

Star Power:

A practical guide to celebrities in gaming marketing



Celebrity collaborations in gaming can be electrifying, but they're also complex, costly, and risky if handled without care. This playbook breaks down how to strategically and practically use celebrity talent in gaming marketing, from budgeting and production to creative control and campaign longevity.



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When is celebrity marketing a great solution?

Celebrity marketing isn't a one-size-fits-all tactic, but at the right moments in a game's lifespan, it can supercharge impact. From breaking into new markets to refreshing a long-running franchise, knowing when to bring in star power is just as important as who you bring in.

A. Entering new markets

When expanding into new geographical or cultural markets, local celebrities can serve as trusted bridges. For example, using a Bollywood star for a mobile shooter's launch in India could bring cultural relevance and break through language and genre barriers. Similarly, a K-pop artist might help a Western game resonate with the South Korean audience.

B. Crossing over to mainstream audiences

If your game targets mainstream or casual audiences (beyond core gamers), a well-known celebrity can attract attention from non-traditional segments. For instance, the Sims franchise has partnered with pop culture figures to maintain its broad appeal and visibility among casual players.

C. Reinvigorating a franchise and churned players

For IPs looking to regain relevance or get back churned players, a celebrity campaign can act as a reintroduction. Think of it as a relaunch with a twist. When Call of Duty used Kevin Spacey (pre-controversy) and later Kit Harington, it helped the franchise feel fresher and more cinematic.

D. Promoting in-game events or limited-time content

Celebrities can create urgency around live ops or seasonal content. Fortnite's in-game concerts with Marshmello and Travis Scott weren't just spectacles – they were time-limited events that drove huge player engagement and social chatter.

E. Storytelling and character building

When your game relies on narrative, a celebrity with strong acting or an iconic voice can bring characters to life in unforgettable ways. Think Norman Reedus in Death Stranding, Giancarlo Esposito in Far Cry 6, and Pedro Pascal in Merge Mansion.

F. Making a statement or cultural moment

Sometimes the goal isn't pure performance metrics – it's owning the cultural conversation. Lil Nas X's collaboration with Roblox turned heads because it was bold, fresh, and unexpected. These partnerships elevate games from entertainment to pop culture events.

In summary: Celebrity marketing is especially powerful when you're:

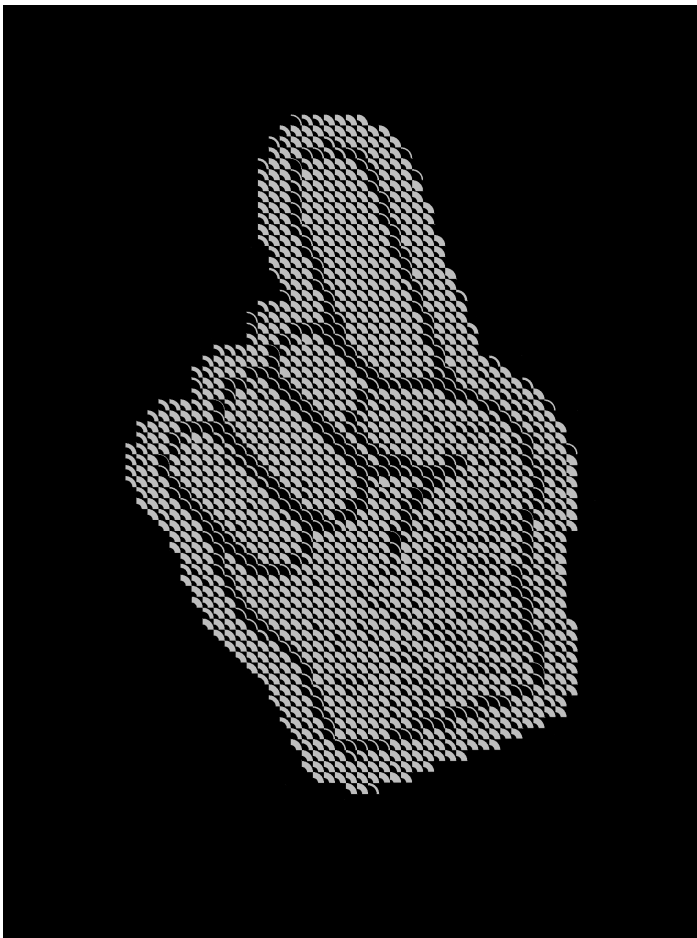
- Expanding to new regions or demographics
- Launching a new IP or reviving an old one
- Promoting timed events or expansions
- Trying to stand out in a crowded release calendar
- Seeking PR buzz or social shareability beyond the usual channels

But the golden rule still applies: the celebrity must fit the IP's world and the audience's expectations.

Why are celebrities (still) worth the investment in gaming?

In a world dominated by streamers, influencers, and algorithmic ad buys, you might ask: why invest in celebrities? Well, people remember them. Think of Pepsi's legendary 2004 'We Will Rock You' commercial with Britney Spears, Beyoncé, and Pink as gladiators in a Roman colosseum, uniting to sing Queen's anthem in a rebellious spectacle of pop power. Now, realize that this was over 20 years ago. And it still gets referenced as a masterclass in cultural branding.

That kind of long-tail impact is nearly impossible to replicate through more tactical marketing. In gaming, where authenticity is king and players are notoriously skeptical, celebrities might seem like a risky bet. But when executed right, they can become powerful accelerators for awareness, credibility, and even in-game engagement.



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Celebrities offer unique advantages

Reach: Celebrities provide near-instant access to massive global audiences. A well-known actor or athlete can amplify your message across social platforms, mainstream media, and fan communities. Their reach is unparalleled, particularly when trying to launch a game in a crowded market.

Relevance: Cultural fit matters. When a celebrity genuinely resonates with a particular gaming audience – say a rapper who streams on Twitch or an athlete known for playing your game in the locker room – their endorsement creates authenticity. It feels organic, not commercial.

Relevance can also come through creative execution by e.g. leveraging a celebrity's persona to match or play against the tone of the game. Sometimes it's the contrast that captures attention: a gritty shooter with a laid-back musician, or a family-friendly game featuring a celebrity with an edgier or unexpected persona. For example, Post Malone's involvement with Pokémon surprised fans by merging his tattooed rockstar image with one of the most wholesome franchises in gaming.

Similarly, Jack Black voicing Bowser in *The Super Mario Bros Movie* brought humor and wild energy to the character showing how personality clashes can become creative gold. When done right, this dynamic becomes a creative asset, not a mismatch.

Recall: Recognition aids memory. Campaigns featuring celebrities tend to linger longer in audience minds. Whether it's a game trailer, a playable character, or a social campaign, star power enhances stickiness.

When it doesn't work

Celebrity marketing fails in gaming when it becomes performative. Slapping a famous face onto a brand without creative, strategic or emotional alignment often backfires. If the celebrity clearly doesn't care about the game or community, the campaign can quickly become a punchline. Think of players mocking Brie Larson's Nintendo Switch ads for feeling overly staged, showing that even well-known stars can fall flat when the tone doesn't resonate. Players value genuine passion. If it's missing, the backlash can be swift and brutal.

"In celebrity collaborations for gaming marketing, authenticity and audience fit make or break the campaign."



Jesse Pitkänen
Strategy Director, Reaktor Creative

"Gaming is fun and entertaining,
and the community appreciates
campaigns that are, too."



Jesse Pitkänen
Strategy Director, Reaktor Creative

Anatomy of celebrity marketing in games

Pulling off a successful celebrity campaign in gaming is a complex operation. It involves careful orchestration of creative vision, production logistics, and legal agreements. Here's a breakdown of the key areas.

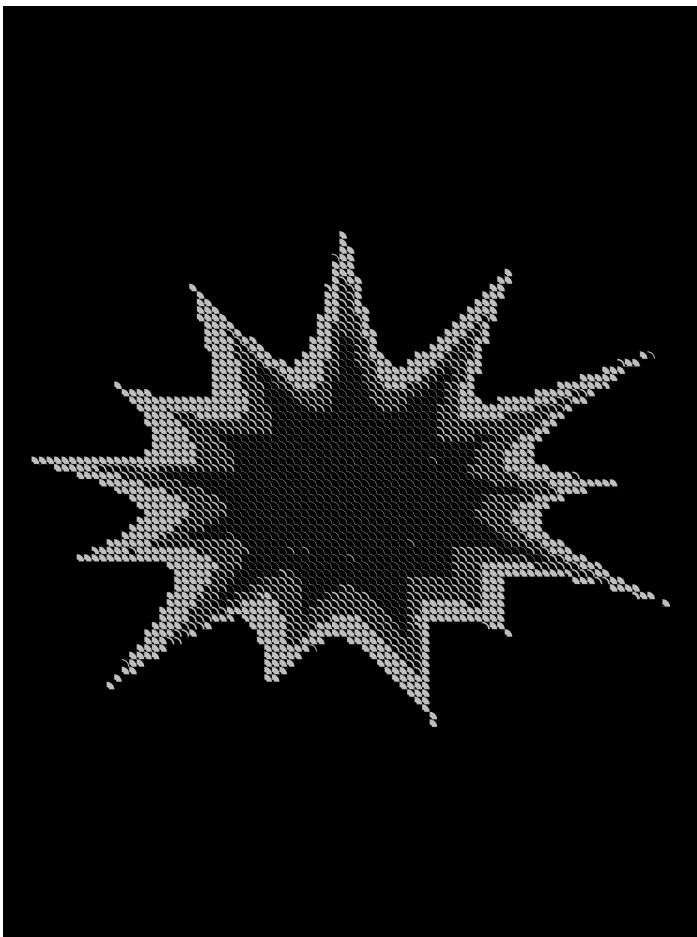
Creative approach: building ideas around or with celebrities

How you frame your creative idea around a celebrity can define the tone, execution, and overall success of the campaign. Broadly speaking, there are two main approaches.

Celebrity-first idea: This approach begins with a specific celebrity in mind. The idea is built around their persona, voice, cultural influence, or a particular piece of content like a song. Think of the Pepsi "We Will Rock You" ad mentioned before. The entire idea was powered by three iconic pop stars and a legendary song. In gaming, Travis Scott x Fortnite is a textbook example. The event was designed around him, his music, and his artistic aesthetic, creating a fully immersive experience for fans.

Concept-first with a celebrity fit: Here, the idea comes first, and a celebrity is cast to amplify or enhance it. The creative team defines what kind of energy, style, or narrative is needed, and then finds the right public figure who fits that mold. This approach allows more flexibility. For instance, in Far Cry 6, the inclusion of Danny Trejo aligned seamlessly with the game's offbeat tone and narrative style. His cameo delivered the kind of unexpected humor and cultural flair that fit naturally into the IP, making him an ideal fit for the experience.

Choosing the right creative approach depends on your goals, timeline, and how central the celebrity is to the story you're telling. When there's harmony between the idea and the talent, players feel it and respond.



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Budget breakdown: what everyone wants to know

Cost is often the first barrier that brands face when considering celebrities. It's important to understand where the money actually goes.



Celebrity Fees

These can vary widely depending on the celebrity's stature, campaign scope, and exclusivity. You're not just paying for their time, you're paying for their brand equity.



Hidden Costs

These include the agency fee (typically 10%), legal expenses for contract negotiation, insurance (especially for on-site or international shoots), and other celebrity-specific costs such as first-class travel and accommodation, artist riders, and security. If the talent is a member of SAG (Screen Actors Guild), it is necessary to fulfill SAG obligations, which adds an extra layer of cost.



Production Premiums

A celebrity-led campaign often demands higher production value. Sets, crews, post-production, and styling must meet a higher bar – often, celebrities bring their own stylists.



Opportunity Costs

These campaigns consume internal bandwidth. Creative teams, marketing leads, and developers may be diverted from other initiatives. Consider what you might need to deprioritize to make room.

"Budgeting and risk management are essential components of executing a celebrity-led campaign, as numerous factors are influenced by the selected celebrity and their specific preferences. While such campaigns often involve higher costs and greater risks, a carefully managed execution can yield outstanding results."



Roosa Ketola
Project Director, Reaktor Creative

Production realities: managing time, teams, and expectations

Celebrities are high-profile and highly scheduled. Their availability is often tight, and their time on set is limited. Sometimes it's only a couple of hours on the one day of shooting. That means:

- **Preparation is critical:** Scripts must be finalized, stylistic decisions agreed upon, legal reviews completed, and production logistics locked in before the celebrity steps on set. There should be no surprises for the celebrity, and therefore, there is rarely room for improvisation. However, the selected celebrity may have unforeseen special requests or suggestions on set. It is crucial, therefore, to remain flexible, ready to adapt quickly, and even develop new ideas during the shoot.
- **Voiceover vs. full performance:** VO can be more flexible, scalable, and efficient. Full performance appearances demand more time and coordination, but can generate stronger impact.
- **Remote and virtual production:** Tools like virtual sets or remote VO recording studios are growing in popularity, especially post-pandemic. They offer flexibility but may reduce the quality of creative collaboration.

Creative control and IP considerations

Creativity and legality often clash when celebrities are involved. Each party has an image to protect.

- **Personality rights:** Make sure contracts clearly define what you can use (face, voice, gestures), for how long, and across which platforms. Get it in writing – vagueness leads to disputes.
- **Reusability:** Clarify whether campaign assets can be reused in future trailers, updates, or different marketing channels. Many celebrities limit re-use without additional compensation.
- **Brand integrity:** Celebrities may have clauses restricting association with certain types of content (e.g., violence, sexuality, gambling). Their approval processes can be rigorous and time-consuming.

- **Creative signoff:** Celebrities may also require final signoff on all creative assets that feature them: trailers, VO lines, character models, promotional graphics, and social media content. Be prepared to build time into your production schedule to accommodate their review and approval cycles.

Integration into game worlds vs. marketing only

You have two core choices: build the celebrity into the gameplay experience, or use them to market it externally.

- **In-game integration:** This is typically more resource-intensive but offers greater long-term ROI. Think playable and non-playable characters, VO lines, character skins, or cameo appearances. Players appreciate when the integration is thoughtful and fun.
- **Marketing-only roles:** Faster and often cheaper. This includes trailers, commercials, livestreams, and social content. Effective when targeting broad awareness over deep in-game engagement.
- **Hybrid approach:** The most immersive campaigns blend both – a trailer launch tied to in-game rewards or an event. These drive both awareness and engagement. This is the best practice of celebrity marketing especially in mobile games.

Campaign lifecycle

Celebrity campaigns aren't just one-off moments. They're journeys. The best ones unfold over time.

- **Teasing and timing:** Use the celebrity's involvement as early hype. Tease their appearance before a major reveal, expansion, or global launch.
- **Influencer synergy:** Pair the celebrity with gaming influencers or streamers for extended reach. This makes the celeb look like "one of us," and bridges credibility gaps with core audiences.
- **Sustained engagement:** Post-launch, keep the buzz alive. Release behind-the-scenes content, do Instagram takeovers, or have the celebrity livestream gameplay. Repurpose content wherever possible.
- **Measuring success:** While performance metrics are important, brand metrics are crucial when evaluating the success of celebrity involvement in gaming. A successful celebrity-driven campaign will elevate brand awareness, sentiment, recall, and cultural relevance. It should shift perception and integrate the IP into the broader cultural conversation. This more often than not leads to better performance metrics such as lower CPI, higher conversion rates, and improved retention due to recognition and awareness. To gain a comprehensive understanding, use tools such as social listening, brand studies, and sentiment analysis in conjunction with traditional attribution metrics.



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Quick case studies & cautionary tales

😊 Wins

- **Keanu Reeves x Cyberpunk 2077:** His surprise reveal at E3 became a cultural event. Despite the game's technical issues, Keanu's role generated unprecedented buzz.
- **Gordon Ramsay x Hay Day:** Supercell partnered with Gordon Ramsay to bring the culinary celebrity into the cozy farming world of Hay Day. The campaign leaned into Ramsay's fiery persona in a tongue-in-cheek way that didn't disrupt the game's charm, but instead added a surprising twist that generated buzz and broadened appeal.
- **Lionel Messi x PUBG Mobile:** During the 2022 FIFA World Cup, PUBG Mobile collaborated with football legend Lionel Messi. The partnership introduced exclusive in-game outfits and items themed around Messi, allowing players to showcase their fandom within the game. This collaboration effectively tapped into the global football audience, enhancing player engagement during the tournament period.
- **Travis Scott x Fortnite:** Not just a concert, but an interactive, surreal experience. Millions tuned in and stayed longer in-game, setting a benchmark for immersive celebrity collabs.
- **Danny Trejo x Far Cry 6:** Trejo appeared as himself in a free crossover mission for Far Cry 6, helping players take down waves of enemies while delivering his signature tough-guy charm. The collaboration leaned into his cult icon status and fit the game's irreverent tone perfectly. It was a lighthearted, fan-pleasing moment that gave the campaign an unexpected jolt of personality.
- **Snoop Dogg x Call of Duty:** Snoop has been featured in Call of Duty multiple times, including as a playable operator with custom voice lines, weapon skins, and themed content. His laid-back persona and iconic voice brought novelty and humor to the game, resonating with both longtime fans and younger players. The integration felt fun, on-brand, and amplified by Snoop's own livestreams and social media, showing how a well-matched celebrity can become a fan-favorite recurring presence.

😞 Fails

Uninspired cameos: When celebrities deliver wooden performances or clearly don't understand the product, the result is cringe. Audiences are quick to ridicule tone-deafness.

Mismatched partnerships: A celeb who has no known gaming affinity promoting a niche hardcore title will ring hollow. Even high visibility can lead to low impact if audiences feel misled.

Fallen reputations: When a celebrity's public image collapses, it can drag the game down with it. One of the most prominent examples is Kevin Spacey's involvement in Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare. At launch, his presence was a major selling point, lending narrative gravitas and media buzz. But after serious allegations against him emerged, the association quickly became a liability raising uncomfortable questions and damaging brand perception. This underscores the importance of reputation risk management and having contingency plans in place.

Case: Pedro Pascal x Merge Mansion

The gaming industry is estimated to reach a market size of roughly \$320 billion by 2026, with the majority of that being casual gaming, and the sector in which Merge Mansion and most other mobile games operate. Competition is getting stiffer with the growing market, and even more so with recent developments in privacy regulations that make targeting audiences with pinpoint precision increasingly difficult.

The question Metacore faced, amongst many other gaming companies, was how to make the game stand out and reach new audiences. The answer: getting creative and putting more emphasis on narrative instead of just ad spend.

Merge Mansion is a game that mashup addictive merge puzzles, home makeover thrills, and satisfying garden-building. But the real hook is its wildly entertaining storyline – equal parts family secrets, sharp objects, and the ever-mysterious Grandma Ursula.

To take this storytelling powerhouse even further, Metacore teamed up with Reaktor to elevate the brand into a full-blown pop culture phenomenon. The twist: a dash of true crime, a sprinkle of detective fiction, and a leading man the internet can't get enough of.

Enter Pedro Pascal – currently dominating screens in *The Last of Us*, *The Mandalorian*, and many more. And now, he also starred as the hard-boiled detective Tim Rockford in the Merge Mansion's campaign. In the campaign's trio of cinematic spots, Rockford is tasked with cracking the strangest case of his career.

The response to the campaign was incredible: the three commercials generated over +40M views in a month and were covered by 300 media outlets around the world. Influencers shared the films in creative ways, and the internet saw a tsunami of likes, comments, headlines, TikToks, fan art, and YouTube reaction videos. And most importantly, people who had never heard of Merge Mansion got excited about it and started playing the game.

"We couldn't have imagined a better counterpart to Grandma Ursula. This campaign thrilled our loyal fans and no doubt lured in a whole new crowd."

Sandra Fenyo
VP of Brand Marketing, Metacore

Final Checklist: Is a celebrity right for your IP?

Before greenlighting a celebrity campaign, ask:

- **Fit:** Does the celebrity authentically align with your game, brand values, and target audience?
- **Affordability:** Can you support the full cost, not just the talent fee, but also production, logistics, and legal?
- **Timing:** Do you have a clear campaign timeline, and does it sync with the celebrity's availability?
- **Internal readiness:** Do you have the teams and resources to manage a high-complexity campaign?

Internal pitching: Start by stating the strategic reasoning and clarifying the case with your goal and KPIs. Exemplify your level of ambition with creative references – even outside the industry – and build a phased project plan.

Consider starting with a smaller investment by developing the concept idea first before committing to full production. This staged approach allows for internal validation without locking in the full spend. If internal feedback indicates it won't fly, you haven't locked yourself in. It's also a good idea to work with your agency to map out a realistic cost estimate; remember that the expenses go beyond just the production.

Before signing anything: Get contracts that cover deliverables, rights usage, timelines, compensation, approval processes, and cancellation terms. Never assume.

Agency with experience in gaming and celebs: Partner with a marketing agency that understands both the gaming space and has experience in working with celebrities. Invest time in getting the agency up to speed with what is special about your game and its relationship with players. Navigating talent negotiations, creative approvals, and gamer expectations requires nuanced expertise that most agencies or PR firms may lack.

"Celebrity campaigns are inherently large and multifaceted. Phasing the project allows for reducing risk, building internal momentum, and ultimately securing a more impactful outcome."



Jesse Pitkänen
Strategy Director, Reaktor Creative

Conclusion

Celebrity marketing in gaming is not a silver bullet. It's a high-risk, high-reward play that demands precision, creativity, and strategic thinking. But when it's done right, when the celebrity truly fits the IP, when the execution is sharp, and when the player experience remains central the results can be extraordinary.

At its best, celebrity marketing transforms launches into cultural moments. It bridges entertainment and interactivity. It makes games feel bigger than games.

About Reaktor

Growing a good game into a successful one takes more than exceptional game design. Players expect a seamless experience from start to finish – whether it's marketing or making purchases. Every touchpoint and interaction matters.

Reaktor helps gaming companies level up with scalable, cutting-edge technology, player-centered design, and strong community and brand-building expertise. Teaming up with us allows both the game studio and the gaming community to focus on the one thing that matters the most – the game itself.

Brand and marketing

Every game wants to become part of popular culture and grow its fanbase. We get there by being open to fresh perspectives, collaboration, cultural change, new tech, and new thinking. From brand activations and integrated campaigns to brand design and glow-ups, our work helps you create, grow and foster connections with your customers.

Scalable technology

Any system you are using needs to be robust and built with the utmost precision – such that allows you to focus on the game. Massively scalable backend systems ensure that millions of players can enjoy their experience without interruptions. The system failing at a critical moment is not an option.

Ensuring healthy & high-performing teams

Your skilled experts are the key to your success. Our senior coaches can help improve their ways of working and focus on what motivates them most while making them high-performing and more productive. Working in a gaming company doesn't need to mean constant crunch mode or short employee retention - we can help you work smarter, not harder.

Reaktor. Go beyond the game.

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