

**[00:00:00] Claire 00:00:00:** As marketers, traditionally, we think about, like, "We need to get attention. Like, how do we cut through? How do we capture attention?" In gaming, we've already got that attention.

**[00:00:10] Matt 00:00:10:** To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to The Speed of Culture.

We're here live in South Beach at the POSSIBLE conference, and today we are thrilled to welcome Claire Nance, the Senior Director of Marketing Communications at Microsoft's Xbox Media Solutions. Claire leads B2B marketing communication for Microsoft's gaming advertising business, helping brands understand why gaming has become one of the world's most powerful channels for culture, connection, and modern entertainment. Claire, so great to see you today.

**[00:00:53] Claire 00:00:53:** It's great to be here. Thanks for having me.

**[00:00:55] Matt 00:00:55:** So, you've been in the gaming space for quite a while. Correct?

**[00:00:58] Claire 00:00:58:** Yeah.

**[00:00:58] Matt 00:00:58:** So, tell us about your journey.

**[00:01:00] Claire 00:01:00:** Yeah. So, I was previously at Activision Blizzard, which is one of the world's biggest video game partners. And then, of course, Activision Blizzard was acquired by Microsoft a number of years ago now. I came into Activision Blizzard; they had kind of what was, back then, a very early-stage ads business, and I came in as one of their first Marcom hires. And it was—my job was really, like, "How do I help the industry understand gaming?" And the ad industry, the marketers, understand gaming. And so, I helped kind of build that team and build that business from scratch. And then now, since the Microsoft acquisition, we're now under the Xbox Media Solutions banner, so we've kind of had this rebrand, which is really exciting and represents more of the properties that we're now going out to market with. So, I've been in this space for a long time, as you mentioned, and really seen, I think, the evolution of the conversation around gaming amongst marketers and in the advertising industry, and how that's evolved.

**[00:01:51] Matt 00:01:51:** How has life changed for you and your other colleagues?

**[00:01:55] Claire 00:01:55:** Yeah.

**[00:01:55] Matt 00:01:55:** Formerly at Activision since the Microsoft acquisition?

**[00:01:58] Claire 00:01:58:** Yeah. I mean, it's been really exciting. We have the power of Microsoft, which is, obviously, one of the biggest and best companies in the world. And to have that kind of power behind us, it now means for us, in terms of the amplification of the message and the storytelling that we're able to do, we're able to do that so much more. And even from a product perspective, when we were on the Activision Blizzard side, we were mainly talking about mobile gaming—so, ads within the mobile gaming space. Candy Crush is...

**[00:02:24] Matt 00:02:24:** Yeah.

**[00:02:25] Claire 00:02:25:** You might have heard of it. One of our big...

**[00:02:26] Matt 00:02:26:** I can't get my mom off of it.

**[00:02:28] Claire 00:02:28:** Yeah. It's—you know, I think it's one of the most ubiquitous mobile titles, right? And so, we were doing a lot in the mobile space. Post-acquisition, we're now also in console, we're now also in PC.

**[00:02:40] Matt 00:02:40:** Yeah.

**[00:02:41] Claire 00:02:41:** So, when you think about the gaming landscape, and you think about it through these three channels or these three platforms—mobile, PC, and console—we now have an offering across that entire spectrum. Whereas previously, we were much more focused in the mobile space. So for us, that's been a really, I think, important step for us as a business, but candidly, even for the gaming ads industry and the gaming ad space, because no one else can really compete with us through that lens, you know, with the depth and breadth of the portfolio that we have. And so, being able to work with marketers and brands and have them come to us and say, like, "Yo, I'm interested in gaming. Where do I start?" We can now help them be, like, "This is the best channel or the right audience for you," rather than having a narrow portfolio.

**[00:03:25] Matt 00:03:25:** Right. So gaming is big. Just how big is it? I know, like, during COVID, obviously, with people stuck at home, all they could do is play video games. Five years later, what is the state of gaming today? And what are some of the areas that are growing the fastest?

**[00:03:40] Claire 00:03:40:** So, there's this stat, you're going to hear it a number of times if you haven't already: 3.6 billion gamers globally. That's the number that gets touted a lot. I think it's about 80% of people in the US are playing games. So, that's a lot of people.

**[00:03:54] Matt 00:03:54:** From mobile games, iPhone too. Xbox, hardcore.

**[00:03:57] Claire 00:03:57:** Yeah. Absolutely. And I do think one of the reasons that there's not this understanding of the power and just how big gaming is is because a lot of people don't call themselves gamers, or they don't think of, like, the mobile game and playing Candy Crush—like, "Is that gaming?" And it is, right? And we see that in those numbers, this 3.6 billion—it's so ubiquitous. It is really big.

**[00:04:19] Matt 00:04:19:** Yeah.

**[00:04:19] Claire 00:04:19:** So that shift, you're, what we saw with COVID—there was obviously a lot of people kind of picking up gaming again, and we actually saw that it was more people returning to gaming. So people who had played maybe when they were younger and still had that console at home—COVID happened, and they actually picked it up again because they had a little bit more time. It was a great way for social connection.

**[00:04:38] Matt 00:04:38:** Wow. This is not, like, Atari growing up.

**[00:04:40] Claire 00:04:40:** Yeah.

**[00:04:41] Matt 00:04:41:** Because that...Just for those who haven't played video games in a while, it's just incredible, just the evolution that the gaming experience has undergone. It's incredible.

**[00:04:51] Claire 00:04:51:** Exactly. Well, even when you think about mobile games too, the technology advancement in mobile games, too—from where it was to where it is today, the level of graphics that you can have...

**[00:05:01] Matt 00:05:01:** And connectivity with other people.

**[00:05:02] Claire 00:05:02:** Yeah. And that was a big thing during COVID, obviously, but I think even beyond that, that it wasn't just about, "Oh, having a call with someone"—it's sharing an activity together.

**[00:05:12] Matt 00:05:12:** Right.

**[00:05:12] Claire 00:05:12:** So when you're gaming, you're... you know?

**[00:05:12] Matt 00:05:14:** You're sharing an experience.

**[00:05:12] Claire 00:05:15:** Exactly. And that's really, really important. So I do think that sometimes gets missed when we think about this idea of gaming. And I think this, like, social connection piece, we see that extend outside of the game as well. So a lot of gaming audiences are connecting off-platform. So even again—I know I've mentioned Candy Crush a

couple of times here, but we actually—that is a single-player mobile game, but we actually see that communities connect in forums offline to talk about, like, their favorite levels and why is this level so hard? So that connection extends. Like, yes, some of it is in-game and those multi-game experiences, but it also extends beyond that. So I think when you ask about, like, the state of gaming today, I think that it's continuing to grow. We see that gaming is kind of this precursor for technological advancement. So we know that people use gaming as a way to really understand technology and understand it through play. And so, I think we're seeing kind of this evolution there. We're seeing the technological advancement there, and it's getting bigger and better with that.

**[00:06:13] Matt 00:06:13:** And what are you seeing as the fastest-growing titles or categories that you're seeing across the gaming landscape here in 2026?

**[00:06:19] Claire 00:06:19:** Yeah. I still think the mobile gaming space is growing because it's that access.

**[00:06:23] Matt 00:06:23:** Yeah. And just like, anybody can grab onto it.

**[00:06:25] Claire 00:06:25:** You can, right?

**[00:06:26] Matt 00:06:26:** That's all ages. You don't have to be a gamer.

**[00:06:28] Claire 00:06:28:** You have essentially, like, a gaming device in your pocket. It removes a barrier to entry. And I think some of the barriers to entry historically was the hard cost of a console, the equipment. Then you're adding on the games. And so if you're not sure, that's a lot to commit to upfront. Mobile gaming, there's the device piece. You already have the hardware. You don't need that level of investment. But I think the other critical piece is that the mobile game development and the gameplay itself and the mechanics are actually created so that it's really easy to start playing a game and enter into playing a game. You can pick up a new game and get really comfortable and familiar with it, and they're designed that way.

**[00:07:08] Matt 00:07:08:** There's not really a learning curve. Not complicated.

**[00:07:10] Claire 00:07:10:** Yeah. So I do think this idea of access is really important. And, candidly, that's also where we see the ads piece and the media piece come into play because that can play a really critical role in providing audiences with more access to more games and more titles through a monetization stream that hasn't necessarily been used in gaming before.

**[00:07:32] Matt 00:07:32:** I think the advertising piece in a second. My last question is just—the gaming space is, obviously, Xbox has Game Pass, and it's a subscription service.

**[00:07:39] Claire 00:07:39:** Yeah.

**[00:07:39] Matt 00:07:39:** I was growing up, and I went to have a Nintendo game. I'd have to go to the store, buy the cartridge.

**[00:07:45] Claire 00:07:45:** Yeah. Yeah.

**[00:07:46] Matt 00:07:46:** And then over time, you're able to download it, but you'd take like a day to download it. Now it downloads instantly, and now you could subscribe. And is that how you're seeing more people in the console world that can access games?

**[00:07:56] Claire 00:07:56:** I think it's one of the ways. I do think—and it's about giving people choice so that they can choose how they want to engage with the games, whether through the subscription model, whether it's still through the purchasing the title, as we talked about.

**[00:08:09] Matt 00:08:09:** People buying CDs and...

**[00:08:12] Claire 00:08:12:** Yeah. The digital stores make it a lot easier these days. But I do think we've seen, and we've seen this in CTV as well, the shift to that subscription model. There's an understanding and a comfort level for consumers with that. So I think it really is about choice—giving gaming audiences the options so they can play how they want to play. They can access the games how they want to play, because not every person who plays games is the same.

**[00:08:33] Matt 00:08:33:** So your role, obviously, is to drive awareness and buy-in to a gaming platform under Microsoft's Xbox Media Solutions. So, ultimately, what that means is you have a massive audience of people who are playing games, to your point, across a multitude of different devices, and you can reach them. So tell me about how that works. Like, am I seeing ads when I'm playing games, or is it something a little bit more subliminal? How's it?

**[00:08:57] Claire 00:08:57:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think the really critical piece and core philosophy that we have operated under—and this was back in Activision Blizzard days, and it continues today—is every experience, we are player-first in terms of any ad or brand experience, whether it's in the game—

**[00:09:12] Matt 00:09:12:** Go ads first. Forget about it.

**[00:09:14] Claire 00:09:14:** Yeah. And what I used to kind of say to people a lot is we are a game publisher first. So the studios that we work with are very careful about the experience for the players, and they will not let us put a bad ad in the game, which is a good thing, to be clear, because that means a better experience for players, better outcomes for brands. So I think when we look at the mobile space, that's where we really think about rewarded video. So where there's those natural breaks in gameplay, everything we do is opt-in. So you're playing Candy

Crush, you get to the end of the level, you run out of lives, you have an option to watch an ad, and then you get rewarded.

**[00:09:48] Matt 00:09:48:** Purchase more coins, right? It's like...

**[00:09:49] Claire 00:09:49:** Yeah. Or you can do none.

**[00:09:52] Matt 00:09:52:** Right? Right.

**[00:09:53] Claire 00:09:53:** But you get rewarded for watching the ad experience. We also have playable ad experiences, which are really fun. So there's this value exchange, and I think that is really critical, and making sure that it's in these natural moments. It's not... nothing's popping up during gameplay. Like, we've all played those mobile... You know... Back in the day, all your mobile games and the ads, and you're trying to X out of it, and that is very much not the experience. And then when we think about the console side of things with the Xbox dashboard, we have ad units that sit on the dashboard itself. So that's kind of, like, the entryway.

**[00:10:23] Matt 00:10:23:** People who are selling first-party games? Or...?

**[00:10:25] Claire 00:10:25:** Games. Yeah. Exactly. Entertainment partners as well. So that dashboard is really the entryway into this gaming ecosystem, this entertainment ecosystem. So nothing about it is disruptive. It's fitting like very seamlessly within the environment. And, again, there's often that—"How is this adding value for the player and being additive to the player experience?"

**[00:10:47] Matt 00:10:47:** Right.

We'll be right back with The Speed of Culture after a few words from our sponsors.

How about in-game advertising, like you're playing FIFA World Cup and you see banners on the field? Is that part of your offering as well?

**[00:11:00] Claire 00:11:00:** That's not part of our offering. Yeah, I know that there are some ad tech companies out there that do. That's what we call "intrinsic advertising." So that's when you think of—you're playing that car racing game, and you see the billboards on the road.

**[00:11:13] Matt 00:11:13:** Toyota is actually paying for you to drive it.

**[00:11:15] Claire 00:11:15:** Exactly. So that's intrinsic advertising. So I think a really helpful way to think about gaming advertising is through this rubric, which is: in the game, adjacent to the game, and outside of the game.

**[00:11:27] Matt 00:11:27:** Got it.

**[00:11:27] Claire 00:11:27:** So "in the game" is that intrinsic—like, you're actually seeing the ad within the gameplay experience itself.

**[00:11:34] Matt 00:11:34:** The Xbox doesn't do any of that even with its own first-party games?

**[00:11:37] Claire 00:11:37:** Xbox does not. Yeah. So, again, it's really about that player experience, but I know that other games and other ad tech companies do that. So intrinsic is that "in the game" example. The "adjacent to the game" is what I talked about—the rewarded video. Like natural breaks in play, the opt-in that's a really clear example of that. And then the "outside of the game" is like when I was talking about these communities that connect off-platform. And so that can be even things like streamers, you know, the watching, that kind of component. Esports is obviously really big as well. That's where we see that "outside of the game." So I think thinking about "in the game," "adjacent to the game," and "outside of the game" is a helpful rubric to understand. There is a complex ecosystem. Gaming advertising—there's a lot there. There's a lot of different ways to advertise. There's a lot of different formats, a lot of different genres, and so having that rubric can help simplify it for brands a little bit.

**[00:12:30] Matt 00:12:30:** So I would imagine that if an advertiser is coming to Xbox Media Solutions, based upon the title, that title has a certain demographic that they're going to want to reach, so that will kind of dictate the types of titles that they will advertise on?

**[00:12:44] Claire 00:12:44:** Yeah. I think one of the things we think about when we work with brands is: know your objective and know your audience. So rather than coming in and being like, "I want to do gaming," if you kind of really focus on what it is as a brand that you're trying to achieve, who is the audience that you're going to reach, we can then work with those brands and be like, "Hey, this is the type of experience that's going to match that."

**[00:13:06] Matt 00:13:06:** Yeah.

**[00:13:06] Claire 00:13:06:** This is the type of... you look at something like Candy Crush and Call of Duty—not necessarily going to have crossover in terms of audience. So, it is actually about—even though gaming can be this kind of overwhelming and a little bit complex for brands—actually really simplify it and taking it back to that core starting point as a marketer of, "Who am I trying to reach? What am I trying to do?" And then, you know, kind of figuring out, "Okay, what is the right gaming experience that matches that?"

**[00:13:33] Matt 00:13:33:** And is this a programmatic media buy, or is it just sort of, like, a one-off premium buy?

**[00:13:38] Claire 00:13:38:** Within the mobile space, we do both.

**[00:13:41] Matt 00:13:41:** Okay.

**[00:13:41] Claire 00:13:41:** So we sell programmatically, and then we also have bespoke—like those playable mini-games that I talked about—more bespoke experiences as well. So we have a bit of a spectrum.

**[00:13:50] Matt 00:13:50:** Got it. So more broadly, where do you see the gaming space going? I was at CES this year. So many innovations, especially when you bring in the power of AI. The gaming experience—I mean, some people are talking about how people are going to be able to put themselves in the games and write the future. Where do you see that? You obviously are passionate about the gaming space. Just personally, where do you see it headed?

**[00:14:11] Claire 00:14:11:** I think, again, we're going to see more people playing. And I think the more technology grows, the more we're going to see some of those access barriers. It's going to be even easier to game.

**[00:14:20] Matt 00:14:20:** Right.

**[00:14:20] Claire 00:14:20:** And I think we're already seeing that, and we're seeing more people playing different types of games, and I think we're only going to see that continue. And I think the technological advancements are going to be really exciting because there's going to be more that can be done within a game environment, and more immersive styles of play and different styles of play. And I think that's going to just continue to attract more people. So I think gaming as a space is somewhere that really is able to push the boundaries a little bit more, and I'm excited to see where that goes.

**[00:14:48] Matt 00:14:48:** Yeah. So we're here at the POSSIBLE conference in Miami, and, obviously, I'm sure top of your list is getting an audience with the right people to tell a story about why this is a powerful medium.

**[00:15:00] Claire 00:15:00:** Yeah.

**[00:15:00] Matt 00:15:00:** What are some of the effective ways that you've been able to capture the attention of advertisers, from a B2B marketing standpoint? What's worked?

**[00:15:06] Claire 00:15:06:** Yeah. The biggest part of my job is actually not even selling Xbox or Activision Blizzard. It's actually selling gaming.

**[00:15:15] Matt 00:15:15:** Yeah.

**[00:15:20] Claire 00:15:20:** And, really, a lot of what I do is this education piece, and that's kind of the core part of my job...

**[00:15:23] Matt 00:15:23:** What we're doing today through this conversation.

**[00:15:23] Claire 00:15:23:** Exactly what we're doing today, which is breaking down some of the misconceptions about gaming. So, like, "teenage boy in the basement"—you know, that kind of stereotype, which is very much not who the gaming audience is today. So, breaking down some of the misconceptions, helping them understand the space, understanding the different ways they can activate—that's really the core, almost overarching part of the job. Because the titles and the platforms that we work with, and some of the IP we work with is some of the best in gaming. You know, it's so well-known. So it's less about selling that and more really about that education piece.

**[00:15:58] Matt 00:15:58:** Yeah. And I think I would imagine one of the big selling points is just the level of engagement that you have from this audience. You know...They're a captive audience.

**[00:16:06] Claire 00:16:06:** 100%.

**[00:16:07] Matt 00:16:07:** They're engaged in what they're doing. And if you reach them contextually and you could put your brand into an environment because we're in a world where everyone's clamoring for attention...There's a million things popping up in every direction, but when you're immersed in the game...

**[00:16:17] Claire 00:16:17:** You're in.

**[00:16:18] Matt 00:16:18:** It's almost like no other experience, and it's a great place for a brand.

**[00:16:22] Claire 00:16:22:** We often say that gaming's superpower is its immersion. Like, as you said, when you're in that game, that's all you're thinking about. And so, again, as we think about these brand experiences, for us, it's not about disrupt—we don't want to break that immersion.

**[00:16:36] Matt 00:16:36:** Yeah.

**[00:16:36] Claire 00:16:36:** We want it to be much more seamless, and it's almost thinking about it the opposite way. Like, as marketers, traditionally, we think about, "We need to get attention. How do we cut through? How do we capture attention?" In gaming, we've already got that attention.

**[00:16:49] Matt 00:16:49:** Yeah.

**[00:16:49] Claire 00:16:49:** So we actually don't want to be breaking it. We want things to feel seamless within that environment.

**[00:16:54] Matt 00:16:54:** So as we wrap up here, a lot of our listeners in the podcast are younger listeners who are at the beginning of their career. And a lot of people are always told, "Do what you're passionate about." And, obviously, gaming is a passion point. Just curious how you found your way into the gaming space and any advice you might have for some of our younger listeners to follow their dreams in terms of what they're most passionate about.

**[00:17:14] Claire 00:17:14:** I think the biggest piece of career advice I always say is: careers are not linear. You kind of often start out in your career, and you think there's this path that you're going to follow. My career was not linear. I've worked in TV, I've worked in media, I've worked in advertising, and now I find myself in gaming. I came into the gaming space through advertising. So I previously worked at IPG. So, again, a very non-traditional way to come into the gaming space. I think for people who are really interested in gaming, I always kind of remind them that there are so many different types of roles in the gaming sphere. You don't just have to be a game developer or an engineer. You can work in HR, you can work in marketing, you can work in all these different facets of the industry. So I always like to remind people that there are probably jobs out there they didn't even realize, and in the future, haven't even been invented yet. When we think about mine. So, yeah, I always kind of tell people to really think big and broad. And if you're passionate about it, have conversations with people in this space, and learn, and just know your stuff.

**[00:18:11] Matt 00:18:11:** Very cool. So to wrap up here, we always ask our guests if there's a saying or mantra that helps sort of encapsulate the career journey. Just what is yours?

**[00:18:20] Claire 00:18:20:** Mine is, "Where's the benefit?"

**[00:18:22] Matt 00:18:22:** Okay.

**[00:18:22] Claire 00:18:22:** And it's a question I ask myself before doing anything. And it's: if we're going to be doing something—whether it's we're going to be doing a marketing campaign, or we're going to be doing some kind of activity, or making an investment in something—"Where is the benefit in doing that?" And being really crystal clear on the "why" rather than just doing. Because I think, especially in very fast-paced environments, there's a lot going on, there can be this kind of tension.

**[00:18:47] Matt 00:18:47:** Especially AI like lowers the barrier to entry to almost anything. But if you don't know why you're doing it, you're just going to be doing a lot of doing and not making a lot of progress.

**[00:18:53] Claire 00:18:53:** Exactly. So that “Where’s the benefit?”. It's a question I ask.

**[00:18:57] Matt 00:18:57:** Well, lots of benefit today.

**[00:19:05] Claire 00:19:00:** Absolutely.

**[00:18:57] Matt 00:19:00:** Thinking about the gaming space with you, and really thankful that you took the time out of your busy schedule here at POSSIBLE to share with us, and wishing you nothing but success in 2026.

**[00:19:05] Claire 00:19:05:** Thank you.

**[00:19:10] Matt 00:19:11:** Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to Claire Nance, the Senior Director of Marketing Communications at Microsoft's Xbox Media Solutions, for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, rate and review the Speed of Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Till next time. Bye-bye.

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