

# DO GAMES EVENTS STILL MATTER?

By Will Guyatt

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Do gaming events still matter?

I'm now an outsider looking into your world - but from what I can see, consumer gaming events have taken a turn for the better.

My early experiences were all about exhausted gamers queuing in a queue to join the actual queue for a short hands-on with the hotly anticipated release of that year.



While at Gamescom for IGN one year, I met a bunch of European gamers after hours who were clearly going through their own form of PTSD - having stood in line for at least seven hours to get a 10-minute go on the Call of Duty du jour.

I'd have rather 'raw-dogged' a flight to New York than spent the same amount of time listening to pumping game music on loop, as people split their drinks, tripped over my feet and got sweatier as the venue got busier. For a while it seemed like the industry was battling with what to do next. Consumer events with big deluxe-looking stands that focused on hands-on experiences were great until too many people started coming. Ironically, the more successful they became, the less people enjoyed them.

Events like this were no longer fun once you had to regimentally plan your day to the nano-second, with the ability to outperform Usain Bolt off the line as the doors opened.

In the pursuit of getting time with the one or two games that interested you most, you would routinely miss out on other stuff you really wanted to see - as well as other things you didn't know existed, but would have also loved.

For me, gaming events became enjoyable again when they took a page from the Comic Con playbook - by focusing on the communities and fandom that built around game franchises and the hobby itself. I've worked many San Diego Comic Cons over the years for Future and IGN and have since been back as a fan. Even with 130,000 + attendees, many people go again and again - having got to spend time doing things that interest them.

The MCM Comic Con is taking place in London this weekend, and if I was in town, I'd be making a beeline for an experience built around a decade old game. Marioke is the chance to play Mario Kart 8 as a live 8-piece band plays the soundtrack. Not only is it great to watch, it's also fun to hear them bring the game's tunes to life - including speeding the music up for the final lap. There's something gloriously perverse about going to play an old favourite when the hotly-anticipated new instalment launches in under a fortnight.

Modern gaming events do a solid service for the industry - they allow publishers and marketers to engage with fans, and connect in more meaningful ways - educating, entertainment and informing with live demos, Q&As and loads more - all of which are WAY more interesting than a day of queues. I'm now seriously considering rejigging my weekend to check out MCM Expo. Do you know if they play the Rainbow Road theme?



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He is former Head of Comms for Instagram, IGN and Future Publishing.