THE GTA EFFECT:

What’s your move?

JOURNEY FURTHER

MORE THAN A GAME LAUNCH

Grand Theft Auto VI isn't just a game release. It's a cultural event that will pull attention from every corner of the internet all at once. Its predecessor made $1 billion in three days[1], and that was over a decade ago. The demand this time is bigger.

GTA VI's 27-minute extended preview reached 31.1 million Netflix views in four days and topped the charts in 87 countries[2].

When GTA VI lands, it won't stay in gaming. It'll be on YouTube, TikTok, and Reddit. In search, music, fashion and food, while it'll also hit the front page. It's competing for everyone's attention, not just gamers'. That includes your customers.



In four days, GTA VI's 27-minute extended preview reached

31.1M VIEWS

Every brand will feel it

For marketing leaders, the impact comes in two forms:

- **Direct (gaming, media and adjacent brands):** Fierce competition for ad space, inflated auction prices, creators booked up and audiences who are elsewhere.
- **Indirect (non-gaming brands):** Automotive, QSR, retail, tech and lifestyle brands will pay a hidden attention tax. Impressions get bought but not noticed. Social feeds get saturated. Conversion rates dip, and the creative isn't the problem.

Being seen is not the same as being discovered. During launch week, that gap gets expensive.

Where the opportunity is

You don't have to go dark, and you don't have to outspend the noise. The brands that win will know three things: where attention is getting scarce, where it's getting more valuable and where it's moving next.

> “
>
> It's competing for everyone's attention, not just gamers'. That includes your customers.

1. IGN, GTA 5 Sales Hit $1 Billion in Three Days, 20 September 2013
2. Variety, 'GTA 6' Extended Look Tops Netflix Charts With 31.1 Million Views in Four Days, 1 September 2026

YOUR PLAYBOOK

This playbook gives senior marketers, VPs and media planners a clear framework across three areas:

Paid media: Find the channels insulated from the scramble, like CTV, digital audio and OOH. Shift budget into the 'cultural orbits' around the launch, away from the most crowded auctions.

Media buying: Get past targeting bottlenecks with first-party data, retail transaction signals and dynamic bid caps that protect your CPA.

Creators and influencers: Lock in talent early through adjacent networks, agree CPM caps and usage rights up front, and set up campaigns that can react in real time.

Later sections give you practical models for deciding your response: pause and step out of the crossfire, pivot your spend, or ride the cultural moment.

Guidance comes from our senior contributors helping brands navigate these problems every day:



BEN BULLAS
Director, Paid Media Strategy, Journey Further



TOM BOTTOMLEY
Director, Programmatic, Journey Further



SUHIT AMIN
VP, Influencer Strategy, Journey Further, and Founder of Saulderson Media*

*A Journey Further company

THE PAID MEDIA STRATEGY OUTLOOK



BEN BULLAS
Director, Paid Media Strategy, Journey Further

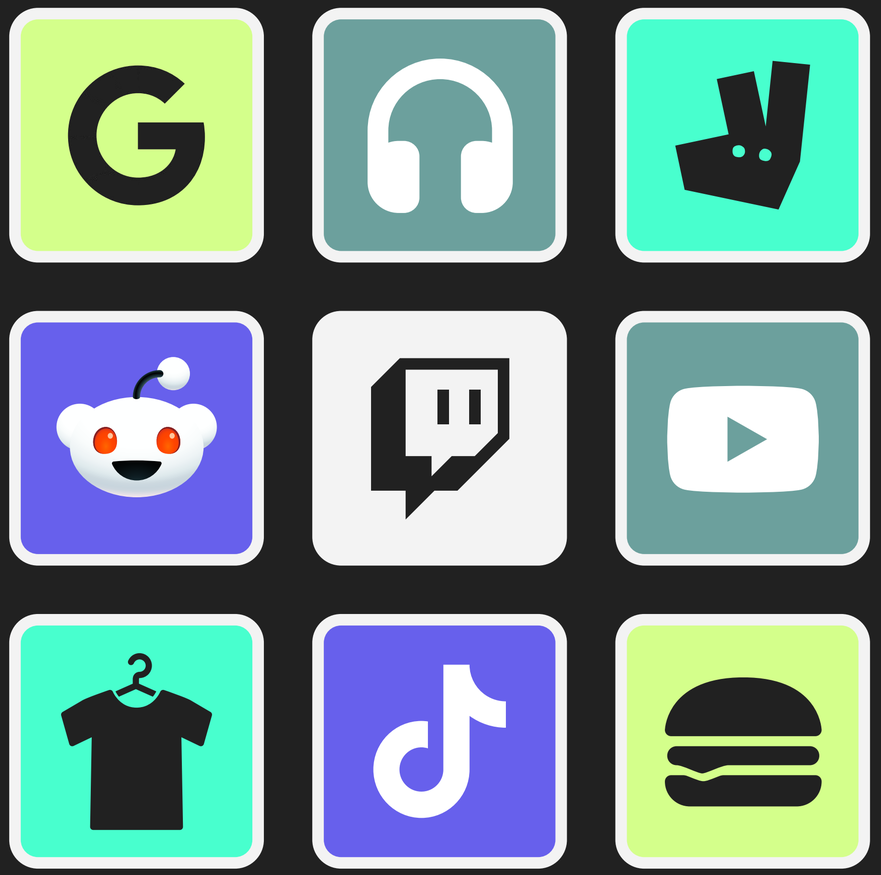
THE PAID MEDIA STRATEGY OUTLOOK

The release of GTA VI will be one of those rare global cultural moments.

It won't just dominate gamers' attention, it will well and truly enter the wider consciousness across YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, music, search, entertainment, food, fashion, and you'll likely see it pop up on your news notifications too.

For brands, that presents an interesting opportunity or conundrum depending on how you see it. Do you go after that attention? Or move elsewhere?

Your response should not be to simply spend more though, whatever course of action you decide to take. It's all about looking at where that attention is dropping, where it's becoming more valuable for commercial growth, and where it has shifted.



THE PAID MEDIA STRATEGY OUTLOOK

Look beyond the GTA epicentre of activity

If you want to get closest to those surfaces most inextricably linked to the launch, you will unsurprisingly pay more. If you want to work with creators, Twitch, gaming YouTube, gaming publishers and GTA-adjacent audiences, it will cost you.

But you don't necessarily have to stretch your budget to be part of the cultural moment in other parts of the ecosystem.

You don't have to dive into the epicentre of activity. Look at what's surrounding it. Think beyond the competitive gaming environments into entertainment, music, fashion, cars, food and wider culture.

And if your brand sits in a completely different vertical to GTA, you should 100% not be paying the GTA premium. Consider CTV, audio, OOH and broader contextual media as alternative pools of attention.

To participate or not to participate

The launch of GTA VI presents a shift in how the smarter brands are participating in major cultural events when media planning.

Previously it might have been a question of "How do we advertise around GTA VI?"

Now they'll ask "Where is attention going to become more expensive, where is it going to move, and what can our brand do with that movement?"

Because it's not always about hopping on what's hot. Sometimes you need to sit it out to get a win elsewhere.



THE MEDIA BUYING OUTLOOK



TOM BOTTOMLEY
Director, Programmatic, Journey Further

THE MEDIA BUYING OUTLOOK

Seek out the points of difference

Inflation will hit hardest in the areas of greatest investment. It's very likely there'll be gaming enthusiasts scouring the major digital platforms of Google, Meta and Amazon. All of these function through live auctions. And if lots of brands try to reach the same people in the same places you would certainly expect costs to rise.

The way brands will win in this space is to reach these same audiences in less competitive environments; by diversifying their channel mix or by reaching audiences through less popular signals and data sources.

This is where diversification is so important, reaching people in different environments to build frequency across channels. Go deeper though. Look at the less talked about diversification of data sets - ensuring you aren't just using the same targeting signals everyone else is as this will protect you from sudden price increases when lots of advertisers are in the market.

GTA is a game that has mass appeal so it is a rare opportunity to reach engaged audiences outside of core targeting and one advertisers should test out.

Give the algorithm new avenues to explore

If you need to keep on running campaigns during the GTA VI launch period, I would give two main pieces of advice:

- Make sure there are plenty of opportunities to scale your budget.
- Get relevant caps in place to prevent budget from going over what you are prepared to pay.

Typically broader campaigns and line items come into play here as you give bidding algorithms more space and flexibility to operate. If you are only targeting one audience in one placement on one channel then you are forcing spend into one busy bottleneck.

But if your campaign includes multiple audiences, multiple formats, multiple channels then the algorithm can turn down new avenues, avoiding any bottlenecks to deliver the budget more efficiently and increase decision power to make sure those impressions are as effective as possible.

> The way brands will win in this space is to reach these same audiences in less competitive environments.

Make a compelling offer

Take this opportunity to go back to the fundamentals of advertising, and ask yourself, "What value are you giving to the consumer?" Think you'll have the exact same answer as your competitors? Then you'll just blend into the sea of sameness.

Make sure your offer is compelling, pique the interest of your customers and plan your media for high attention environments with quality creative. That means rich visuals, sound-on environments, and audio hooks to keep people engaged.

THE CREATOR OUTLOOK



SUHIT AMIN

Founder of Saulderson Media (a Journey Further company)

THE CREATOR OUTLOOK

Seek out the niche creator

If you're a gaming brand on the hunt for a creator in and around launch time, I don't think most will be contractually playing GTA VI. A handful of the very biggest names will probably be paid to play it, but the game doesn't need to buy attention.

People have been waiting over a decade for it, so demand for GTA content will be enormous and viewership on GTA videos will spike. That makes it in every creator's interest to play it on an earned basis. Most will be streaming and making videos about it simply because it's the best thing they can do for their channel at that moment.

The paid mega-creators don't matter much for most brands anyway. The biggest creators are rarely the best fit. Nine times out of ten, a niche creator with the right audience outperforms a huge one with a broad audience. So rather than competing for GTA's attention, I'd look at these routes:

Adjacent creators with the same audience:
Think about what your audience does beyond gaming. Formula 1 fans play F1 on PC. Football fans play EA Sports FC. Creators in those categories talk to the same people but won't necessarily be consumed by GTA.

Creators already in your community:
Start with the people who already play your game. Give them a reason to keep creating through the launch window, such as new updates, early access or exclusive in-game content built for them.

Paid behind content that's already working:
Put paid budget behind existing creator content that's performing well, and amplify creator content being made around your game, rather than commissioning everything from scratch in the busiest weeks.

Make it worth watching:
If you do go live during the window, build something bigger and more interesting than a standard integration, an activation that gives audiences a reason to watch that creator's content over another GTA stream.

Adjacent verticals and a wider micro tier:
Go broader across niches and book micro creators at scale. Be selective here, because plenty of smaller gaming creators will want to jump on GTA too.

Audiences that were never going to play GTA:
For some games, the audience you want is already out of GTA's reach. I can't see a cosy gamer switching to GTA, so if that's your player base, carry on.

Work around the window:
Plan content before and after launch instead of fighting for attention in launch week itself.

> A niche creator with the right audience outperforms a huge one with a broad audience.

THE CREATOR OUTLOOK

Lock creators in ASAP

So far, we haven't seen rates surge because of GTA, and I'm not convinced they will. Dedicated videos may get more expensive, but for integrations the bigger issue is supply. Creators will be making so much GTA content that there'll simply be fewer ad slots available. So the priority isn't special clauses. It's getting ahead.

If you want content live before, during or after the launch, lock those creators in ASAP so the deliverables are committed in their contracts. Beyond that, I'd focus on four things:



A flexible window, not a fixed date.
Agree a delivery window rather than a specific day. If GTA gets delayed again, or something shifts at launch, you can move the content without renegotiating.

At least 30 days of usage rights.
If a busy creator can only fit in one post, you want the right to put paid behind it and get far more from that single piece of content.

Pricing locked to today's numbers.
If viewership on GTA content spikes around launch, you don't want your fee rising with it. Lock pricing to the creator's current average viewership. On CPM-based deals, set a sensible cap so you're protected if the content massively outperforms.

Topic alignment written into the contract.
If you specifically want to appear inside GTA content, make that a contractual requirement. We have a client doing exactly this right now, running a campaign built purely around GTA integrations. For them, the contract states that the video topic must be agreed before a creator goes live, and that topic is GTA. Integrating into GTA content will still be very powerful, but only if you guarantee you're actually in it.

> “
>
> Creators will be making so much GTA content that there'll simply be fewer ad slots available. So the priority isn't special clauses. It's getting ahead.

THE CREATOR OUTLOOK

A lot of brands have failed in gaming because they didn't do the research.

They came in saying what they thought gamers would care about, not what they actually do. The formula I'd use for the ultimate culture-jacking campaign has four parts:

Community resonance:

Everything starts here. Can your brand genuinely resonate with this community, and do you know how? That means choosing who you're talking to. We've seen brands launch gaming strategies that try to speak to every type of gamer, but every gaming community is different. GTA's audience is broader than most, but you still need to define who within it you're targeting and understand what they care about before you say a word.

+

Natural fit:

Does your brand naturally belong in GTA and the content around it? If you have to explain the connection, it isn't there. Sometimes you can engineer one, but it has to make instant sense to the audience. KFC is a great example. It unveiled the KFConsole, a tongue-in-cheek gaming console spoofing the next-gen console reveals, complete with a built-in chamber to keep your chicken warm. It was ridiculous, but it worked, because gamers and fried chicken already go together.

+

Speed:

Everything is about speed now. Trends come and go in days, so you need to be relevant and topical. Be on the ball at launch, spot the hype moments and the most talked-about things as they happen, and jump in fast.

+

Creator ownership:

Don't force your way in. Let creators shape the narrative. They know their audience better than any brand does, so give them the freedom to work out how your brand fits naturally into their world and into the world of GTA.

The single biggest mistake is assuming what gamers care about instead of finding out. Brands that skip the research end up talking at a community rather than being part of it, and gamers call that out instantly.

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER

With the deafening background noise around the release of GTA VI, it can be a challenge to clear your head and decide how your brand should position activity around the time of launch. So with the help of our experts, we've pulled out three different routes you could take when this behemoth cultural moment comes around.

It's time to CHOOSE your character.



CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER

CAUTIOUS CALLUM

Pause

Risk:

Spend:

Reward:

You're already booking in creators for Q1 while everyone else is distracted.



You're a direct competitor to GTA, or you're bringing out a product for young men around launch time.

There are times when just not engaging with a cultural moment is the simplest answer. And the right one.

If you have a product targeted at young men launching when GTA is coming out, just do not do it. The majority of attention will be focussed on GTA, so you'll just be spending more to get less from it.

And if you're a competing game, pause. If it's any way like GTA, you're running a race you'll never win. No creator campaign is going to change the fact that everyone will be playing GTA.

From a programmatic perspective, it is very likely if you're doing any bidding that costs will rise on the day of launch, and for several days after. Pause on that audience, and allow the budget to flow to a more cost-efficient, less distracted audience.

It may just be that the GTA audience does not cross over with your audience. In which case, don't pay for attention where the eyes you want aren't even on it.

> No creator campaign is going to change the fact that everyone will be playing GTA.

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER

AGILE ANDREA

Pivot

Risk:

Spend:

Reward:

You're a maestro at knowing where you can encounter the same audience at a cheaper price.



Your brand has a crossover with a section of the GTA audience, and you need to keep momentum throughout the launch.

A complete sidestep while keeping performance steady may be unrealistic if you're a direct gaming competitor.

For example, a potential reduction in paid spend may offset a rise in CPM costs to keep CPA steady, but then you may experience a longer-term impact on sales.

There are ways you can reduce your exposure though. For any gaming creators you're looking to work with, delve into adjacent orbits like cars, tech, music, comedy and lifestyle, or gaming communities that won't be switching focus to GTA.

Take your eyes off Twitch and look at YouTube whether that's long or short-form. That means looking at longer tail demand less dependent on launch week.

Or you could even carve open two windows either side of the launch. The first two to three weeks before launch, and the second four to six weeks afterwards in that sweet spot where a GTA fatigue sets in.

For those brands who have a clear link to GTA, a sidestep might look something like this:

Gaming ➜ entertainment ➜ culture

GTA audiences ➜ cultural behaviours

Social ➜ YouTube ➜ CTV ➜ audio ➜ OOH

Generic launch creative ➜ contextual, reactive creative

And for those without one:

Gaming audiences ➜ category audiences

GTA contexts ➜ contextual environments

Crowded social ➜ CTV, audio, OOH

Launch period ➜ moments before and after peak attention

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER

OPPORTUNISTIC OLIVIA

Piggyback

Risk:

Spend:

Reward:



You're an expert culture jacker who knows how to take advantage of the ripples GTA will cause across different sectors.

You are a bold brand who has a clear link to the moment that you want to capitalise on.

While being bold brings rewards, first ask yourself whether you're being true to your brand by leaping on the moment. Try explaining that link in a sentence. If you can't, consumers will see right through you.

Ensure you have the right creative to do it justice. Creative is the biggest lever you can pull so do not rush it. And if you're booking in creators, get it done ASAP to lock rates, windows and whitelisting.

Complement it with the culture surrounding the launch. Carefully look at the different behaviours that event produces then find that genuine connection to them. That could be their new favourite show. Or what they're talking to their circle about. And then act on it. Listen. Find the connection before amplifying and capturing that demand.

Ensure everything is planned for the standard game phases: pre-launch hype, launch-week reactive, and post-launch second wave.

When you're working with creators, let them own the execution and align with the content they're making. It's crucial you have that synergy in place.

Run social listening through launch, set 24-hour approval turnarounds and pre-approve creative ideas so you can respond to what's actually happening and what is trending and getting attention from the game.

In terms of other tracking from a paid perspective, get a diverse range of data signals to ensure you are capturing different intent signals to reach your audience. That way you'll have multiple segments for budget to flow and avoid bottlenecks, whether that's search data, purchase data or first-party data such as previous customers or retargeting lists.

Finally, track comment sentiment, saves, shares and search lift. With culture jacking, the conversation is the result.

JOURNEY FURTHER

Get in touch to get your
last-minute GTA strategy tips.

E: hello@journeyfurther.com
W: journeyfurther.com