FIRST



ZOE SCAMAN

THE TITHE



The Tithe

ZOE SCAMAN
FOUNDER, BODACIOUS

Zoe Scaman joined over Zoom after flooding kept her at home, our first ever video presentation.

Her argument: fans pay a tithe of time, the evenings and weekends they give freely to make fic, art, edits and songs for each other, and IP runs on it. That time is now coming up against a wall of AI.

Fans don't object to the technology. They object to it taking the part they came to make, or faking the effort they're looking for. Hatsune Miku's fans happily use an AI voice because the making is still theirs. D&D players use AI at their own tables while rejecting it in the books they buy. The job is to map where fans make things, keep AI out of those places, and use it everywhere else. Don't touch the tithe.

THE TITHE.



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CLICK TO SEE THE FULL PRESENTATION ON ZOE'S SUBSTACK

Takeaways

PROTECT FANS' FREE TIME

The fan fiction, the edits, the hand-bound copies: fans give their evenings and weekends freely, and your IP runs on it. Protect that time

KEEP AI AWAY FROM CRAFT

On Steam, the PC games store, AI art drags games down and AI translation doesn't. Use AI where fans aren't looking for effort

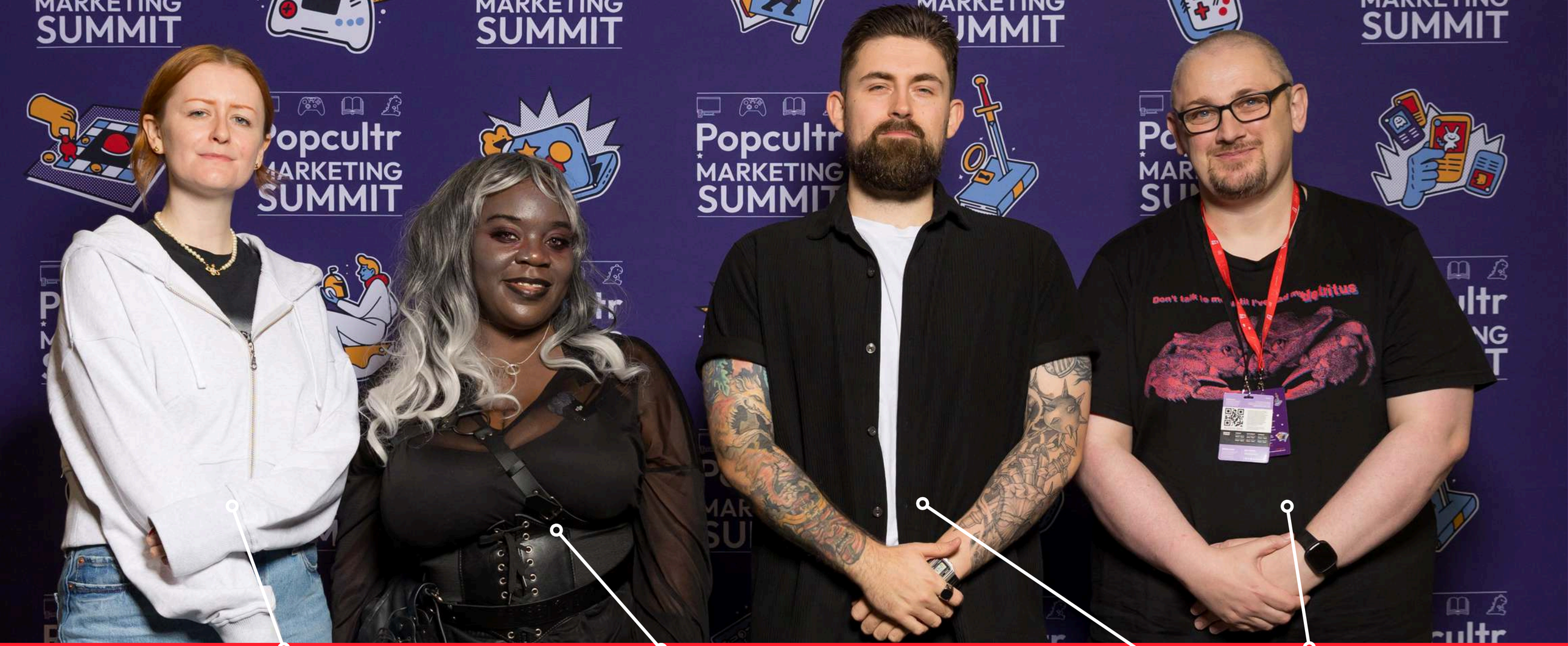
MAP FAN ACTIVITY FIRST

D&D banned AI from its products while players use it at their own tables. Map each activity by how much fans make, then decide where AI helps

DON'T TOUCH THE TITHE

Use AI behind the scenes, in fan tools, translation and approvals. Keep it out of fan making, visible effort, performers' voices and replies, and never hide it

USE AI TO MAKE THE WORK FASTER AND CHEAPER, BUT KEEP IT AWAY FROM THE TIME FANS GIVE: THAT'S WHAT YOUR IP RUNS ON



Panellist:
Lisa Marie
UK & Nordics Community Lead, League of Legends, Riot Games

Panellist:
Cassie Hughes
Creator, director and consultant GeekyCassie

Moderator:
Dave Jewitt
Founder & Director EXP

Panellist:
Neil Gorton
Snr Community Manager Fenris Creations

GAMES: THE LONG GAME



“The players are the most passionate voice, and they are putting the time and the effort and the energy into your product, and they are the ones who you should ultimately be listening to.”

LISA MARIE
UK & NORDICS COMMUNITY LEAD, LEAGUE OF LEGENDS, RIOT GAMES

Launch week gets the budget, but a game lives or dies over years. This panel was about what keeps people playing after the first 48 hours, and the answer kept coming back to people: creators and the community teams who look after them.

Most of the panel agreed you can't predict the breakout. One came from a streamer dressed as a wizard who won't use a gun. Lisa's view from League of Legends, a 17-year-old game, is that every corner of a fandom needs its own reason to stay. The panel agreed creators need time, and a code the day before launch gets you rushed content or none, though Neil warned early codes are a gamble. Cassie made the case for keeping community teams: when they go, the Discord empties.

Takeaways

BACK THE SURPRISE BREAKOUT

The creator who lifts a game is often one nobody had on the list. Judge creators on engagement over size, and back them when they appear

PLAN FOR EVERY CORNER

Plan for each corner of a long-running fandom as its own audience, and let new and beginner creators bring newcomers in

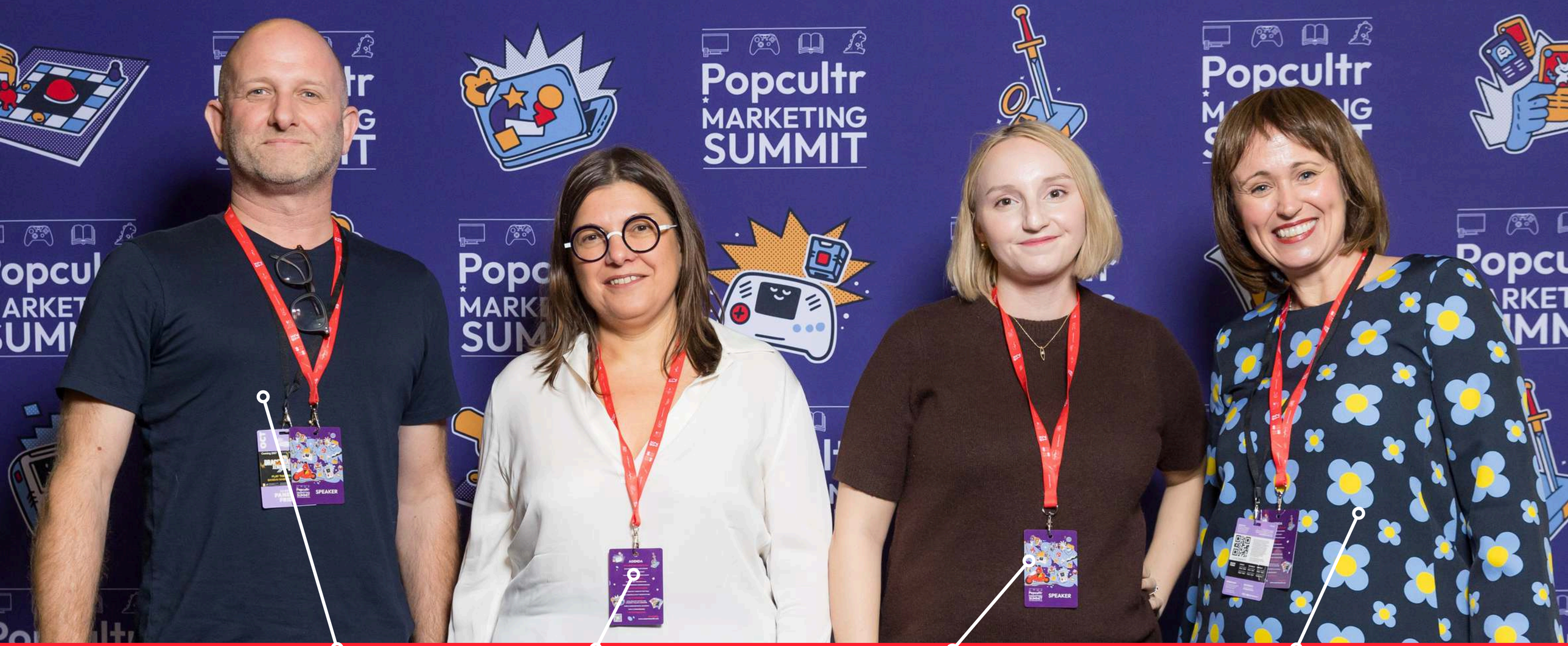
GIVE CREATORS TIME

Send codes early and brief on what their audience cares about. A code the day before launch gets rushed content, or none in your report window

KNOW THEM BEFORE YOU NEED THEM

Tying a game to one big name is a risk both ways. Keep the community managers who get to know creators over weeks and months

PLAN CREATOR BUDGETS FOR THE LONG RUN: SEND CODES EARLY AND BACK CREATORS FANS ENGAGE WITH



PANELLIST
Richard Barnes
CEO
BRIDGE

PANELLIST
Nadege Dubant
Global Licensing & Partnerships Director, DANONE SA

PANELLIST
Tilly Payne
Senior Brand Marketing Manager
The AA

MODERATOR
Julia Kamoda
Global Director of Partnerships & Promotions, Hasbro



PARTNERSHIPS: COMMON GROUND



“For us this is the era of fandoms. We cannot just put a logo on the pack. We need to tell a greater story.”

NADEGE DUBANT
GLOBAL LICENSING & PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR, DANONE

A logo on a pack no longer counts as a partnership. With a rights holder, two brands and the agency in between on stage, the question was what a brand is for inside someone else's story.

Most of the panel agreed it starts with the story, finding the brand's role in the IP's world, like the AA keeping the Jeeps moving in Jurassic World. Both sides' real goals and audience data need to be on the table, and the panel agreed pitches need a clear why. Danone and the studios are doing fewer, deeper deals. Hasbro works the other way, testing fast in its deeper fandoms, and Richard pointed out that only works with evergreen brands. Tilly named the hard part: keeping fans warm after the launch.

Takeaways

JOIN THE STORY

Start by asking what your brand would do in the world of the IP. A shared human truth makes the partnership feel like an addition to the story

START WITH THE WHY

Share your real business goals and audience data with the partner up front. Partnerships pushed onto a brand tend to fall down later, or never quite work

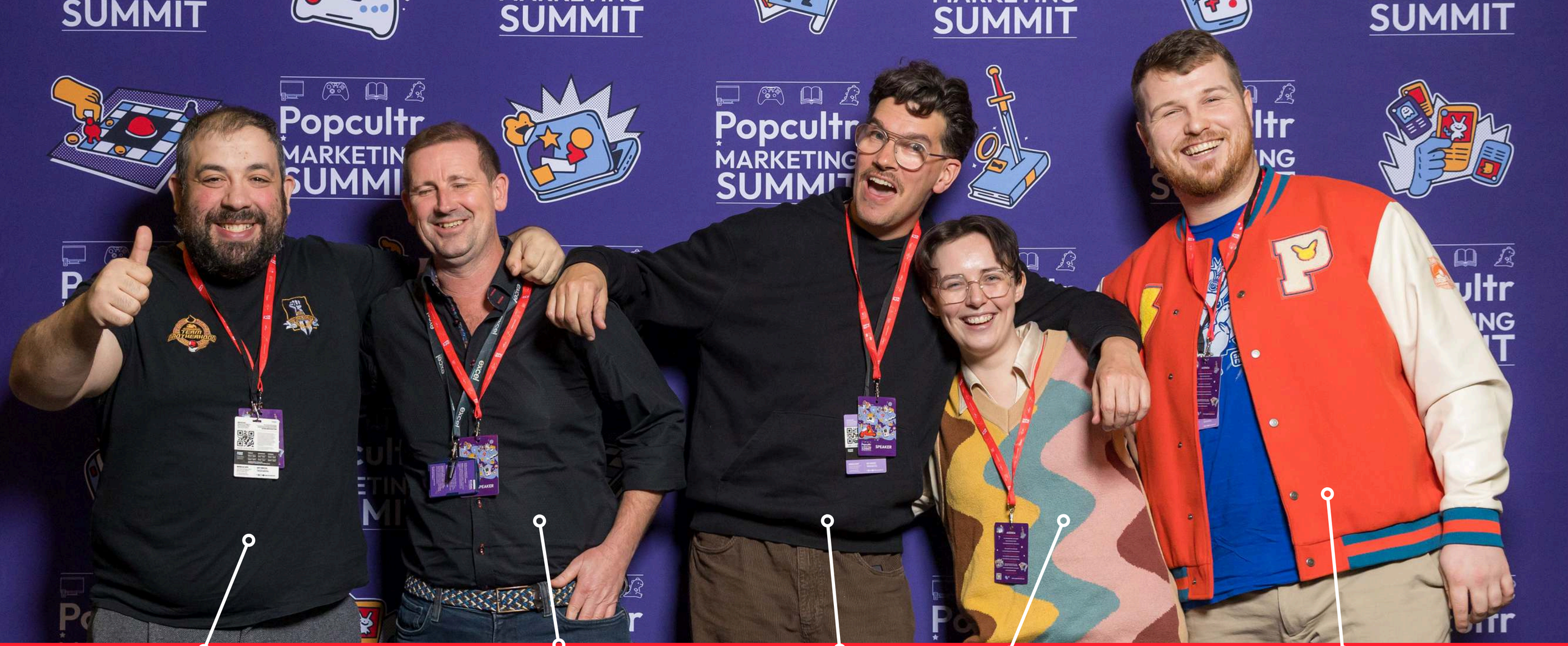
DO FEWER, DEEPER DEALS

The logo on a pack used to be enough. Pick fewer partners, build a bigger story around each, and make the product itself worth collecting

KEEP THE FANS WARM

Plan past the launch. Fast testing suits long-running brands like Hasbro's, and one-weekend releases can't do it. Decide up front if selling out counts as a win

START EVERY PARTNERSHIP WITH A SHARED WHY AND A SHARED TRUTH, AND PLAN TO KEEP FANS WARM LONG AFTER LAUNCH



PANELLIST
Michael Loizou
Director / Founder,
The Brotherhood Games

PANELLIST
Ian Senior
Head of Consumer
Exhibitions, Excel London

PANELLIST
Lee Esposito
Content Creator,
Leyline Nexus

PANELLIST
Lou Jones
Head of Strategy,
YRS TRULY

MODERATOR
Mike Ellis
Creator Manager,
Nuggit

TABLETOP: CARDS ON THE TABLE



“I wasn't just being nice when I said that kindness needs to be part of every strategy. If you don't have kindness in your marketing strategy going into 2027, you're going to be falling behind.”

LOU JONES
HEAD OF STRATEGY, YRS TRULY

The panel talked about why trading card players keep turning up, and they were pretty aligned on the answer: players come for each other, and the cards are how they do it. The shop is a sacred space where you don't walk in and sell hard, and the community is part of what you're selling. The clearest common ground was money. While money's tight, fans have turned on showy pack openings and influencer boxes nobody can afford, so put the budget behind the slow build of a collection, which is what keeps people hooked. Nobody disagreed. The differences were in what each person leaned on. Lou leaned on kindness and plans that run for years, while Michael kept coming back to the local store, where players who sit down this week are still there six months later.

Takeaways

WORK THROUGH THE LOCAL SHOP

Players come for the people as much as the cards. In a good shop ten players become fifty, and they're still there months later

BRIEF CREATORS ON PLAY

Cards are a repeatable social event, and players think about the next game and the next set. Show what the cards can do, never just what they cost

PUT KINDNESS IN THE PLAN

Lou's view: the community is part of the product, so treat kindness as a planning test. The whole panel agreed: sit down with players and plan in years

FUND THE SLOW BUILD

Opening a pack is a quick thrill. Collecting is the real hook. Back free-to-watch tournaments too, because they let the curious in

SIT DOWN WITH TRADING CARD GAME PLAYERS WHERE THEY PLAY, AND PLAN IN YEARS



PANELLIST
Chee Keong Cheung
CEO, Film Producer, Film Director & Distributor
Action Xtreme Ltd

MODERATOR
Deborah Sheppard
Distribution, Production and Marketing Consultant
Iheartcinema Ltd

PANELLIST
Carla Bradford
Director of Digital Marketing - International
Cineworld Cinemas Ltd

THEATRICAL FILM: THE BIG PICTURE



“We're releasing more films than ever before as well. Over 1000 films were released last year, so each of those films has to work that much harder to reach an audience.”

DEBORAH SHEPPARD
DISTRIBUTION, PRODUCTION AND MARKETING CONSULTANT, IHEARTCINEMA LTD

Cinema admissions are up, but more films than ever are chasing them. With a filmmaker-distributor and an exhibitor on stage, the panel talked about what gets people off the sofa and into a seat. The answer kept coming back to the shared room. The film on its own isn't always enough, and dress-up screenings and premium formats give people a reason to go. The panel agreed that micro-influencers bring in the right crowd for less.

Where they differed was over who drives demand. Carla said that with the right product, the audience will find you. Deborah wasn't so sure: a film still needs something people can latch onto, and most films have to be discovered somehow.

Takeaways

MAKE THE FILM AN EVENT

The film on its own isn't always enough. Fund Q&As, themed screenings and premium formats to get people out of the house. Indies can do it too

TAKE FAN DEMAND TO CINEMAS

When fans asked for The Amazing Digital Circus on every post, Cineworld got it on screen. Fan requests now get films booked, so show them to exhibitors

GIVE FANS SOMETHING TO TAKE HOME

Eventised screenings cost little and fill more seats. Merch is now the first question when a film goes on sale, so plan it in early

BACK MICRO-INFLUENCERS OVER BIG NAMES

Opening weekend decides how long a film stays on screen. Micro-influencers convert better than big follower counts and cost less, so spend there first

TURN SCREENINGS INTO EVENTS, AND LET SMALL VOICES BRING THE CROWD



MODERATOR
Beatrice Mustocea
Creator Lead
TikTok

PANELLIST
Dan Seto
Creator Relations Manager
EU & LATAM Lead
Electronic Arts

PANELLIST
Josh Bloom
Senior Program Manager
Twitch

PANELLIST
Jo Redfern
SVP Digital
Four Trees Media



CREATOR: WATCH, LIKE, COMMENT, FOLLOW, SUBSCRIBE



“I was at Mipcom a couple of weeks ago, and you could not move for people debuting their creator strategy.”

JO REDFERN
SVP DIGITAL, FOUR TREES MEDIA

The panel talked about who holds the relationship with the audience now, and they agreed it's creators. Jo watched it happen from inside kids' TV, while in games it had always worked that way.

They came together most on timing and respect. Bring creators in when you can act on what they say, and don't leave it too late. Pay them and let them do it their way. Audiences, and kids most of all, spot a fake a mile off.

The difference came at the end, on what's next. Josh was excited by creators putting on their own events and shows. Dan was warier: brands with budgets carry responsibility for who gets seen, and the internet is getting muddier.

Takeaways

PLAN CREATORS LIKE A CHANNEL

Creators went direct to fans and took the audience with them. They're their own distribution now, and sell their IP back to TV and streamers

BACK CREATORS WHO LISTEN

Josh's view from Twitch: viewers who feel listened to keep coming back. Pick creators who let the chat change what they make

BRING CREATORS IN WHEN YOU CAN LISTEN

Creators speak for the brand and for their community. Bring them in when you can show them something and act on what they say, then pay them and let go

DROP THE SCRIPT AND CHOOSE WITH CARE

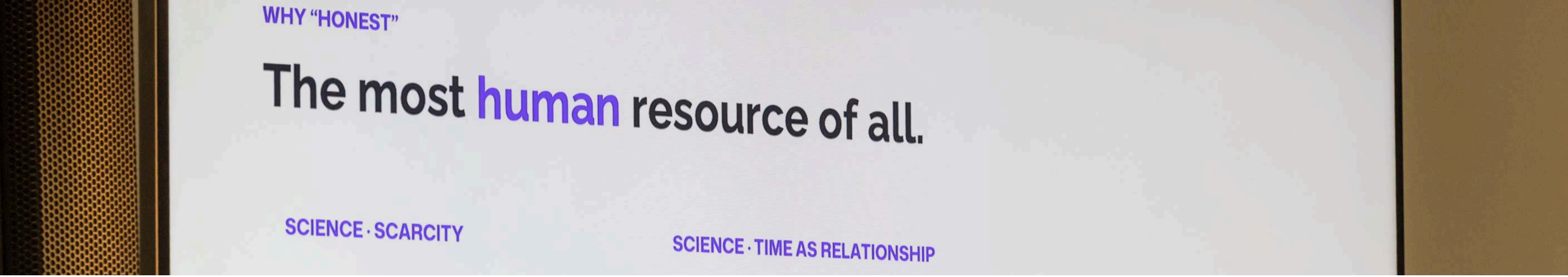
Audiences spot a script a mile off. The brands paying creators shape who gets seen next, so pick who you back carefully

PAY CREATORS TO MAKE IT THEIR WAY, AND ACT ON WHAT THEY TELL YOU



LEA KARAM

WHY CONSUMER TIME IS MARKETING'S LAST HONEST METRIC



Time Is Marketing's Last Honest Metric

LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

Lea Karam, behavioural scientist and founder and CEO of Mindscope Behavioural Labs, closed the summit by setting out to prove that attention isn't enough. Some things have become so easy to measure, she said, that they've become hard to understand. Nobody can really measure an attention span, Lea argued, so the shrinking one is a myth. People have got better at filtering, and the way through the filter is time.

Time is the last honest metric because it can't be bought, faked or made again. But it has to be given. Spending it isn't enough. Given time compounds through anticipation, participation and ritual, and the return visit is the proof. She separated trends from the culture underneath them, then rewrote the scorecard: hours given over impressions, cultural return over reach, participation over engagement rates.


“It's never been about attention. It's always been a permission problem.”
LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS
Popcultr
MARKETING SUMMIT

Takeaways

WIN THE FILTER

Lea's point: people have got better at filtering. Earn your way in with symbols they already trust, and they'll give you four hours, forty hours or a lifetime of collecting

MEASURE THE TIME FANS GIVE

Lea calls time the last honest metric: it can't be bought, borrowed or faked. Leave out autoplay and the endless scroll, because that time doesn't compound

BUILD RITUALS OVER MOMENTS

In Lea's view, moments spike and rituals compound. Plan for anticipation, participation and ritual, and track the return visit as the proof it worked

CHANGE THE SCORECARD

Swap impressions for hours given, reach for cultural return, engagement rates for participation and claimed love for observed time. Strike any metric that's bought, borrowed or autoplayed

MEASURE THE HOURS PEOPLE CHOOSE TO GIVE YOU, AND PLAN THE RITUALS THAT BRING THEM BACK

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ABOUT TIME

Takeaways



About Time: A tale of two cities

The day was about time: who earns it, and how. Across London, and in New York two weeks before, the same threads kept coming up from very different corners: games, tabletop, film, creators, brand partnerships and our own fan research.

Everything here comes from what was said on stage. Ten discussion points, each one backed by more than one session and each one naming the panels it came from. They're there to argue with, so take them back to the office and see which ones hold.

Ten Discussion Points

1
Most fandom marketing is renting an audience

2
Plan by what fans do, not what they love

3
Stop blaming attention spans. Permission is the problem

4
We fund the launch and sack the relationship

5
People come for each other

6
Fans audit effort. AI's risk is where you put it

7
Being in the room shows you time

8
Your next competitor is a fan with a laptop

9
Spend on the thing first, then the reach

10
Talk to the inner circle. Build the door for everyone else

1. MOST FANDOM MARKETING NOW IS RENTING AN AUDIENCE

A lot of what gets called fandom marketing is really a media buy.

A brand pays for a creator's followers, a platform's front page or a licence on a pack, gets a fortnight of reach, and nothing is left when it stops. Fans can tell when a brand hasn't earned its place, and it comes across as performative.

Building a fanbase is slower, but it lasts.

Pay the people who were already fans to keep doing what they do. Turn up before you need anything. Stay visible between the big moments: online, in the room and in contact.

Renting reach is fine if that's the job. Just don't call it fandom, or expect it to grow into one if that’s all you’re doing. Building a fandom takes time, effort and consistency.

“A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY FANDOM WHEN WHAT THEY'RE REALLY TALKING ABOUT IS THE CREATOR ECONOMY. THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT ESSENTIALLY RENTING SOMEBODY ELSE'S FANDOM TEMPORARILY, AND NOT ACTUALLY DOING THE WORK TO REALLY BUILD THE FANDOM.”

CALVIN INNES, CONSULTANT STRATEGY DIRECTOR, INNES CONSULTING (NEW YORK)

DRAWN FROM:

PARTNERSHIPS · LEA KARAM · GAMES · CREATOR · NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL · IRL

2. PLAN BY WHAT FANS DO, NOT WHAT THEY LOVE

Most plans treat a fandom as one audience: the Star Wars fans, the anime fans, the games fans. They're not.

Inside any big IP there are collectors, makers, queuers, people who only watch clips and people who come to meet their mates.

A fan fiction writer in one fandom often has more in common with one in another than with the rest of their own fandom, as Elizabeth Minkel put it in New York.

Experience12's fan research backs it up: people come back to MCM for cosplay and their mates, and each age group lives on a different social platform.

So plan around what people do: watch, play, collect, queue, share, come back. Then the media, the live build and the merch each land with the right people.

"WE NEED TO LOOK AT OUR IP NOT AS ONE WHOLE ENTITY, BUT AS A BUNCH OF DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES THAT CARRY DIFFERENT WEIGHTS FOR THE FAN EXPERIENCE."

ZOE SCAMAN, FOUNDER, BODACIOUS

DRAWN FROM: ZOE SCAMAN · DATA DROP · LEA KARAM · NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL · IRL

3. STOP BLAMING ATTENTION SPANS. PERMISSION IS THE PROBLEM

The goldfish attention span has sat in marketing decks for a decade, and the industry has cut everything shorter because of it.

People have got better at filtering out what they didn't ask for. Lea called it a “permission problem”.

The proof is everywhere. Fans read half a million words for free, spend a holiday's worth of money on a weekend and watch the Real Housewives for four hours. Length isn't the problem when people want the thing.

Louder and shorter won't get you through the filter.

Being there first, listening before planning and giving it time will.

Budget time to earn permission before you budget money to spend it.

“FUNNILY ENOUGH, TECH COMPANIES ARE NOW CREATING LONG-FORM CONTENT BECAUSE WE CRAVE STORIES, WE CRAVE ARCS, WE CRAVE THAT DIVERSITY OF THINKING.”

LEA KARAM, FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

DRAWN FROM:

LEA KARAM · ZOE SCAMAN · CREATOR · TABLETOP · GAMES · PARTNERSHIPS · NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL

4. WE FUND THE LAUNCH AND SACK THE RELATIONSHIP

Most budgets put everything into the launch and very little into the months before or after.

That's correct if the goal is an opening weekend box office. It's wrong if the goal is a second season, a franchise, creating a fandom or a game people still play next year.

The people who keep fans coming back rarely have a line in the plan: community managers, shop owners and the fan creators who keep an IP alive between releases.

They're the first to go when money's tight, because nothing on the scorecard shows what they do.

If you want people back, measure it: return rate, repeat purchase, players still active after six months. Then fund the second visit as seriously as the first.

"A LOT OF THE PEOPLE THAT ARE MAKING DECISIONS AREN'T BOOTS ON THE GROUND, AND THEY DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH COMMUNITY MANAGERS MAKE THOSE COMMUNITIES AND THEN FOSTER THAT."

CASSIE HUGHES, CREATOR, DIRECTOR AND CONSULTANT, GEEKYCASSIE

DRAWN FROM:

CREATOR · GAMES · PARTNERSHIPS · TABLETOP · THEATRICAL · LEA KARAM · NEW YORK: CARDS ON THE TABLE · IRL

5. PEOPLE COME FOR EACH OTHER

Our research at MCM found only 2% of people now come mainly for the celebrity panels, down from 28% in 2018.

The rest come for cosplay, for their mates and to be somewhere everyone gets it.

The same goes for the card shop that's really a place to hang out, the screening people go to so they've got something to talk about on Monday, and the stream that's really a chat room.

Most live events are still designed around the content: the screen, the exclusive, the photo moment.

Design for the people instead. Give strangers a reason to talk, give regulars a reason to come back, and make the space feel like it belongs to that fandom.

“TCGS GAVE ME A SHARED LANGUAGE, SO I COULD GO INTO A ROOM WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE TCGS THAT I'M INTERESTED IN, AND WE KNEW ALL THE SAME VOCABULARY... IT JUST UNLOCKED SOMETHING IN ME THAT I WAS ABLE TO SPEAK TO OTHER PEOPLE AND SHARE SOMETHING.”

LEE ESPOSITO, CONTENT CREATOR, LEYLINE NEXUS

DRAWN FROM:

DATA DROP · TABLETOP · THEATRICAL · CREATOR · NEW YORK: CARDS ON THE TABLE · IRL

6. FANS AUDIT EFFORT. AI'S RISK IS WHERE YOU PUT IT.

Fans object to AI where they expect to see effort. It's fine in translation, in code or in a tool a fan uses to make their own song. It's theft when it replaces the art on the box or the writing in a book they paid for. Zoe's reading of data from Steam, the PC games store: of the games that declared AI and then flopped, 72% had used it on the visuals, the part players look at most.

So the question is where you use it, and whether you're open about it. Hiding it is the bigger risk.

Effort works the other way too. This year's hits let people see how they were made: the making-of that beat the finished animation in Tatiana Tacca's anime campaign, a Twitch creator who reads sponsor ads badly on purpose, and War Dogs, which admitted its flaws and kept its players.

"THE PERFORMANCE OF EFFORT... WILL BE A THING IN A WORLD WHERE AI CAN DO THINGS REALLY QUICKLY FOR US."

GENA-MOUR BARRETT, SENIOR SOCIAL MARKETING LEAD, NETFLIX

DRAWN FROM:

ZOE SCAMAN · CREATOR · THE EDIT · NEW YORK: THE POPCULTR EDIT

7. BEING IN THE ROOM SHOWS YOU TIME

An impression only tells you something appeared on a screen. It can't tell you whether anyone gave it any time. A room can. You see how long people stay, what they ask and what they do next. That's why Experience12's own fan research is done face to face, in the queues.

Ads are good at awareness, and in New York Stu Levy said the platforms are getting worse at telling you who your audience is. A live event does what an ad can't. It turns a brand into a moment people remember, and it puts you in front of the fans who chose to turn up. But the room doesn't have to be the biggest one. Michael Loizou gets about 20 of every 50 players back from an activation in his shop, and asked whether a stand seen by tens of thousands does better.

Measurement is the old problem with experiential and events. So run a second scorecard next to reach: how long people stay, how many come back and what they buy next.

“DOWNSTAIRS THERE'S TENS OF THOUSANDS OF VISITORS VISITING A BOOTH, AND YOU GET RECOGNITION ON THAT BOOTH, BUT REALISTICALLY, I WILL DO AN ACTIVATION WITH 50 PLAYERS, AND I'LL PROBABLY HAVE 20 PLAYERS COME BACK.”

MICHAEL LOIZOU, DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, THE BROTHERHOOD GAMES

DRAWN FROM: LEA KARAM · TABLETOP · DATA DROP · CREATOR · THEATRICAL · NEW YORK: IRL

8. YOUR NEXT COMPETITOR IS A FAN WITH A LAPTOP

It used to run one way: the studio made it, the channel showed it, the audience watched.

Now audiences build the IP, creators own the relationship and studios buy in late. Iron Lung, Backrooms and Obsession were made cheaply by people who already had the fans, and by Calvin Innes's account Backrooms became A24's biggest launch ever. A story written by a fan, for free, is now the version a generation of younger fans treat as canon. The French creator Squeezie rented the Le Mans circuit, put other creators in racing cars and got well over a million views.

Brands still matter, now as backers and distributors more than authors. Work with creator-owned IP early, pay fairly for what fans already make, and treat the fan with a laptop as a likely partner.

"CREATORS HAVE BEEN ALMOST PULLED AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS, AND THEY ARE THEIR OWN NOW VERY POWERFUL DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS... CREATORS ARE THEN SELLING THEIR IP BACK TO TV, NETFLIX, OR WHOEVER."

JOSH BLOOM, SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER, TWITCH

DRAWN FROM: THE EDIT · CREATOR · ZOE SCAMAN · THEATRICAL · NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL · THE POPCULTR EDIT

9. SPEND ON THE THING FIRST, THEN THE REACH

This year's hits spent their money on the thing itself and on the people already there. The extras became the audience. The popcorn bucket became the ad. War Dogs' video admitting the game was flawed became the reason to buy it.

The point is where the money went. Chee Keong Cheung's zombie war film had five grand for prints and advertising, and still had tanks, helicopters and 1,500 extras. Obsession, made for $750,000, had years of a creator's audience behind it.

The misses spent on reach before giving anyone a reason: the World Cup's hydration breaks, which fans saw as extra ad breaks, and the campaign for Tom Cruise's Digger, which never said what the film was. Spend on the reason first, the thing fans can hold, play, queue for or join. Then buy the reach to tell everyone else.

“WE'VE GOT A GIANT 55 CENTIMETRE GODZILLA POPCORN BUCKET... YOU CAN'T REALLY GET YOUR HAND IN TO GET THE POPCORN OUT. BUT PEOPLE LOVE IT... THAT [BUCKET] VIDEO HAS 1 MILLION ORGANIC VIEWS ON OUR TIKTOK ACCOUNT.”

CARLA BRADFORD, DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING - INTERNATIONAL, CINEWORLD

DRAWN FROM: THEATRICAL · THE EDIT · NEW YORK: THE POPCULTR EDIT

10. TALK TO THE INNER CIRCLE. BUILD THE DOOR FOR EVERYONE ELSE.

Talk to everyone and you reach no one. Nike x Corteiz's ad got about 5 million views by speaking only to its own crowd and explaining nothing to anyone else. Everyone else watched anyway.

Fandoms spread the same way: a small circle sets the tone and it travels out through DMs, group chats and word of mouth. The principle is as old as marketing. Only the way it travels has changed.

The risk is turning that circle into a VIP list. Lock the best stuff behind rare cards or hold the queue for existing customers, and newcomers decide it isn't for them.

New York's advice was to stop treating existing customers as VIPs, because passers-by see the queue and walk on. The best venues keep big tournaments free to watch so the curious can wander in. Speak to the inner circle, and keep the door open.

"A LOT OF TOURNAMENTS REMAIN FREE TO ATTEND AS A SPECTATOR... SO THAT GIVES POTENTIAL CURIOUS AUDIENCES THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO AND HAVE A LOOK, EXPERIENCE WHAT IT IS. THEY MIGHT THEN SIT DOWN AND PLAY."

IAN SENIOR, HEAD OF CONSUMER EXHIBITIONS, EXCEL LONDON

DRAWN FROM: THE EDIT · LEA KARAM · TABLETOP · NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL · IRL

THE FRAME. TIME IS THE LAST HONEST METRIC

Attention is a transaction: bought, interrupted, borrowed and gone in a scroll. Time is a relationship: chosen, looked forward to, and it adds up. The industry has chased attention for a decade because it's easy to count. Chosen time can't be bought or faked, so you can trust it.

So test every plan against one question: would fans choose to spend time on this?

"FROM A BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE, TIME IS THE LAST HONEST METRIC... YOU CAN'T GET TIME BACK. YOU CAN GET MONEY BACK, YOU CAN GET ANYTHING BACK, BUT YOU CAN'T GET TIME BACK."

LEA KARAM, FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

DRAWN FROM: DATA DROP · LEA KARAM

EARN THE TIME

Nine questions to ask before you sign off a plan

1. Is this renting or building? Say which, and budget for it.

2. Have we planned by what fans do: collect, make, queue, share, come back?

3. Did we turn up and listen before asking for anything?

4. Is there money for after the launch, and do we measure return rate and repeat purchase?

5. Does the live bit give strangers a reason to talk and regulars a reason to return?

6. Can fans see the effort, and are we open about AI?

7. Did we spend on the thing first, then the reach?

8. Is the door open to newcomers?

9. Do we count the time people choose to give, or only impressions?

Over to you

We never tell speakers what to say. We bring in people who know their stuff, let them do their thing, and ask them to challenge the room. I was still trying to process Zoe in the morning as well as the other panels when Lea landed in the afternoon.

So, like me, take it back to the office and work it through. You may not agree, and it may not suit your business, but it's all there to be discussed and mulled over. Sometimes confirmation is as valuable as new information.

I would say this, as someone who runs an experiential agency, but nearly every panel came back to the same thing: do more live. We can also see that the marketing industry has a fandom fetish at the moment. Fine: work with fandom, do more live stuff, but do it properly, do it kindly, do it nicely and just do it well and if you need a hand to get there please give us a shout at Experience12 (experience12.com). There's far more in our fan data than fits here, by fandom, age and platform, and we're happy to cut it for your audience.

Finally, Lea set you some homework: strike any metric that's bought, borrowed, autoplayed or interrupted. Map where your communities really are and how you reward them.

Thanks to every panellist and speaker, and to Zoe and Lea.

Chris



Thanks

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THE SUMMITEERS

Everyone who came to the summit: we know your time is more precious than ever, so thanks for choosing to spend it with us and for being such a great, engaged crowd. See you next time

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the **popcultr** marketing agency



Experience12 is the experiential agency for brands that live in pop culture, and the team behind the Popcultr Marketing Summit. Independent and award-winning, based in London, operating globally.

Conventions and exhibitions, experience design, experiential events, PR stunts, press and influencer engagement, and national and worldwide tours.

We've spoken to more than 13,000 fans face to face since 2018, and we'll cut that data for your fandom, by age and platform.

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