

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 Whittle





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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



The Data Drop: Experience12 Fan Research

CHRIS WHITTLE
FOUNDER & CEO, EXPERIENCE12

The day opened with Experience12's own fan research. Chris Whittle ran through the May 2026 wave: 957 face-to-face interviews, collected in the neutral areas of MCM London. It adds to more than 13,000 interviews from the same floor since 2018.

The headlines tell you where to find this audience, how they watch and what brings them back. Games are the default at MCM: most fans play, and most say it's good for them. The feed has split, with each age group living on a different platform. Live TV has all but gone. Fewer are in full-time work than at any May show we've surveyed. And what brings people back is cosplay, community and meeting their mates in real life, not the celebrity panels. As Chris put it, it's about showing up, and showing up consistently.

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.

Non-Players

A different audience altogether

61%

of the fans who don't play are women.

Over-35s

Their own living rooms

42%

of over-35s don't play games.
65% would rather watch on a TV than a phone.

Most of the room plays

The headline from Chris: games are the default in the building. 84% of fans play video games, and PC is now their favourite platform, picked by 51% of players. 76% of players say games are good for their mental health, and only 4% say they're bad for it.

The flip side is just as useful. 61% of the fans who don't play are women, and they're a different audience altogether: twice as likely to love film, and nearly four times as likely to want beauty brands at MCM. Age splits it again. 42% of over-35s don't play games, and 65% would rather watch shows and films on a TV than on a phone. Chris's read was that over-35s still keep their dramas separate. They've got their own living rooms. So a brand going after non-players needs a different plan, built around film and beauty.

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

Heavy Players

Discord-first fans

77%

of Discord-first fans game on PC.

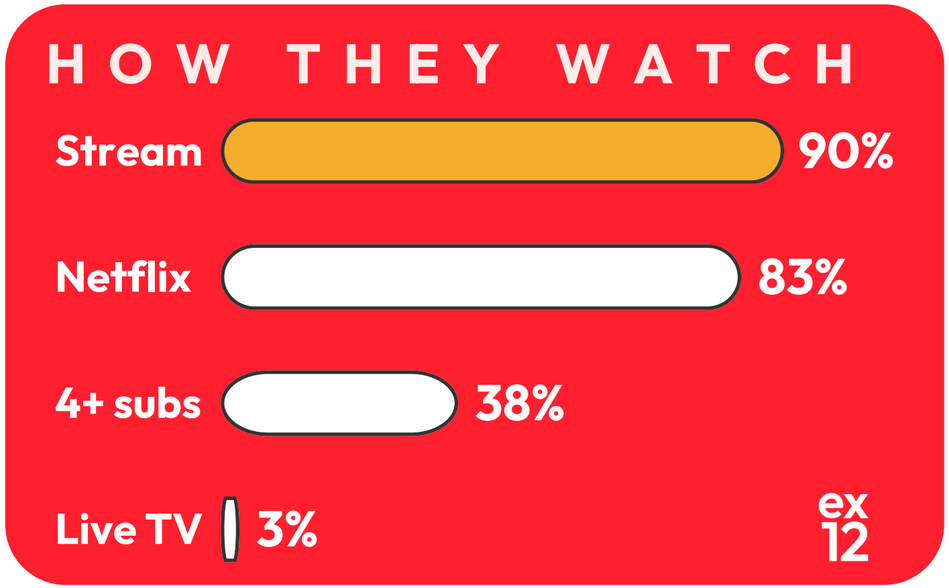
Against 51% of the room. 42% play 20+ hours a week, twice the average. Base: Discord-first fans, n=132.

Every age group has its own feed

The platform fans get their information from now depends on how old they are. 66% of under-18s say TikTok is their main platform, and only 12% say Instagram. Discord-first fans (Discord is the chat app players live on) are the heavy players: 42% of them play more than 20 hours a week, twice the room average, and 77% game on PC against 51% of the room. And 26% of over-35s still say Facebook is their main platform, which Chris called terrifying.

His point was that platforms are closed loops. TikTok-first fans get all their information there, and only 8% of them find new things on Instagram. So you can't rely on one platform. You have to plan across several.

He flagged the Discord figure for anyone outside games in particular. It may be news to brands that don't work in that world.





Live TV's over

The numbers: 83% pay for Netflix, most pay for three streaming services, and 38% pay for four or more, Netflix, Prime Video and Disney+, plus, more often than not, Crunchyroll. Only 3% watch live TV, and 90% watch TV through streaming.

"Sorry, Beeb," was Chris's verdict. Live TV is over, and the way content is delivered has shifted entirely.

Anime runs through all of this. Chris called it a very, very important strand of the research. The typical woman at MCM is 18 to 24, loves anime and lives on TikTok, so plan to reach her through anime and TikTok rather than a live TV break.

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.

“I love that they have prioritised speaking directly to their audience.”

GENA-MOUR BARRETT
SENIOR SOCIAL MARKETING LEAD,
NETFLIX

The hits

The hits had one thing in common: they spoke to their audience on its own terms, and it paid off.

One was a trainer film that never once said "trainer". The streetwear brand and Nike talked about crepes, cast faces its own crowd would know and put Dizzee Rascal underneath it. The comments called it the best marketing in years.

Another was a game launch built on honesty. The developers warned players about bugs and cheaters and talked to them every day. By Cameron's account they hoped for 30,000 players and got around 400,000 on day one. Calvin said involving the audience gives them skin in the game.

The third hit was a shift: creators building the IP themselves, from Markiplier's Iron Lung to Roblox hits like Grow a Garden, with the audience already waiting.



“It's just a great example of knowing your audience, not compromising your audience, and that paying dividends.”

GENA-MOUR BARRETT
SENIOR SOCIAL MARKETING LEAD, NETFLIX

The misses

“The main reason self-deprecating content like this doesn't work is confusion. If you don't know the product, you're not going to go see it.”

CAMERON ROBERTSON
CREATOR, NICK AND CAM

The conversation turned to the misses, and what goes wrong when the marketing call comes before anyone understands the culture.

A beauty brand launched a product built on a trend without crediting the creator who'd made it popular, and the backlash was huge. A major football tournament added breaks and a longer half-time show that suited advertisers over fans. A film campaign that played on its own bad reviews didn't fill seats, because people weren't sure what they were buying.

That film raised the question of star power. Cameron said big names don't pull like they used to. Gena-mour wasn't so sure: talent still draws if the film makes sense.


“Unless you listen to what the fans want and you understand what the fans are looking for and what brought them to the game in the first place ... it's just not going to work.”
CALVIN INNES
CONSULTANT STRATEGY DIRECTOR, INNES CONSULTING

What's next

The last question was what shift will shape the next year, and the panel landed in the same place.

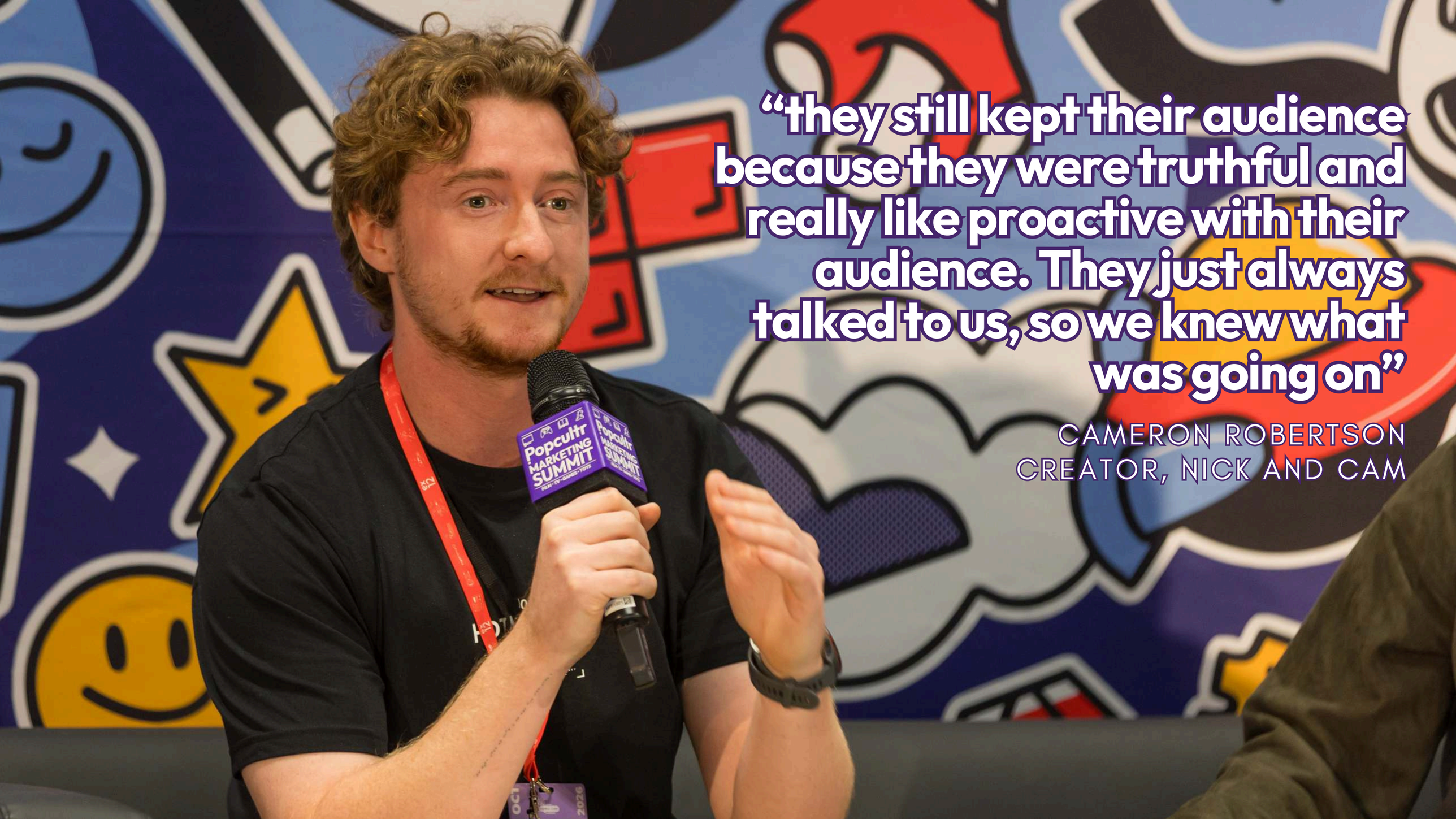
Cameron expects AI to flood the feed, and people to go looking for the opposite: live events, live streamers and real people making real things.

Gena-mour already sees a pull towards analogue hobbies on TikTok, and expects a "performance of effort", like stop motion.

Calvin backed flawed but genuine work, and was softer on AI: in a few years it's just another tool. For brands, the work that shows its making is the work that will stand out.

“For the stuff that really stands out, it's having that real human touch and that human eye.”

CALVIN INNES
CONSULTANT STRATEGY DIRECTOR, INNES CONSULTING



“they still kept their audience because they were truthful and really like proactive with their audience. They just always talked to us, so we knew what was going on”

CAMERON ROBERTSON
CREATOR, NICK AND CAM

Dani's read

The session came down to one line from Dani. Brands can't manufacture relevance, and trouble starts when the marketing decision is made ahead of cultural understanding.

Dr Pepper turning a TikToker's song into its TV jingle was Gena-mour's example of doing it well.

The fixes were practical: research where an idea came from, and build a team with diversity of thought, where everybody's got a different For You page.



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

THE POPCULTR EDIT: LONDON AND NEW YORK

The Popcultr Edit ran in both cities, with Dani Rayner hosting both: New York on 9 October, London on 23 October. London's panel came from Netflix, a creator duo and a consultancy. New York's came from anime and games consulting and Columbia's Digital Storytelling Lab.

Both rooms wanted to see the human effort. In London, Gena-mour Barrett called it the performance of effort. In New York, Tatiana Tacca's making-of beat the finished animation. Both saw people moving back to the real world, from live events and analogue hobbies in London to pop-ups and theme parks in New York. And both rooms heard pushback on AI.

“The performance of effort... will be a thing in a world where AI can do things really quickly for us.”

GENA-MOUR BARRETT, LONDON
SENIOR SOCIAL MARKETING
LEAD, NETFLIX

WHERE THE ROOMS DIFFERED

Misses. London named them: an uncredited beauty trend, the World Cup's hydration breaks and a film that leaned on its bad reviews. New York named none and turned the question into opportunities.

Scale. New York gave more weight to big physical IP worlds, like Netflix House and Disney Parks. London's hits were smaller: a word only its crowd would get, and a game team that told players the truth.

For marketers, the shared lesson: show the work behind what you make, and give fans somewhere real to go.

“audiences today really love seeing how things are made and showing that it's human-made.”

TATIANA TACCA, NEW YORK
CEO AND FOUNDER, ONI VISION



ZOE SCAMAN

THE TITHE



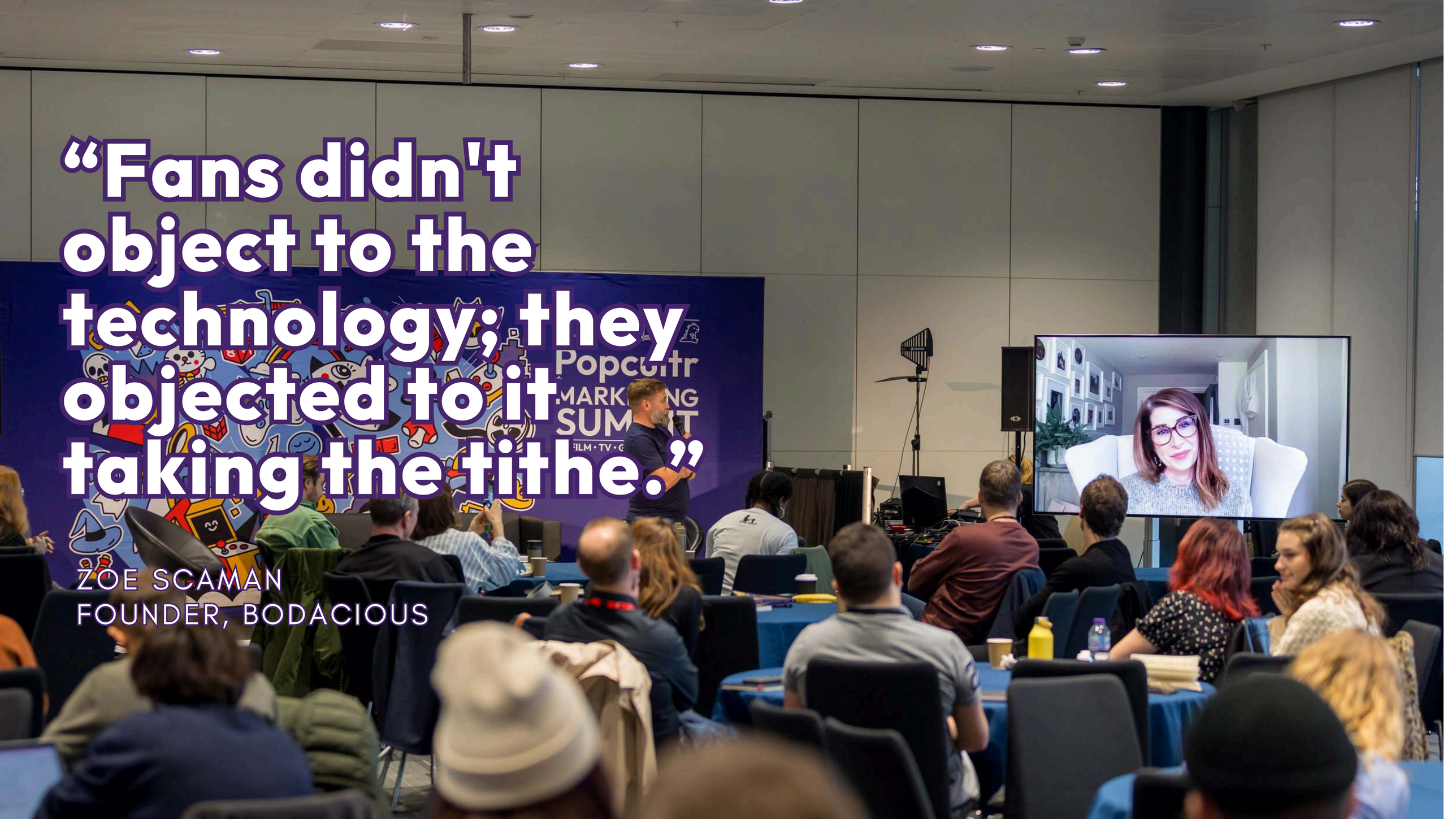
The Tithe

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.


“Fans didn't object to the technology; they objected to it taking the tithe.”
ZOE SCAMAN
FOUNDER, BODACIOUS

Fans pay a tithe

In March 2017 an anonymous writer began posting a Harry Potter fan fiction on AO3, a fan fiction archive, called All the Young Dudes. It took 20 months, ran to around 527,000 words and was free for anyone to read.

Then the readers made more of it. They wrote spin-offs, translated it chapter by chapter, printed and hand-bound their own copies and cut TikTok edits. By 2023 it had passed 9 million hits, more than anything else on the archive. Nobody was paid for any of it.

Two years ago Zoe told this summit that fans are critical infrastructure for an IP. This year's point was that free fan work is what keeps an IP alive, so it's the first thing to protect when you bring in AI.

“That is the tithe. It is time and effort given freely, and it is how fans make something of their own and how they earn their place among each other.”

ZOE SCAMAN
FOUNDER, BODACIOUS

THE TITHE.



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CLICK TO SEE THE FULL PRESENTATION ON ZOE'S SUBSTACK

The argument

“The question here isn't how much AI you can get away with, it's how much of your IP is genuinely [the fans'].”

ZOE SCAMAN
FOUNDER, BODACIOUS

1. Fans pay a tithe: the time they give freely is what IP runs on
2. Fans know where the effort should be: AI in the art gets punished, AI in translation doesn't
3. The board wants it, the fans don't trust it: there's no room for error
4. Leave something unfinished: Hatsune Miku's fans built her, and use AI where the making stays theirs
5. One IP, many activities: map how much fans make in each one
6. Don't touch the tithe: use AI behind the scenes, never in the making

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

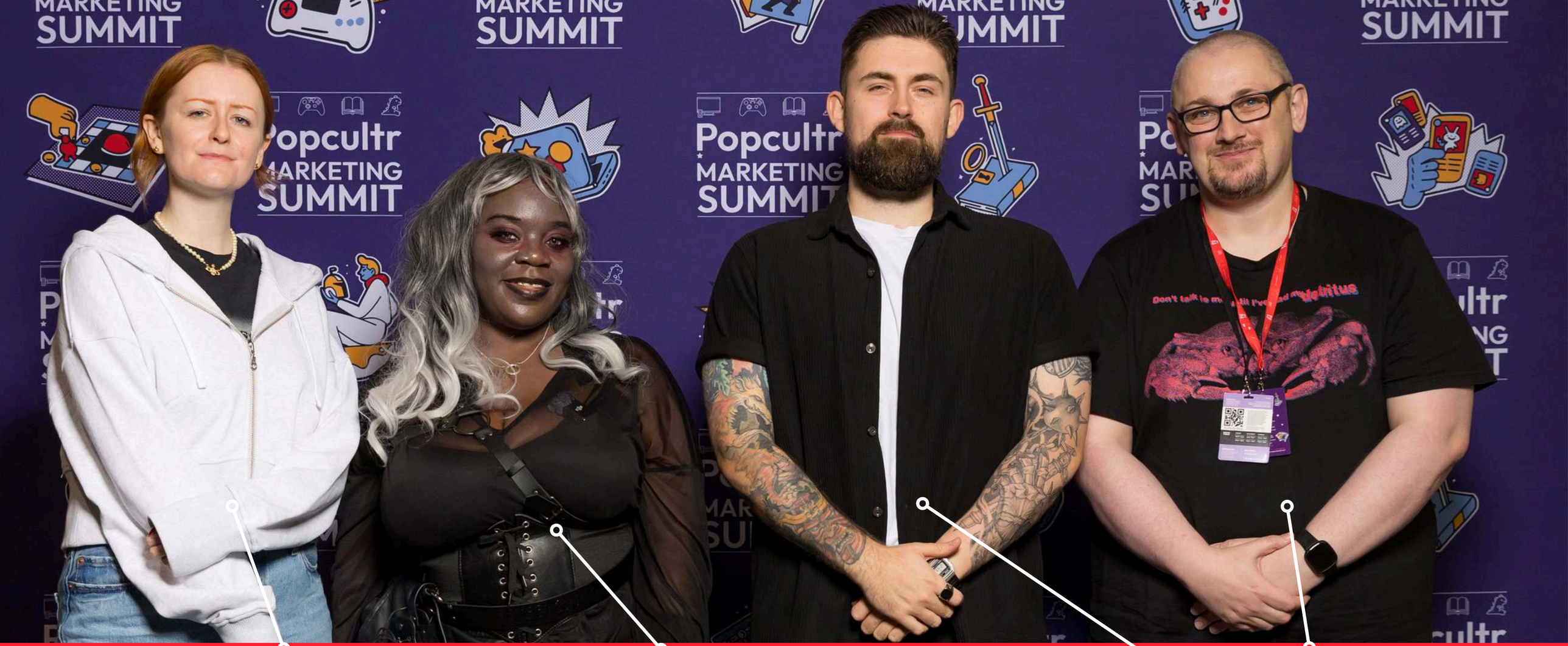
MAP FAN ACTIVITY FIRST

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.

“The breakaway star has been a fabulous man that dresses as a wizard for his streams, and he refuses to use any guns … in a million years, we could not have counted on such lunacy driving eyeballs.”

NEIL GORTON
SENIOR COMMUNITY MANAGER, FENRIS CREATIONS

Be ready for the breakout you didn't plan

The panel talked about the breakout nobody plans for. Every launch plan hopes to get streamed by a big name and go viral. Neil said "go viral" is the word he hates most.

The for you page now lets a player who's simply excited go viral without being a household name, and it's hard to predict who.

Neil's team built a first-person shooter and expected the weapon enthusiasts. The breakout star turned out to be a streamer who dresses as a wizard, refuses to use a gun and charges in with the default knife. Bigger streamers now ask him onto their streams.

Most of the panel agreed you can't predict it. Cassie added a warning from the creator side: judge a creator on how people engage, because big numbers alone mean little.



“Being front page on Twitch doesn't really mean anything. Sorry, it doesn't. It's just numbers. But how are people engaging with that content?”

CASSIE HUGHES
CREATOR, DIRECTOR AND CONSULTANT, GEEKYCASSIE

Every corner of the fandom needs a reason

The conversation turned to keeping a long-running fandom. League has run for around 17 years and patches every two weeks. Not every patch excites everyone, and Lisa said it doesn't have to. A fandom that deep has corners, each waiting for its own thing: a game mode, a champion, a skin. For marketers, that means planning for each corner of a fandom as its own audience, while keeping one story for the whole.

Neil has spent most of his career inheriting communities. Even a new game arrives with players from the last one, and the work is proving it deserves their time.

“Now I'm starting to see a rise of people that are learning League and being bad at League, and people really love to see that.”

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

“My community do not care about the specs. They're like, how light is it to hold?”

CASSIE HUGHES
CREATOR, DIRECTOR AND CONSULTANT, GEEKYCASSIE

Give creators the time you want back

On creator time, the problem is simple. Brands want creators to give a game their time, and don't always give creators any. Cassie said a review code (early access to the game) that arrives the day before launch, or on the day, means she can't make anything she's proud of in the window the brand is measuring. She'll often play it a month later, long after the report's been written.

She also said brands pay the same for short form as for a two-hour stream, and briefs miss what audiences care about. Her community doesn't want the specs. They want to know how light it is to hold.

The panel agreed straight away: respect a creator's time as much as a player's. Neil has pushed for NDAs and codes two weeks early, though he admitted it's a gamble when builds change late.



“You've got Resident Evil, and it doesn't so much belong to the company as it does to the folks you see downstairs walking around as these obscure characters, and you've just got to understand that the game belongs to them.”

NEIL GORTON

SENIOR COMMUNITY MANAGER, FENRIS CREATIONS

Know them before you need them

Next came the risk of tying a game to one big creator. When one of the main faces of a hit shooter moved on, people assumed the game was dying. Lisa said the risk runs both ways: some creators get stuck on the one game their channel is built on, and the passion goes.

Neil's answer was patience. He spends hours in creators' chats, often on games that aren't his, so he knows them before it's time to work together. He called it contractually obligated stalking. The point is to know why an audience would care before backing a creator.

Cassie said this scouting sits with community managers, so cutting those roles costs you the creators too. When the team behind a game she loved went, the Discord emptied.

“I much prefer as a community manager taking so much time out of my day or week in going through channels and finding someone who seems to be authentically having fun with the game they're playing, even if it's not our game.”

NEIL GORTON
SENIOR COMMUNITY MANAGER, FENRIS CREATIONS


“Finger in the air: ‘that influencer has a really big audience, let's throw all of our budget behind getting that person to play the game.’ Why?”
LISA MARIE
UK & NORDICS COMMUNITY LEAD, LEAGUE OF LEGENDS, RIOT GAMES
Popcultr
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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

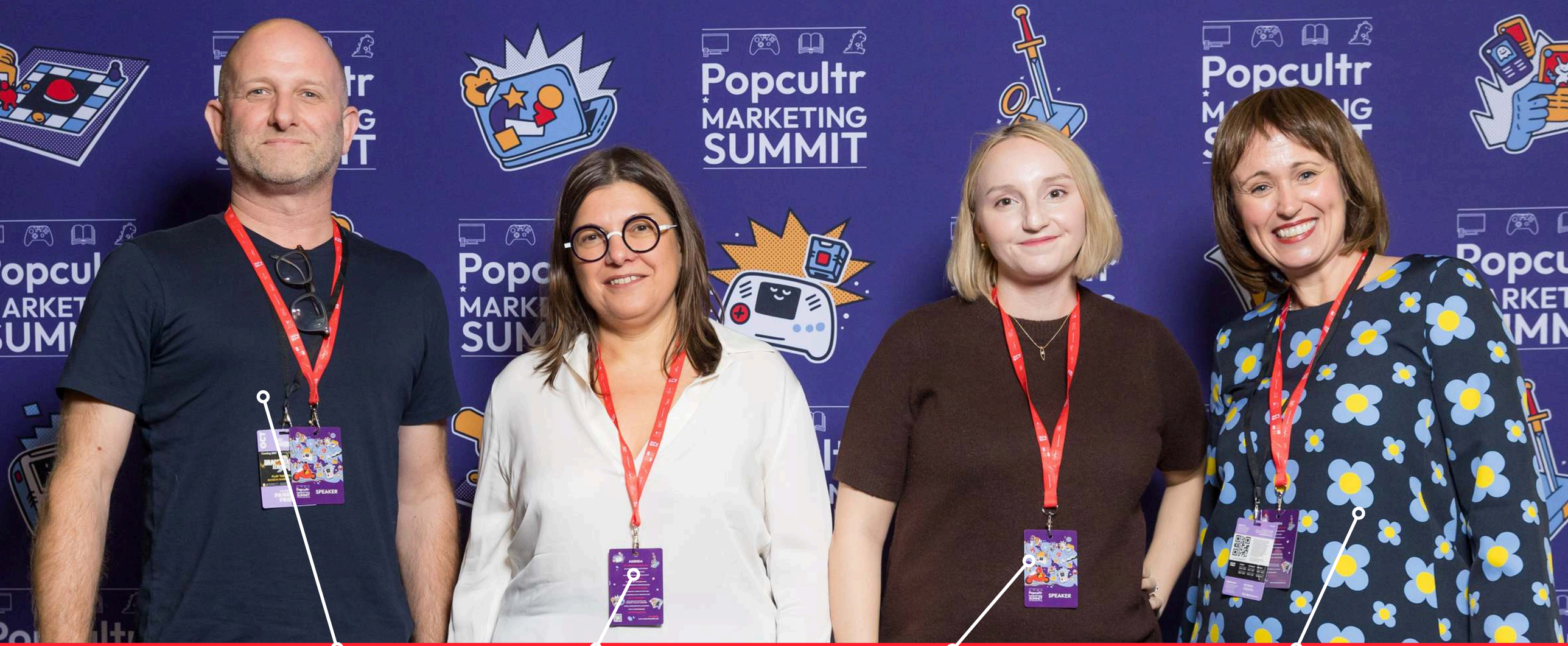
GIVE CREATORS TIME

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.

“Every time we look at a potential IP, we think about in the world of that IP, what would be the role for the AA? Which might not always be obvious.”

TILLY PAYNE
SENIOR BRAND MARKETING MANAGER, THE AA

Join the story

The panel talked about how a brand earns its place in someone else's story. Nadege started with authenticity: use the IP's codes without damaging them, and extend an experience fans are already living. Tilly's team begins every IP conversation the same way. In the world of this film or game, what would the AA actually do? In Jurassic World, full of jeopardy and crushed Jeeps, keeping your car moving matters a lot.

Someone once described it to her as having your photo taken with a celebrity. You look cooler for being in the picture, but the celebrity still has to be front and centre.

The strongest version is a shared human truth, like Pringles and Mario. A single Birds Eye insight led a whole board game campaign.



“You can't force it on anybody. It has to be truly open and collaborative.”

RICHARD BARNES
CEO, BRIDGE

Start with the why

The conversation turned to what both sides need from the start. Richard runs BRIDGE, which sits between the big IP owners and the brands they partner with, and his advice was blunt. First, both sides need to be open about what they're really trying to achieve as a business. Don't assume it's sales, awareness or engagement.

Next, dig into the audience crossover, and walk away if it isn't there. Then keep talking for the year or 18 months a campaign runs, because priorities move.

On pitches, the panel agreed. Julia gets around 400 a month at Hasbro. The ones that land are tailored, with audience data and something fresh, from a partner who's put themselves in the brand's shoes. Richard boiled it down to one word. Why?

“Why are you coming to us? ... Make me understand why it's good, and also why it's good for you and why it could be good for me.”

RICHARD BARNES
CEO, BRIDGE



“A good partnership usually is 100% commitment, 80% alignment because it's a compromise. There is always a compromise.”

NADEGE DUBANT
GLOBAL LICENSING & PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR, DANONE

“When I joined Danone four years ago, the way the company was doing brand partnership was basically slapping a logo character on the pack... What we're trying to do now is develop shorter campaigns, but with a much broader impact.”

NADEGE DUBANT
GLOBAL LICENSING & PARTNERSHIPS
DIRECTOR, DANONE

Fewer, better, deeper

The panel talked about what a partnership in packaged goods used to mean: a character on the pack and some borrowed fame. Nadege said that era is over at Danone. The aim now is shorter campaigns with a broader impact: more places people meet it, a bigger story and the consumer at the centre. Her rule is fewer, better.

The product itself becomes the collectible, with characters on individual bottles. And it starts with the concept, like Kärcher and Ghostbusters, built on the idea that cleaning is hunting ghosts of dirt.

Richard sees the same from the studio side. Studios are choosing fewer partners and helping them go deeper.


“We want someone to go, ‘Huh, The AA did that,’ because it makes people and different groups who've never considered us look at us in fresh eyes.”
TILLY PAYNE
SENIOR BRAND MARKETING MANAGER, THE AA
Popcultr
MARKETING SUMMIT
FILM · TV · GAMES · TOYS

Keep the fans warm

The conversation turned to what happens after launch. Hasbro sits on both kinds of fandom. Monopoly is in 85% of households, by Hasbro's figure, while Dungeons and Dragons and Magic: The Gathering have smaller, deeper fandoms that drive the most engagement. So Hasbro works the opposite way to fewer, deeper, with lots of test-and-learns with brands. A Dungeons and Dragons campaign with Domino's in Brazil, planned for six weeks, was gone in about ten days.

Richard qualified it. Test-and-learn works because Hasbro has evergreen brands, and for many studios everything hinges on one weekend. He also asked whether selling out was a success or a problem. Hasbro is still assessing it.

Tilly wants to keep fans warm after the big launch moments, with budget that runs past launch. She was honest it's still a work in progress.

“The next step for us is moving from these tentpole fireworks that we shoot up to more of a culture ecosystem, where we are building relationships with fans that we then continue on and we keep warm.”

TILLY PAYNE
SENIOR BRAND MARKETING MANAGER, THE AA

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

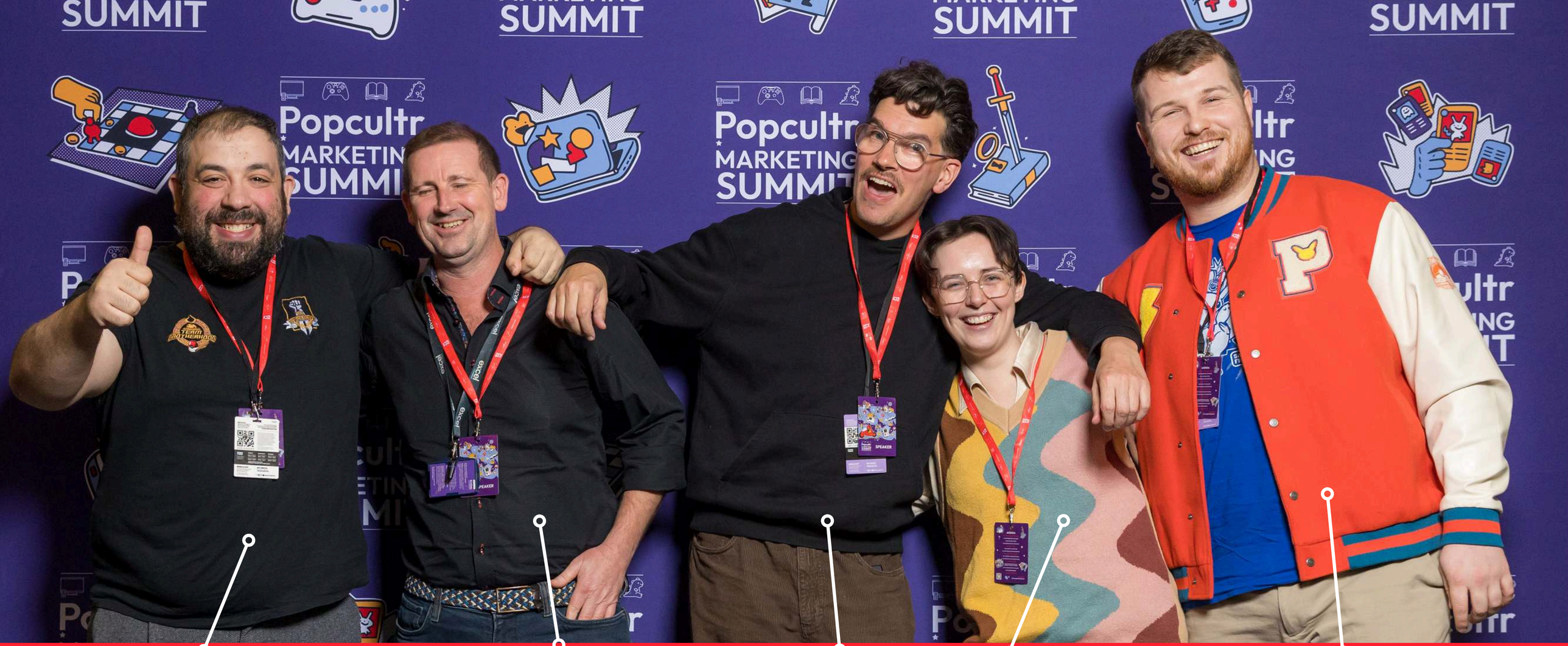
DO FEWER, DEEPER DEALS

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.

“I can tell you right now, I had 50 customers last week playing a game. Those 50 customers will be with me six months later, and that's probably the biggest part.”

MICHAEL LOIZOU
DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, THE BROTHERHOOD GAMES

The shop is the third space

The conversation started with the shop. The high street has filled up with trading card shops in the seven years since Michael Loizou opened his first, and the draw is the room as much as the stock. His players said the bright lights of a high street shop made them feel safer than a rented hall. They noticed the clean toilets, the wooden tables and the comfortable chairs. Then ten people sit down to play, and before long there are fifty.

The panel agreed it's a sacred space. Brands can't walk in and sell hard. The staff who ask after players' dogs and brothers are what keep them coming back, so work with them.

Michael's advice to marketers: go to the local game store, talk to people there and build from the ground up. Fifty players this week are still there six months later.



“It matters. It is not just rectangles, cardboard rectangles. It means so much more.”

LEE ESPOSITO
CONTENT CREATOR, LEYLINE NEXUS

“It's not just a product; it's a repeatable social event. The people that are involved in using TCGs are always thinking about what they're going to be doing next.”

LEE ESPOSITO
CONTENT CREATOR, LEYLINE NEXUS

The game is a shared language

Lee Esposito has played Magic: The Gathering for 30 years. For him, a card game is a repeatable social event: players are always thinking about the next game and the next set. It's also a shared language, and the community has supported his mental health.

On content, the panel agreed on one thing above all. While money's tight, fans are turning on creators opening pile after pile of packs and influencer boxes nobody could afford. Too much of it does damage, so brief creators on how the cards play. What lands is how a card could work and the heart behind the game.

Lee's advice for brands: let creators do what they're good at. His game theory work did better than the straight event coverage he was asked to make.



“We're taking our operational teams, doing play and learn initiatives with them, so they actually get to understand what the game is.”

IAN SENIOR
HEAD OF CONSUMER EXHIBITIONS, EXCEL LONDON

“What the wider games industry can learn from tabletop is that the community is part of the product that you're selling.”

LOU JONES
HEAD OF STRATEGY, YRS TRULY

Kindness is a strategy

The panel talked about how you market to a community that's part of what you're selling. Lou Jones said a marketing plan for it needs creativity and data, plus kindness, which Lou called a real strategic angle. Do events start at a time people can get to? Is the space accessible in every sense? Is anyone talking to the players?

Lou's best research has come from sitting down to play Magic and Yu-Gi-Oh with creators and asking why they love the game. Ian said Excel does the same with its own staff, through play and learn sessions.

On patience, the panel agreed. It takes year-long strategies built on showing up consistently, and the players who find the right shop are still there months later. Marketing here is a long-term buy.


“People are not just investing into something to win anymore... they're investing into something that is their own time. And time is something that we can't buy back. It is the most invaluable thing that we've got in our lives.”
MICHAEL LOIZOU
DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, THE BROTHERHOOD GAMES

The slow build wins

Ian Senior has watched card tournaments at Excel London grow from small Magic events 12 to 15 years ago to a run of major tournaments. For a long time, he said, venues treated card games as filler, tucked in a corner. That's changed.

The conversation came back to time. Ripping open a foil pack is instant gratification. Building a collection is the deferred kind, and that's what keeps people hooked. Ian had seen the same in knitting and other collecting hobbies. Players look at their collection every day and want to add to it.

Players pay their own way to tournaments, often instead of a holiday. Many stay free to watch, which Ian picked out as something cards do better than almost any other event. It's a cheap way in for the curious.

“When we consider time, the immediate gratification that is taken from opening a foil pack and then the deferred gratification of building a collection over time is really, really important.”

IAN SENIOR
HEAD OF CONSUMER EXHIBITIONS, EXCEL LONDON


“If there's anything I would say that the wider games marketing industry can take from the TCG community, just sit down and talk to people like people, because at the end of the day, that's who's buying your product.”
LOU JONES
HEAD OF STRATEGY, YRS TRULY
Popcultr MARKETING SUMMIT
Popcultr MARKETING SUMMIT

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

CARDS ON THE TABLE: LONDON AND NEW YORK

Cards on the Table ran in both cities: New York on 9 October, London on 23 October.

London's panel came from the shop, the creator, the agency and the venue. New York's came from game design, publishing, industry analysis and player experience. London talked mostly about how to reach players. New York talked mostly about how to make a game and keep it going.

Both rooms agreed on four things.

Play is social first: Lee called a card game a repeatable social event, and in New York Joost said play is always just an excuse to hang out with other people. The local store is the centre of it, a sacred space in London, and in New York Brian compared the people who run them to people who run churches. Players keep thinking about the game between games. And licensed IP is pouring in, as Michael put it in London, so a brand's card game now has to earn its place on a busy table.

“Other destinations, other cities or venues, have largely seen [trading card games] as filler material. It's been bunged in a corner somewhere. Now that tide has really, really changed.”

IAN SENIOR, LONDON
HEAD OF CONSUMER EXHIBITIONS, EXCEL LONDON

WHERE THE ROOMS DIFFERED

Money. London talked about the fan's wallet: fans have turned on showy pack openings and influencer boxes while money is tight. New York talked about the business's wallet: speculators, and launches backed by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Why now. Lou linked the boom to stress, trust and nostalgia. New York linked it to screens: young people are tired of them and want to be together in person.

Collecting. London saw it as deferred gratification that keeps people hooked. New York saw it as a form of play in its own right.

Events. Ian focused on big tournaments that stay free to watch. New York focused on everyday organised play.

Both rooms valued the long term from different sides. London said marketing has to be built over years, and New York said keeping a game going after launch is the hard part. Either way, budget past launch.

“Younger generations are grabbing onto these analog forms of entertainment because they're robloxed out.”

JOOST VAN DREUNEN, NEW YORK WRITER, SUPERJOOST PLAYLIST



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.

“It's more about creating more experiential activities, activations to draw people out. I think just the film in itself is not necessarily enough.”

CHEE KEONG CHEUNG
CEO, ACTION XTREME

Make the film an event

The panel talked about how to make a film an event. Working both sides, as a filmmaker and a distributor, Chee started from a simple point. Cinema is communal, and the film by itself isn't always enough to get people out of the house. There's a generation craving a room that laughs and cries together.

His own zombie war film had very little money behind it. Traditional distribution didn't see a cinema release in it, so he went to exhibitors and sent zombies out to cinemas across the country. In some it outsold a big studio title. Carla's caveat was that stunts like that are hard to scale.

Premium formats open the same door. His point-of-view action film, shot on GoPros, got a 4DX release (moving seats, wind and water) after a year of talks with Cineworld, so start format conversations early. The Odyssey has done well in IMAX.



“There's definitely a generation of people who are craving community. They're craving the shared experience of not sitting home on their sofa by themselves and watching a film, but having that moment of sharing it with a room, crying at the same time, laughing at the same time.”

CARLA BRADFORD
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING - INTERNATIONAL, CINEWORLD

“The audience will find you. If you provide the right product, the audience are there already.”

CARLA BRADFORD
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING - INTERNATIONAL, CINEWORLD

The audience programmes the cinema

The panel talked about how much fans now decide what gets shown. Cineworld's posts filled up with fans asking for The Amazing Digital Circus, a YouTube series, so the team got it onto the big screen and it sold out. Fan comments now get films booked, so put that demand in front of exhibitors: an early Heated Rivalry post was screenshotted before any announcement, and the official one is near 300,000 views. Obsession held its screens past the usual drop on social buzz, and came back in 4DX.

Carla said that with the right product, the audience will find you. Deborah wasn't so sure: most films still have to be discovered.



"We ended up sending zombies out to cinemas across the country... I think in some cinemas we were outselling some big studio title."

CHEE KEONG CHEUNG
CEO, ACTION XTREME

“Those screenings on the Sunday… sold the most because we eventised them, because we gave them that little bit extra, and most of it was us asking them to do the work.”

CARLA BRADFORD
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING - INTERNATIONAL, CINEWORLD

Give them something to take home

The conversation turned to giving people something more than the film. The simplest idea cost very little. Cineworld re-released Shrek in 4DX and turned some screenings into a Swamp Screening, with fans invited to dress up and quote along. Occupancy was around 60% higher than the other Shrek 4DX screenings that weekend, on a normally quiet Sunday. It cost so little because, as Carla put it, the fans did most of the work.

Carla added merch. In 11 years at Cineworld, she had never seen people care about popcorn buckets. Now it's the first question every time a film goes on sale. A 55cm Godzilla popcorn bucket drew a million organic views on TikTok. Her comparison was a gig: you don't leave without a T-shirt.

Small voices, real reach

On reach, the question was how to fill seats in the first few days. The opening weekend still decides almost everything. Chee explained that cinemas book Friday to Thursday, and Monday's numbers decide whether a film keeps its screens. An influencer screening on its own isn't enough without a plan for when to go and how to keep it going.

The panel agreed that micro-influencers are worth more than their follower counts suggest. They gave the best direct conversion and reach niche audiences for less. Someone with 2,000 followers at a preview screening is talking to exactly the people you're trying to reach.

Deborah's caveat was that it varies by film. Films like Michael were screened to influencers before critics, The Odyssey went the other way, and she called it horses for courses.

“Just doing the influencer screening isn't enough. It's about trying to build that strategy as well. When do you go? How do you sustain that process?”

CHEE KEONG CHEUNG
CEO, ACTION XTREME

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.

“You think about MrBeast 10-15 years ago. MrBeast came along and took the audience away from people like CBBC, where I was working at the time.”

JO REDFERN
SVP DIGITAL, FOUR TREES MEDIA

Creators hold the relationship now

The conversation started with how the audience moved. TV used to own the relationship. Then YouTube and the platforms that followed cut out the middle. Creators went straight to fans, and the audience went with them. Jo watched it happen from inside kids' TV.

What creators had was closeness: a phone screen away, so they can see what's working and serve it far faster than a commissioning round ever could. Josh said they're their own distribution networks now, selling IP back to TV and streamers. For a brand, that makes creators a channel to plan and pay for, and a source of new IP.

Warrior Cats is Jo's proof. It has run for 23 years and 96 books without a film to carry it, kept going by fans making things on Discord, TikTok and YouTube. Jo called them a marketing army, though the same fans will sometimes come after you.

“Twitch lives and dies on the chat that runs down the screen.”

JOSH BLOOM
SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER, TWITCH

Viewers who feel heard come back

On live, the question was what keeps an audience coming back. On Twitch the chat runs down the side of the screen, and a creator who ignores it won't last. Viewers who feel acknowledged, and feel they can shape what they're watching, come back and support the creator most.

Josh, from Twitch, said that matters more as AI makes people less sure what's real, so live content carries more weight. Use Twitch's own test when you pick creators: do they talk to camera and let the comments change what they make?



“Normally you would have needed a movie or some kind of broadcast-led strategy to make an IP sustain for 25 years. What made Warrior Cats sustain was the fans.”

JO REDFERN
SVP DIGITAL, FOUR TREES MEDIA

“The worst thing you can do is go to a creator, get them in early, get their feedback, and then you just didn't do anything that they said.”

DAN SETO
CREATOR RELATIONS MANAGER, EU & LATAM, ELECTRONIC ARTS

Bring them in when you can listen

The panel talked about when to bring creators in, and this was where they came together most. Creators speak for a brand to their community, and for their community back to the brand. That's why they're valuable, and why they'll sometimes come after you. There's no one-size-fits-all.

Timing comes down to objectives. A creator told about a project a year out, with nothing to see, is left in the lurch. Asking for feedback you then ignore is worse, and asking too late is just as bad.

Respect matters too. Jo's team commissioned fan creators for the new official Warrior Cats channel, paid them, gave a rough brief and left the rest to them. Josh's test was love, money or fame: know which matters to a creator before you ask.



“In the era of AI, people are questioning what they see more and more... And one of the joys of Twitch is it's real.”

JOSH BLOOM
SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER, TWITCH

Real beats polished, and brands choose who gets seen

The panel talked about what feels real to an audience, and what comes next. Josh called it the common theme of the whole conference: do it in a way that's real to the creator. One streamer reads his sponsor slots badly on purpose, and his community loves it. Kids have a built-in spam filter and will spot a sales pitch a mile off.

On the future, the answers went different ways. Josh pointed to creators putting on their own shows, with Spain and France leading. Jo was excited by new formats like Chicken Shop Date changing how stories get told. Dan was warier. Vanity metrics will matter less, and rage-based content and misinformation are muddying the internet. Brands with budgets act as gatekeepers, he said, and who they back shapes who gets seen.

“We, as brands, have a social responsibility... Because in a lot of ways, we are gatekeepers. Some companies more than others have budget to platform certain creators and put more creators in front of communities who might have not had an opportunity otherwise.”

DAN SETO
CREATOR RELATIONS MANAGER, EU & LATAM, ELECTRONIC ARTS



“Sometimes we don't involve creators... If you overextend and work with creators a bit too much, it can feel a little bit fake to a community.”

DAN SETO
CREATOR RELATIONS MANAGER, EU & LATAM, ELECTRONIC ARTS

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

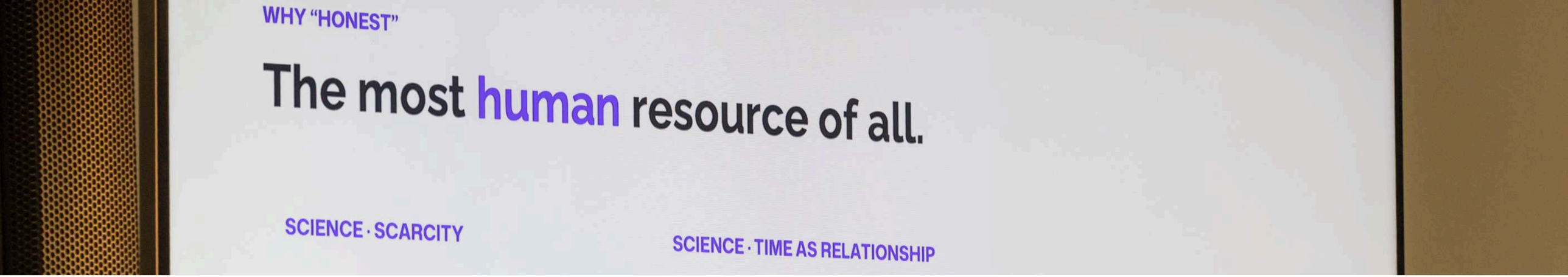
Audiences spot a script a mile off. The brands paying creators shape who gets seen next, so pick who you back carefully

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.

Easy to measure, hard to understand

Lea opened with what she calls the Hard-Easy Effect. Some things have become so easy to measure that they've become hard to understand. Brands are swimming in data, but data isn't insight, and if you don't understand people, you can't serve them.

The cost shows up in how people see brands. In the Science of Desire study with Havas, Lea's team found 84% of brands are seen as indifferent. She called that an opportunity for this room, because nothing recreates a real experience like pop culture.

Buying attention means buying a view without owning or earning a return. You rent it, it doesn't compound your brand, and it depends on what Lea called the algorithm's mood that morning.

After the broadcast and attention economies, she said, we're now in the relational economy.

“What is the point of buying attention if you're just there buying a view without actually owning and earning a return?... You borrow something, you rent something. You don't compound your brand.”

LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS


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

“Conquer the filter, and then they will watch the Real Housewives for four hours. They will play a game for 40 hours. They will keep collecting your IP tangibly.”

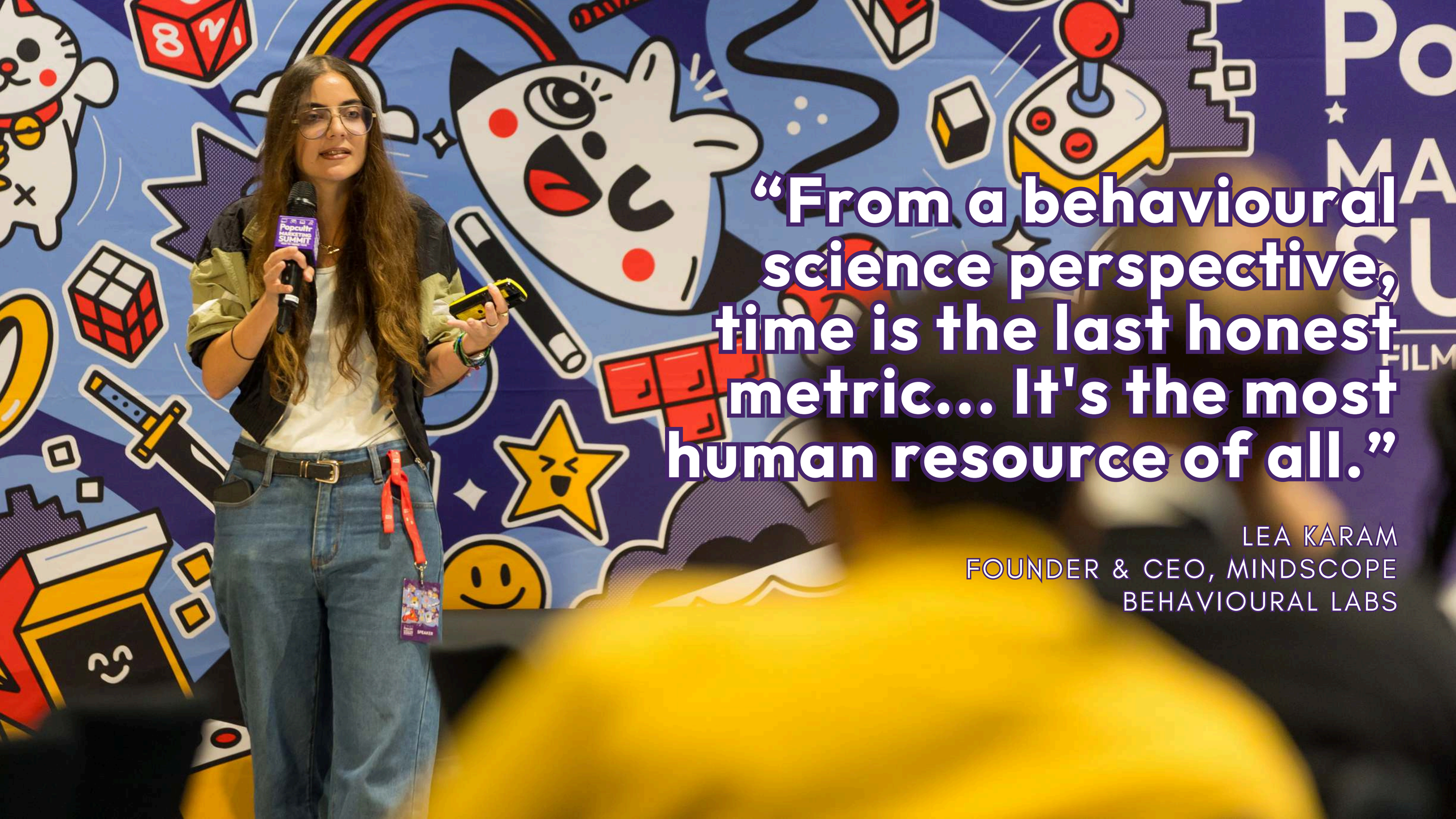
LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

Win the filter

The shrinking attention span is a myth, Lea said. You can't really put a number on it, for reasons that include neurodiversity. What has changed is the filtering span.

People have developed the brain's bouncer: a sharper sense of what to let in and what to keep out. That's a gift for pop culture, which is full of symbols people already know and trust. Get past the filter and the person who skips a six-second ad will watch the Real Housewives for four hours or play a game for forty.

So the job is earning permission. Brands that get that end up in the right rooms and partnerships, instead of chasing shorter and shorter content.


“From a behavioural science perspective, time is the last honest metric... It's the most human resource of all.”
LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

Time is the last honest metric

Why time? Because it's the one resource nobody can make more of. You can get money back. You can't get a second back. Research Lea cited, from Mogilner and Aaker in the Journal of Consumer Research, found people read attention as a transaction and time as a relationship.

But only time given counts. Time spent is the autoplay, the infinite scroll, the default setting. Time given is anticipated and chosen, and it compounds. Behavioural science calls it costly signalling: when people give something up to choose you, they care more.

And it can't be faked. People can say they love a brand, but their hours tell the truth. Lea pointed to the 82% at MCM in May who claimed the fan label outright, against her own finding that only 33% feel properly rewarded by their favourite brands (Mindscope Data Pulse, Q3 2026). That gap is the opportunity.

“There's a big difference between the time that is spent, like the autoplay, the infinite scroll, the default setting, and the time that is actually given.”

LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS



“Why scream at people when they're so close to you? They're your fans. They're here. Why scream at them? Build a community. Cultivate them.”

LEA KARAM

FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

“The moment can spike and decay… But a ritual compounds.”

LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

Moments spike. Rituals compound

The brain isn't a deliberation engine, Lea explained. It's a prediction engine, built on the symbols you loved and how things made you feel. Time given gets written into that memory, which is why a moment spikes and fades while a ritual keeps building.

She set out four stages. Anticipation, because wanting and liking are different, so the build-up and the release rhythm matter. Participation, where fans help make the thing. Ritual: the weekly drop, the rewatch. And the return, the proof the first three worked.

That's what fandom is, Lea said: what giving time looks like. Plan for the next time as well as this one, and look for odd partners. Her prediction: the weirdest collaborations will be the best in 2027.

A trend is a symptom

Lea ran a show of hands. Labubu, Dubai chocolate, run clubs, matcha, quiet luxury, sober curious: cultural shifts? Plenty of hands went up. None of them are culture, she said. They're all trends.

The trend is the symptom, and culture is the tension behind it. Labubu is collecting as belonging. Run clubs are connection against loneliness. Quiet luxury is the shift from showing to knowing, driven by the cost of living.

Her own research backs it up. The Great Brand Reset found people moving from public feeds to private spaces. The Alchemy of Consideration found 11 signals showing the pause is consideration, not a leak in the funnel. So brief against the tension, and in 2027, she said, what people pause on will matter more than what they click.

“The trend is the symptom. Culture is the tension behind it.”

LEA KARAM
FOUNDER & CEO, MINDSCOPE BEHAVIOURAL LABS

The new scorecard

Lea finished on the slide she wanted everyone to photograph: the marketing scorecard, rewritten line by line

Hours given, not impressions: high impressions often just mean choice overload. Measure the hours people give to your brand.

Cultural return, not reach: anyone can get reach for a moment, but it doesn't compound. Look for private groups, communities, live experiences and IP that can stretch.

Participation, not engagement rates: the remixing and sharing that turn content into culture. Lea cited 63% of brand content spreading in DMs and a 47% conversion lift for native branded entertainment (Mindscope Data Pulse, Q3 2026).

Observed time, not claimed love: people don't always do what they say in surveys. What they do with their hours is the truth.

A ritual, not a viral brief: 'We want to go viral' isn't a brief. Work out the ritual, the behaviour and the audience first, and then it can go viral and stick.

Homework for Monday: strike any metric that's bought, borrowed, autoplayed or interrupted. Map where your communities really are and how you reward them.

The plan for 2027: put human behaviour, and time given, at the top of it

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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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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