

belong

Popcultr MARKETING SUMMIT

NYCC POPUP OCT 9 2026

Summit Report

OCTOBER 2026

POWERED BY: experience12 the popcultr marketing agency

Foreword

We ran two About Time events this October: a pop-up on the show floor at New York Comic Con on 9 October, and London inside MCM London Comic Con two weeks later. Four panels, 12 panellists. Fandom, then cards, then real life, then the Popcultr Edit.

New York was the smaller day, so this is the shorter report. It's what the four panels told us, the line from each that still sticks, how New York's Cards on the Table compared with London's, and six takes from New York, each pointing to the London discussion point it backs up.

I moderated the in real life panel. I genuinely couldn't resist being a part of a panel which ended up having over a century of accumulated wisdom represented on it. A post can reach millions of people. Why do companies still build at a show like this one? Three people with about a century of this work between them gave the same answer: the room gives you time, the feed gives you a glance, and if you're not nurturing your fans, someone else is. Our own clients still ask why we market to people who'll turn up anyway. This report is the answer.

This is a homage to a great set of contributors at one of the biggest cons in the world.

Chris

Contents

Introduction:	Dispatch from New York	3
Panel 1:	Fandom Doesn't Stand Still	4 - 7
Panel 2:	Cards on the Table	8 - 11
Panel 3:	IRL: The Feed Is Not Enough	12 - 15
Panel 4:	The Popcultr Edit: New York	16 - 19
London:	Six Discussion Points	20
Takeaways:	Six New York takes	21 - 27
Thanks	Thanks and Acknowledgements	28
Contact:	Want this for your fans?	29

Dispatch from New York

Popcultr Marketing Summit pop-up · New York Comic Con · Friday 9 October 2026 · Javits Center

It wasn't a full summit, and this isn't a full write-up. It's what New York told us, session by session, and what it set up for London.

The idea behind the pop-up apart from expanding the summit onto another continent is to see where thinking converges and diverges and to start to see what lessons can be applied through mutual learning across the Atlantic.

Several of the ideas that ran through the London day were represented here first. Some London ideas were challenged here too, and we've kept those challenges in.





Moderator:
Matthew Sullivan-Pond
Publisher
MSP In Real Life / Den of Geek

Panellist:
Elizabeth Minkel
Editor in Chief
Fansplaining

Panellist:
Kim Hernandez
Social Media Manager & Strategist
Freelance

Panellist:
Calvin Innes
Consultant Strategy Director
Innes Consulting



FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL



“So right now, to be a fan, it's probably better than it's ever been.”

CALVIN INNES
CONSULTANT STRATEGY DIRECTOR, INNES CONSULTING

New York opened on fandom, and on what brands keep getting wrong about it. Matthew Sullivan-Pond of Den of Geek hosted Elizabeth Minkel of Fansplaining, social media strategist Kim Hernandez and Calvin Innes of Innes Consulting.

Too many brands rent a fandom for a campaign instead of earning a place in it, and treat one big IP as one audience when it holds many fandoms that want different things. Fans are smart and quick to spot a cash grab. The fixes were practical: talk to fans before the plan is written, get the small, knowing touches right, let people make something, and know when to step back. Calvin closed on an upbeat note: it's probably never been a better time to be a fan.

“they've not earned the right to be there, it still feels performative”

CALVIN INNES
CONSULTANT STRATEGY DIRECTOR,
INNES CONSULTING

Earn the right

Calvin said a lot of what gets called fandom marketing is really renting someone else's fandom for a while. Brands rush in for reach and sales and skip learning how fans talk and where they spend their time. Even a partnership that performs well can look like a cash grab.

Earning the right can mean six months to a year with no real return, and Calvin admitted that's a hard sell. Speak to fans before the media plan exists, and speak to plenty of them. Kim and Elizabeth warned that the loudest voices are often a small minority.

For brands: put fan research in the plan before the money is committed, and listen past the noise.

Small touches

Kim said fans know their fandoms inside out and notice the small things. An insider joke in a caption still lands harder than the biggest screen. Elizabeth is still talking about a con activation that handed out sheet music for a character's song.

Calvin wanted stands where people make something, not just watch. Elizabeth's advice was to know when to back off: fan work pulls new people in when the brand isn't watching. Give fans the tools and the room, and keep your own official line alongside it.

For brands: spend on the small, knowing touch, and leave fans space to do the rest.

“as a fan, I will still freak out if a brand that I enjoy or a celebrity that I know has acknowledged something that is an insider joke.”

KIM HERNANDEZ
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER & STRATEGIST, FREELANCE





MODERATOR
Sam Stone
Host/Contributor
Den of Geek

PANELLIST
Joost van Dreunen
Writer
SuperJoost Playlist

PANELLIST
Brian David-Marshall
Co-founder / Chief Creative Officer
Mothership Games

PANELLIST
Ben Goodman
Director of Player Experience
Elestrals

CARDS ON THE TABLE



“play is always just an excuse to hang out with other people, either inside of a game or around it.”

JOOST VAN DREUNEN
WRITER, SUPERJOOST PLAYLIST

Sam Stone of Den of Geek hosted three people who make, study and run card games: Brian David-Marshall of Mothership Games, Joost van Dreunen of the SuperJoost Playlist and Ben Goodman of Elestrals.

Joost put the boom down to screens: younger players are tired of them and want to be in the same room. Brian's test for a fun game is whether people stop checking their phones. Ben said the first game has to show a puzzle players want to come back and solve. The panel agreed the hobby has room for players and collectors, that keeping a game going is harder than launching it, and that the stores hold it all together.

Collecting is play

“as long as you're not, I think, gating playability behind that collectability, I think it's great.”

BRIAN DAVID-MARSHALL
CO-FOUNDER / CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, MOTHERSHIP GAMES

Brian sees two kinds of card store: ones where people come every week to play and meet friends, and ones where people rip open boxes. Ben split fans three ways: players, collectors, and speculators who buy to sell on.

Brian argued that collecting is a form of play. One big card game dipped after launch and grew again by running collecting events. At Gen Con he watched a mother and daughter skip the rules and spend half an hour opening packs and trading. His one condition: rare cards shouldn't decide who gets to play.

For brands: treat players, collectors and traders as separate audiences, and don't lock the fun behind the rarest product.

Keep it going

Ben said launching a card game can feel easier than keeping one going. A big launch brings fanfare and money. Keeping a game alive takes more effort for less, and when games fade, store owners ask why they should bother with the next one.

Brian called the stores the backbone. The people who run them hold a community together, and his team treats them as partners and plans three or four sets ahead. Joost warned that as a niche goes mainstream, early fans push back, and that's a conversation to have.

For brands: budget for the second year, and treat the venues where fans meet as partners.

“I believe that the people who run these stores are people who run churches.”

BRIAN DAVID-MARSHALL
CO-FOUNDER / CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, MOTHERSHIP GAMES



MODERATOR
Chris Whittle
Founder & CEO
Experience12

PANELLIST
Mike Monello
Partner, Creative Director
Campfire

PANELLIST
Stu Levy
Founder & CEO
TOKYOPOP

PANELLIST
Mike D'Alessio
President
Promo360 Group

IRL: THE FEED IS NOT ENOUGH



“if you pull it off and you do it right, there's nothing like the relationship that you get with fans that have shown up in person”

STU LEVY
FOUNDER & CEO, TOKYOPOP

Chris Whittle of Experience12 asked why entertainment and games companies still build at shows when reach online is easy to buy. With him were Mike D'Alessio, who has worked New York Comic Con since it opened, Stu Levy of TOKYOPOP and Mike Monello of Campfire.

The answer was depth over reach. A booth gets a response an ad can't, and events create the emotion that makes a memory. Stu said the old argument about whether a booth is worth the cost is over. The panel's advice: speak the fandom's language, adjust for each country, and don't build only for the fans you already have. Stu's last word was passion for the creators and gratitude to the fans.

Their language

“You have to be authentic to your audience you're speaking to.”

MIKE D'ALESSIO
PRESIDENT, PROMO360 GROUP

Mike Monello said every Campfire job starts with how a fandom already plays. For Only Murders in the Building, fans were already parsing clues, so the experience made them investigators.

Mike D'Alessio said you can't fake the language. For BioShock 2, his team sent bellboys to fans' doors worldwide with a message written only in the game's glyphs, and fans solved it within an hour. Stu added that the same IP needs different things in different countries: European fans at TOKYOPOP's Naruto exhibition wanted original art, not printouts.

For brands: study how a fandom already plays, market by market, before deciding what to build.

Room to grow

Clients ask Chris why they should market to fans who'll turn up anyway. His answer: fans have more ways than ever to spend their time, and if you don't nurture them, they drift.

Mike D'Alessio said events are where acquisition happens, so stop treating existing fans as VIPs who hold up the line while passers-by give up. Chris added that the line is the longest engagement anyone has with your booth, so design it. The panel split on creators: Mike Monello lets them in first, Mike D'Alessio would rather they queue.

For brands: plan the queue and the first few minutes for people who aren't fans yet.

“Every single person who does a booth should go to Disney to learn how to do lines.”

MIKE D'ALESSIO
PRESIDENT, PROMO360 GROUP



Panellist:
Tatiana Tacca
CEO and Founder
Oni Vision

Panellist:
Frank Rose
Author, The Art of Immersion
Columbia University School of the Arts

Moderator:
Dani Rayner
Event Host & Presenter
Formerly Netflix, BBC, BAFTA

THE POPCULTR EDIT: NEW YORK



“creators aren't just a distribution platform or mechanism but are very much becoming the heart of campaigns.”

DANI RAYNER
EVENT HOST & PRESENTER,
FORMERLY NETFLIX, BBC, BAFTA

Dani Rayner asked which campaigns became part of the cultural conversation and which faded into the noise. Tatiana Tacca of Oni Vision and Frank Rose, author of The Art of Immersion, answered with trends, hits and gaps.

The trends were retro-maximalism and ordinary people turning against AI. The hits let people see the work behind them. Asked what didn't land, neither named a miss. They named gaps instead: anime and adult animation as a medium for whole campaigns, and brand moments people can take part in. Dani's read: creators are moving from the media plan to the heart of the idea.

“there's no fatigue. Because each unique execution feels so creative, feels so intentional”

TATIANA TACCA
CEO AND FOUNDER, ONI VISION

The hits

Tatiana's first hit was Pokémon's 30th anniversary. It opened at the Super Bowl, then ran through Worlds, Target, streetwear collaborations and Adidas, and never tired, because every execution felt intentional.

Her second was an anime campaign she worked on. The animation did well, but the side-by-side making-of did better. People want to see that a human made it.

Frank chose games used to tell stories: a horror walk through a plantation and a Jim Crow town, where you don't win or shoot, and Grand Theft Hamlet, staged by out-of-work actors inside Grand Theft Auto Online.

For brands: show the making as well as the finished work.

What's next

Frank said real-world experiences have passed critical mass. People have maxed out on digital as a world of its own, and the opportunity is using it to make real life more interesting. Tatiana pointed to anime pop-ups and themed cafes, and to artists as voices brands can work with.

Both pushed back on optimisation. Frank called "frictionless" his least favourite word, and Tatiana said limits lead to better work. Their one-word answers for the next big opportunity: "Real world" and "Anime and gaming".

For brands: use digital to bring people into the real world, and don't optimise out the surprises.

“all the better when you can use digital technology to not immerse yourself in some digital world, but to reconnect with the real world.”

FRANK ROSE
AUTHOR, THE ART OF IMMERSION,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Six Discussion Points

1
Most fandom marketing is renting an audience

2
Plan by what fans do, not what they love

3
We fund the launch and sack the relationship

4
Fans audit effort. AI's risk is where you put it

5
Being in the room shows you time

6
Talk to the inner circle. Build the door for everyone else

1. EARN THE RIGHT BEFORE YOU SHOW UP

Calvin Innes said a lot of what gets called fandom is really renting somebody else's for a while. Brands spot something big and shiny, rush in for reach and sales, and skip learning how fans talk and where they spend their time. Even a partnership that performs and gets great coverage can feel like a cash grab if the brand hasn't earned the right to be there.

Earning it can mean six months to a year with no real return, and Calvin admitted that's a hard sell. Do it anyway, and in the right order: talk to fans before the media plan exists, and talk to plenty of them. Kim Hernandez and Elizabeth Minkel warned that the loudest voices are often a small minority.

“ANY BRAND THAT DEVELOPS A MEDIA PLAN OR A STRATEGY WITHOUT ACTUALLY SPEAKING TO FANS FIRST HAS JUST WASTED A HUGE AMOUNT OF TIME AND EFFORT AND MONEY.”

CALVIN INNES, CONSULTANT STRATEGY DIRECTOR, INNES CONSULTING

DRAWN FROM: NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL
· SUPPORTS LONDON POINT 1

2. BRIEF FOR THE FANDOMS
INSIDE THE IP

Elizabeth Minkel said the industry looks at an IP and sees one audience, when Star Wars is a million different fandoms with different behaviours and values. As an X-Men fan fiction writer, she has more in common with a Star Wars fan fiction writer than some Star Wars fans have with each other.

Calvin came at it from the other side: fandoms are overlapping more than ever, and nobody in the world just likes one thing. Many of Formula One's newer US fans follow it through short videos and have never sat through a whole race.

So brief by what fans do and where their fandoms overlap, not by the franchise name. The adjacent fandom is often where a brand can surprise people.

“IT'S A MILLION DIFFERENT FANDOMS, YOU KNOW, A MILLION DIFFERENT SUB-FANDOMS, DIFFERENT BEHAVIORS, OVERLAPPING VENN DIAGRAMS.”

ELIZABETH MINKEL, EDITOR IN CHIEF, FANSPLAINING

DRAWN FROM: NEW YORK: FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL
· SUPPORTS LONDON POINT 2

3. THE BOOTH TALKS BACK

Mike D'Alessio calls it real-time marketing. Nobody knows if you looked at a billboard. At a booth the brand pushes a message and pulls a response back: faces, how long people stay, what they take away and what they ask.

Stu Levy said TOKYOPOP used to argue about whether a booth was worth the cost. Not any more: meeting fans face to face is worth more than it was, and online ads have got harder to aim. Mike Monello said ads create awareness, but events create the emotion that makes a memory. Mike D'Alessio has seen clients move digital budget into an event.

Count what the room gives you that a feed can't: time spent, questions asked and who comes back.

“I'M NOW NOT JUST PUSHING A MESSAGE LIKE AN AD WOULD DO, I'M PULLING YOUR RESPONSE.”

MIKE D'ALESSIO, PRESIDENT, PROMO360 GROUP

DRAWN FROM: NEW YORK: IRL: THE FEED IS NOT ENOUGH · SUPPORTS LONDON POINT 7

4. SHOW THE WORK AND GIVE FANS A PART

Tatiana Tacca worked on an anime campaign where the side-by-side making-of beat the finished animation. Kim Hernandez said fans still freak out when a brand they love gets an insider joke. Elizabeth Minkel is still talking about a con activation that handed out sheet music for a character's song.

Mike Monello said every Campfire job starts with how a fandom already plays. For Only Murders in the Building, fans were already parsing clues, so the experience made them investigators. He'd happily never build another photo moment.

Budget for the making-of and the small knowing touch, and build experiences fans can take part in, not just look at.

“THE BEST WORK WE DO IS THE WORK THAT HELPS THEM CELEBRATE THAT FANDOM IN THE WAY THAT THEY'RE ALREADY CELEBRATING IT.”

MIKE MONELLO, PARTNER, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CAMPFIRE

DRAWN FROM: NEW YORK: THE POPCULTR EDIT · FANDOM DOESN'T STAND STILL · IRL · SUPPORTS LONDON POINT 6

5. FUND THE SECOND YEAR, NOT JUST THE LAUNCH

Ben Goodman said it can feel easier right now to launch a card game than to keep one going. A big launch brings fanfare and money. Keeping a game alive takes far more effort for less. Games that launch big and fade leave store owners asking why they should give the next one the time of day.

Brian David-Marshall said the stores are the backbone, and he treats them as partners, which not every publisher does. His team plans three or four sets ahead. On the IRL panel, Mike D'Alessio's client that planned one booth has come back every year since.

Put money into the months after launch and treat the stores and venues where fans gather as partners.

“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LAUNCHING GAMES AND SUSTAINING A GAME IS THAT SUSTAINING A GAME TAKES WAY MORE EFFORT”

BEN GOODMAN, DIRECTOR OF PLAYER EXPERIENCE, ELESTRALS

DRAWN FROM: NEW YORK: CARDS ON THE TABLE · IRL · SUPPORTS LONDON POINT 4

6. DON'T BUILD ONLY FOR THE FANS YOU'VE GOT

Clients ask why they should market to fans who'll turn up anyway. Mike D'Alessio's answer: market only to the fans you've got and you'll hit saturation, because events are where acquisition happens. He wants brands to stop treating existing fans as VIPs who hold up the line while passers-by give up, and to learn lines from Disney. Chris Whittle added that the line is the longest engagement anyone has with your booth, so design it.

In Cards on the Table, Brian David-Marshall made the same case for play: collecting is welcome as long as the rare cards don't decide who can play.

Plan the queue, the entry point and the first experience for the people who aren't fans yet.

“IF YOU ONLY FOCUS ON RETENTION, YOUR BUSINESS IS GOING TO FAIL.”

MIKE D'ALESSIO, PRESIDENT, PROMO360 GROUP

DRAWN FROM: NEW YORK: IRL · CARDS ON THE TABLE · SUPPORTS LONDON POINT 10

Thanks

TO ALL THE CONTRIBUTORS:

Matthew Sullivan-Pond, Elizabeth Minkel, Kim Hernandez, Calvin Innes, Sam Stone, Joost van Dreunen, Brian David-Marshall, Ben Goodman, Mike Monello, Stu Levy, Mike D'Alessio, Dani Rayner, Tatiana Tacca & Frank Rose. Dani and Calvin did both cities, two weeks apart. Special thanks to them for doing the double.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Brien McDonald at ReedPop and the New York Comic Con team for the River Pavilion stage. Den of Geek for lending us two hosts.

THE SUMMITEERS

Everyone who found us on the show floor: with a whole convention competing for your day, thanks for choosing to spend part of it with us. See you in London, or back here next year.

experience12

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.

PlayStation · Walt Disney Pictures · Disney+ Original · Paramount · Warner Bros. · Universal · sky · LEGO · ebay · Kodansha · UBISOFT · SEGA · KONAMI · Bethesda

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