

A Glimpse into the Future of Content – A Study of Twitch.tv



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Table of Contents

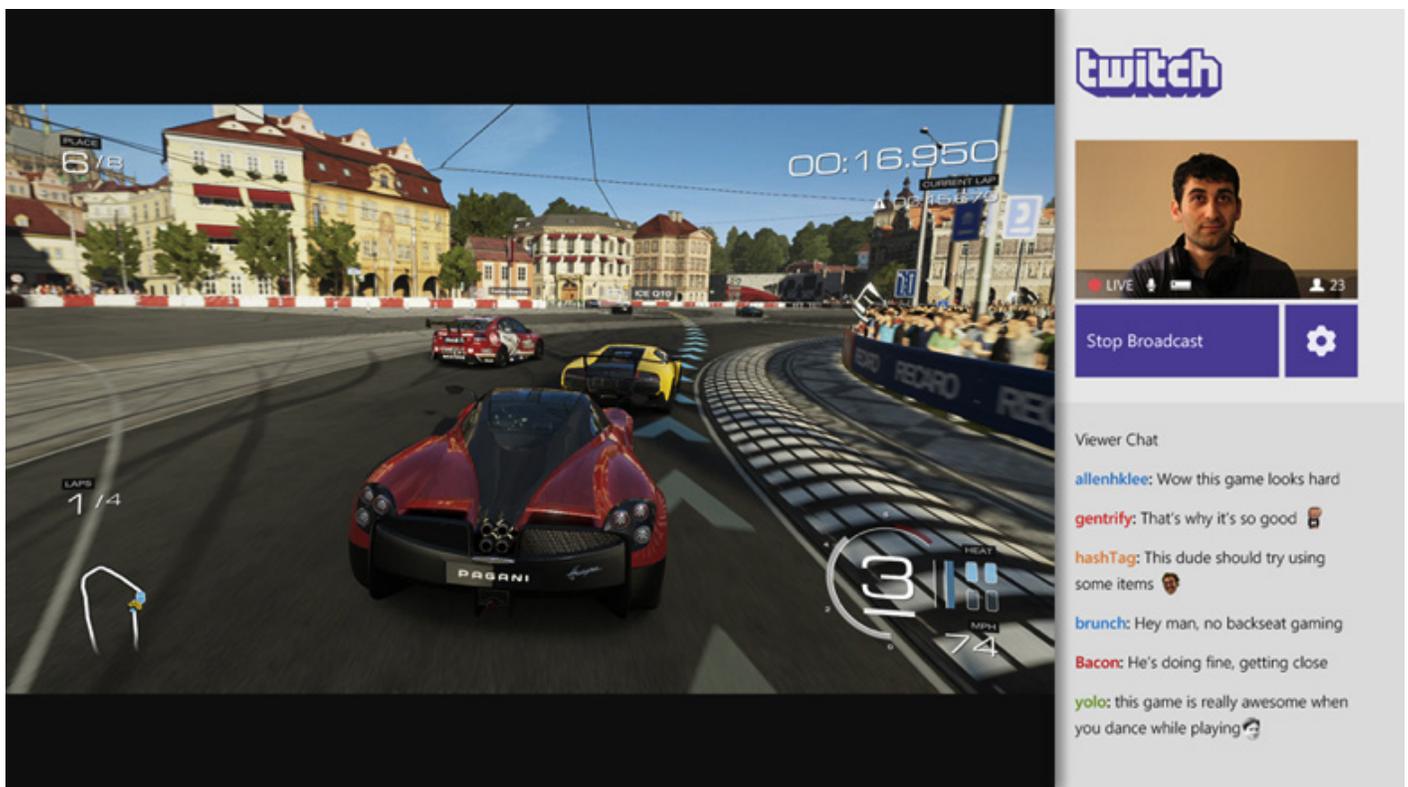
Introduction	2
What is Twitch?	3
An Experience Tailor-Made for Millennials.....	4
How Twitch is Evolving Content Consumption	5
A New Way to Look at Content Marketing	7
Sources	8

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The multibillion-dollar gaming industry and its community have thrived on constantly pursuing better gaming experiences. They took it upon themselves to develop their own culture, language, and content platforms to enhance the enjoyment of their passion. The rapid rise in popularity of one particular platform—Twitch—recently generated significant attention.



What is Twitch?

Twitch is the leading video-streaming platform and global community for gamers; it had 55 million unique viewers in July 2014 alone.¹ Live-stream content on the site falls into two categories: major video game events and player streams. Events include video game tournaments, trade shows, announcements, and conventions with hired professional casters and reporters. The other component of Twitch—the player streams—allows viewers to watch individuals play games and, in most cases, see a Skype-like video of the player along with the stream. In addition to the streams, Twitch offers a chat-room experience that allows the community to interact with the streamer and with each other in real time.

According to statistics released by Twitch, in 2013, users watched an average of 200 million hours of gaming each month, with a remarkable 58% of users each spending more than 20 hours a week on Twitch.² This explains why Amazon recently (and strategically) purchased Twitch for \$970 million—the largest acquisition in the company’s history.³

You’re probably wondering, “Why would anyone want to spend so much time watching someone else play video games?” It’s a bizarre concept, but it makes sense when you consider what the platform provides to the viewer. Streamers range from professional gamers to any Joe Schmoe who can offer personal insight, commentary, experience, and personality while they play. Twitch gained its popularity as viewers connected with their favorite streamers to learn more about their favorite games, study tactics to get better, interact with a like-minded community, and ultimately be entertained—an experience that’s relatable to any hobby or passion.

What Twitch brings to the table is a service that allows gamers to immerse themselves in their passion. Twitch approaches content in ways that empower its viewers and deliver an experience that can be engaging for seemingly endless periods of time.

An Experience Tailor-Made for Millennials

Twitch appeals to what seems to be a niche audience of gamers, but its design and platform are tailor-made for Millennials. A look into Twitch's demographics reveals that 64.1% of the site's users are between the ages of 18 and 34, with a heavily male-skewing audience (93.6%), indicating that the site is resonating with one of the most valuable and sought-after demographic groups.⁴ The site's success at reaching Millennials centers on the platform's ability to empower active engagement.

Millennials are increasingly becoming active participants in the content they consume, rather than passive experiencers. They find ways to push the boundaries of engagement in every category. They're no longer just watching their favorite movie stars or listening to their favorite musicians; they're following and exchanging Tweets with them. They're posting reviews on Yelp, writing personal blogs, and recording videos to post on YouTube. They're as much makers as they are consumers. It's only natural that Millennials want an outlet to actively engage with the games that they play.

What Twitch does so well is to provide a platform that not only turns gaming into a spectator sport, but gives viewers a chance to be active in their passion—whether it's following and talking to their favorite professional gamers, recording their own live streams, or engaging with the gaming community. Twitch's reach and pull goes beyond offering an outlet for gamers; it provides an immersive, interactive, and relevant service that acts as a catalyst to drive content engagement.

But Twitch isn't just creating a channel to engage with content—it's changing the way content is consumed.

How Twitch is Evolving Content Consumption

Moving from Polished to Unfiltered

As a live-streaming platform, Twitch allows its viewers to see unhindered, unfiltered versions of their favorite streaming personalities. With YouTube evolving into a platform for polished and refined content, Twitch offers the inverse: a way to watch streamers who are real people, with unique personalities and quirks. Screaming in elation when something amazing happens, shouting obscenities when they get frustrated, all while playing the game and showing off their skill and individuality. It's hard to fake a persona when you're casting live for hours on end, so it offers viewers an opportunity for authentic interaction.

This type of authentic interaction can be a refreshing change to a range of other verticals. Imagine a live-streaming cooking show hosted by an aspiring culinary personality; we'll call him Dominique. Dominique could try out new recipes, get frustrated when instructions aren't clear, get excited when things work out, showing all the hiccups along the way while viewers watch and interact. The priority here isn't to create a fairy-tale cooking show where things are made perfectly, but to inspire the passion of enthusiasts and have them feel, "I can do that." It has the appeal of a reality show, while staying true to the authenticity the platform provides.

Incentivizing a Personal Connection

Twitch offers an optional subscription model (Normally priced at \$4.99, with half going to Twitch) that allows viewers to directly support both the Twitch community and the individual streamers they like the most. Similar to popular crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter and Patreon, subscribers get perks like avoiding ads, gaining moderator status in live chat rooms, and access to emoticons.^{5,6} Whether viewers want to help increase the pot of a local game tournament or directly donate to streamers to help sustain their stream, it develops a culture of incentivizing the content viewers connect to the most.

Obviously, this model can work in many different industries. For instance, DIY streamers can gain support to buy new tools, motivating them to try different and more difficult projects. It rallies fans around their favorite personalities and gives them the ability to see the direct result of their support.

Demand for Real-Time Interaction

Twitch encourages a distinct intimacy between streamer and viewer by providing real-time chat along with the stream. Viewers get a chance to communicate directly with the streamer and get instant feedback, facilitating a strong bond between viewer and content. In addition, the chat experience gives viewers an outlet to discuss content with a like-minded community, creating a playground of inside jokes and memes. Combining this personal connection with a Twitter-like real-time discussion of events occurring in-stream produces a recipe for an incredibly engaging and interactive viewing experience.

Content marketers put tremendous effort in developing content calendars that rely on seasonal events, purchase cycles, etc. These messages are created months in advance to prepare brand-approved copy, images, and campaigns. Yet as we move towards a digital era that enables content to be instantly served, real-time marketing will take a larger role in the marketing mix.

At best, we see real-time chat practiced most in social media as brands insert themselves in pop culture in an effort to become a trending topic, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. Twitch offers a glimpse into real-time marketing with live video. It's exciting, authentic, and hyper-relevant.

Whether viewers go on Twitch for gigantic video game tournaments, like DOTA's \$11 million prize pool *The International*,⁷ or to watch small-time gamers and explore their passion together, Twitch has changed the way gamers consume content. And considering how successful Twitch has grown to be in the gaming world, it's only a matter of time until this model is extended to other industries.

A New Way to Look at Content Marketing

While Twitch may be considered niche and seemingly only relevant to gamers, the numbers point to its emergence among mainstream categories. A deeper look at the site has revealed three successful content tenets that have been proven to reach the elusive Millennial market:

1. Moving from polished to unfiltered content
2. Incentivizing a personal connection between content and viewer
3. Creating opportunity for real-time interaction

Those marketers who are brave enough to tackle the opportunity and engage at the speed of culture will not only become more relevant, but will also reap the largest rewards.

Sources

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