

Targeting Youth Retail: How Gamestation Turned on a Bunch of Psychopathic, Earth-defending, Speed Freaks

By Graham Furlong, Planner, CheethamBellJWT
Graham.furlong@jwt.com

They live in a parallel world, a world unlike our own. It's fast, furious and complex. It requires death-defying skill. In this world they hold great power, power beyond any mere mortal's imagination. They choose to be whoever they want to be and go wherever they want to go. Each day they wake they choose to fight for good or evil. They exist in a world where flight is not fantasy.

They are the greatest problem solvers of the 21st Century. Their reactions are like lightning. They don't read instructions and they certainly don't play by the rules. They are gamers and gamers create their own rules.

So, do you really think telling them you've got a half price sale is going to turn them on?

Gamestation are gamers and proud of it

This is a story of how Gamestation has built a powerful brand by staying true to who they really are. A brand that has not only helped them become the fastest growing entertainments retailer, but has helped double market share whilst other specialist game retailers lost share to the not-so-specialist competition.

Gamestation was started in 1993 by a group of serious gamers and to this day they have only recruited gamers. If you're not a gamer you're not coming in. This means the buyer and seller are the same, they operate on the same level. The gamer buys from a gamer, in a store designed by gamers, full of messages that excite gamers.

They are the only games retailer to ooze gaming attitude. It seeps out of every sweaty pore. They refuse to compromise. They are who they are, they change for nobody. Their gaming attitude doesn't stop in the store. It's contagious and has infected every dimension of their business, from the inside out. Every element of the business is finely tuned to convey the rich brand voice that has helped build the Gamestation brand over the past 13 years.

Can you hear the BOOM of our voice?

The Gamestation brand hasn't be built on a single mind-numbing proposition that is repeatedly beaten over the head of every gamer. That tactic just wouldn't work in this market. Gamers are more complex than that; they would soon get bored and move on to things that are of greater interest. Instead Gamestation has invested in building a truly different, thought-provoking and powerful brand voice. A brand voice that is a million miles from the world of repetition and instantly noticeable when you hear it. The Gamestation voice has depth and embraces subtlety in an attempt to remain interesting to an audience with an extremely low attention span.

It emanates from every single store.

Get yer sick note ready



Goodbye Girlfriend



Fresh air's overrated

Player 4 - Cash Tills

It lives and breathes on every piece of communication. Using any space they can as a media vehicle.



To encourage gamers to trade-in their old games Gamestation would ask them to 'Bring out your dead' and 'Turn a nice game of football into a bloodbath'.

Communications look rough and scratchy, like they have come from an underground mob of serious players. Not a 200 store national retailer. Each piece is hand crafted with a bespoke typeface that is created in house at CheethamBellJWT. That's dedication.

Finally, as a Christmas treat Gamestation offered its customers Season's Beatings.

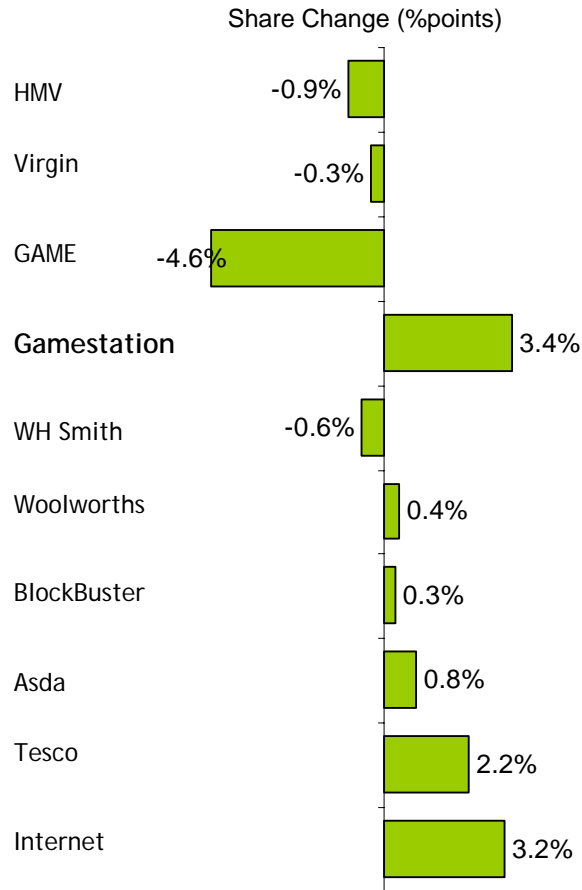


Are they winning?

In 2004 the gaming market began to dramatically change. Not only did Gamestation have to combat the specialist game retailers like GAME, supermarkets like Tesco and online retailers like Amazon wanted to join the battle. Throughout this tough period Gamestation didn't flinch, they didn't try to combat the supermarkets with copy-cat tactics. They continued to stay true to who they are. Gamestation continued to pump out gamer attitude.

They stood up to the supermarkets and in 2005 they saw a promising picture. Gamestation were the only specialist retailer to gain market share, out growing new entrants like Tesco and Asda.

Retail Games Spend Share Performance – year to date September 2005



Throughout this period it is worth noting that Gamestation didn't open any new stores and their share of voice didn't increase. That would be too easy.

Gamestations greatest reward came in 2006 when they were awarded Entertainment Retailer of the Year by MCV magazine.

Teach us master Yoda

As a green wise man with a pal called Luke would put it - Learning's of three take away from Gamestation we must.

1. Build a brand voice that has depth.

Simplicity isn't always the only thing that is required. Complexity is often welcomed as long as it is coherent. In a recent conversation with John Meada, author of 'The Laws of Simplicity' and founder of The Simplicity Consortium at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he stated that when building a brand 'Simplicity is the attraction, but complexity is the lifetime relationship'.

And lifetime relationships are crucial for building any retail business. So, spend time building a brand voice, be ruthless in ensuring that it is true to you, but don't dumb down. Embrace depth where appropriate.

2. Be interested and interesting

If you're a retail brand operating on the bustling high street then you've probably decided to focus on selling perhaps one type of product - cosmetics, organic food, uber-futuristic technology, male grooming etc. You must remain as interested in your chosen category as you were when you opened the doors for the very first time. If you falter the customer will notice.

Customers often want to purchase from someone who is as interested as they are in the product they are looking to buy, if not more so. Plus, if you share a common interest then you'll probably be quite interesting to talk to. Nobody likes a boring retailer.

3. *Don't compromise*

Never, ever, ever, compromise your personality (not even on a Bank Holiday). When the competition get closer to you or come up with a nifty new tactic, refuse to copy. Instead, flex your brand voice in a way that is compelling to the customer and true to you. You may find it easier to follow the most threatening competitor but this could be the most fatal move you make. Possibly your last in the arduous brand building journey.

Capitalise, don't compromise.

GAME OVER.