

The Almedia Rewarded UA Handbook

Industry data, best practices & what comes next

A survey of 912 developers across 10 tier-1 markets from Almedia, the creators of Freecash, the highest-rated rewarded UA app in the US according to Trustpilot.

Part I – 2026



Foreword

Rewarded UA has earned its place alongside Google, Meta, and AppLovin in the mobile marketing mix. It has become a core channel because the additional user engagement delivered post ad-click drives retention and long-term value that other UA sources struggle to match.

The numbers tell the story. The global games market hit \$188.8B in revenue in 2025, with mobile accounting for over half (roughly \$103B). Marketers spent \$109B on app marketing globally in 2025, but the market is tightening. UA costs are climbing, user growth has stalled, 95% of new users churn within 30 days, and traditional tracking is harder than ever.

Rewarded UA is the channel that solves this very problem. Users opt in voluntarily, and the model produces higher-quality users who engage for longer through rewarding users post D30, up to half a year and beyond.

Our Rewarded Returns study in 2025 explored perception and adoption across the US and UK. This year, we went broader, surveying 912 mobile UA professionals in gaming across 10 tier-1 markets.

This handbook combines that industry data with practical knowledge from over 1,200 live advertisers on Freecash, Almedia's flagship platform. Use it to benchmark, sharpen your approach, and understand where the channel is heading.



Moritz Holländer

Founder & CEO, Almedia

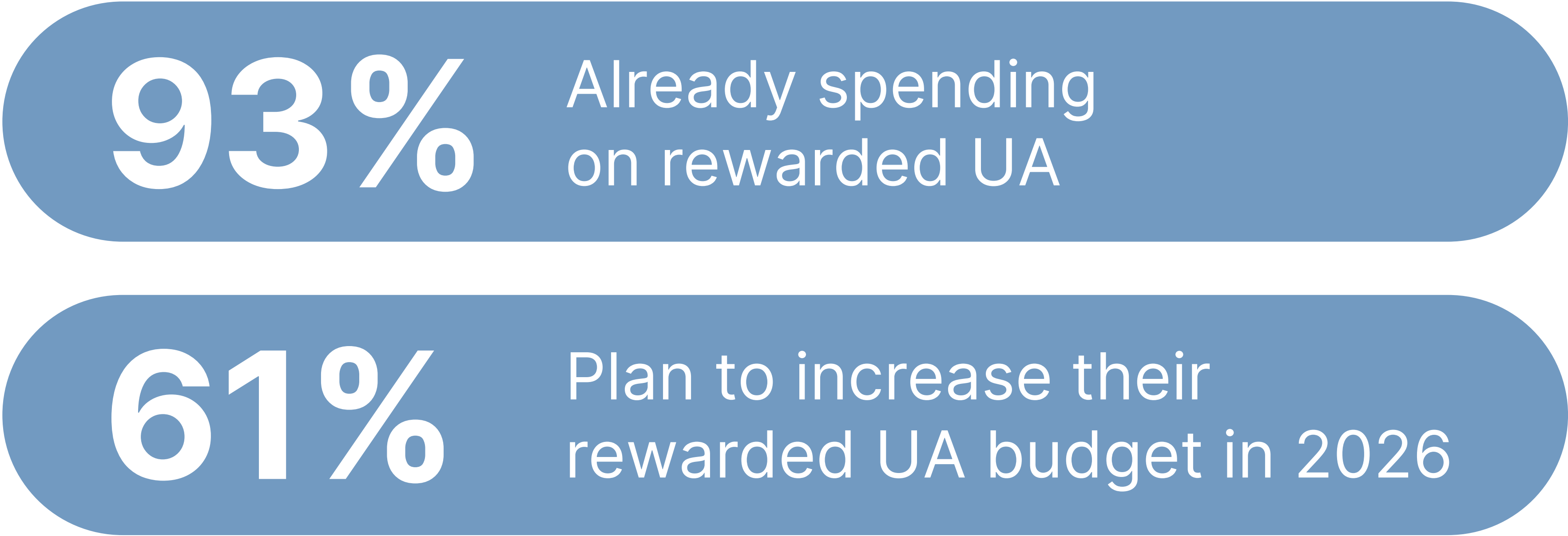


State of the Market

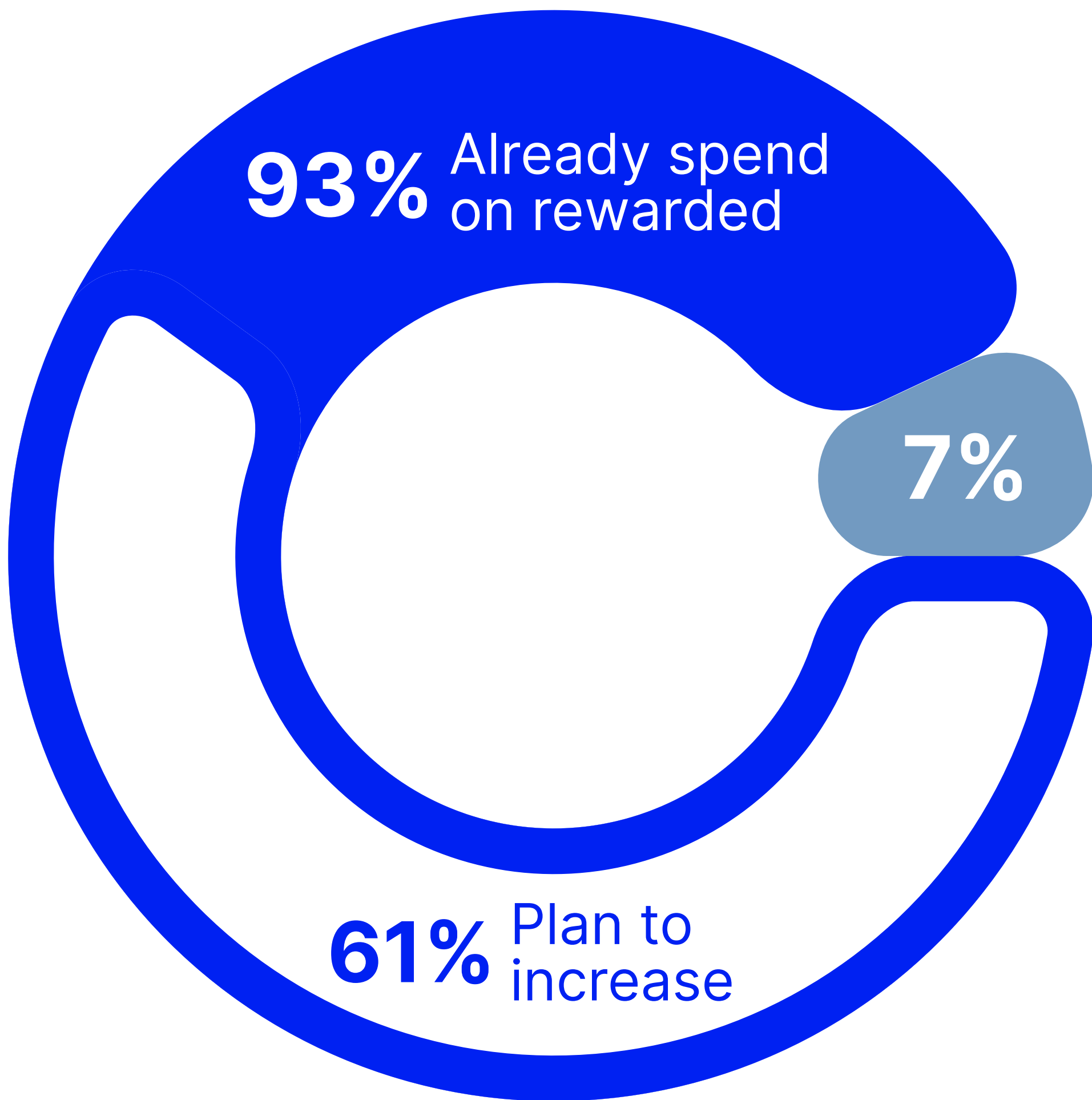
Of the \$78B spent on user acquisition globally in 2025, AppsFlyer puts mobile gaming UA at \$25B. The market has matured. Worldwide game downloads peaked at 57.6 billion in 2020 and have since plateaued and sat at 49.3 billion in 2024, with IAP revenue roughly flat at \$82B. Growth no longer comes from new players. UA costs are rising 12% year on year against just 2% user growth, and the studios doing well are those finding ways to retain the players they already have.

The gaming ad market today is still dominated by programmatic networks and the major platforms such as AppLovin, Meta, Google, TikTok. Rewarded is the challenger. It is a smaller slice of the pie, but is the one growing the fastest. In our Rewarded Returns study last year, 77% of 502 US and UK developers had run a rewarded campaign. One year later, across 10 global markets, that figure is 93%. The channel is becoming standard practice.

Adoption & Budget



Of those already running rewarded, 61% plan to increase their budget in 2026, with just 2% planning to pull back. A further 5% plan to start in 2026; only 2% have no plans to adopt.



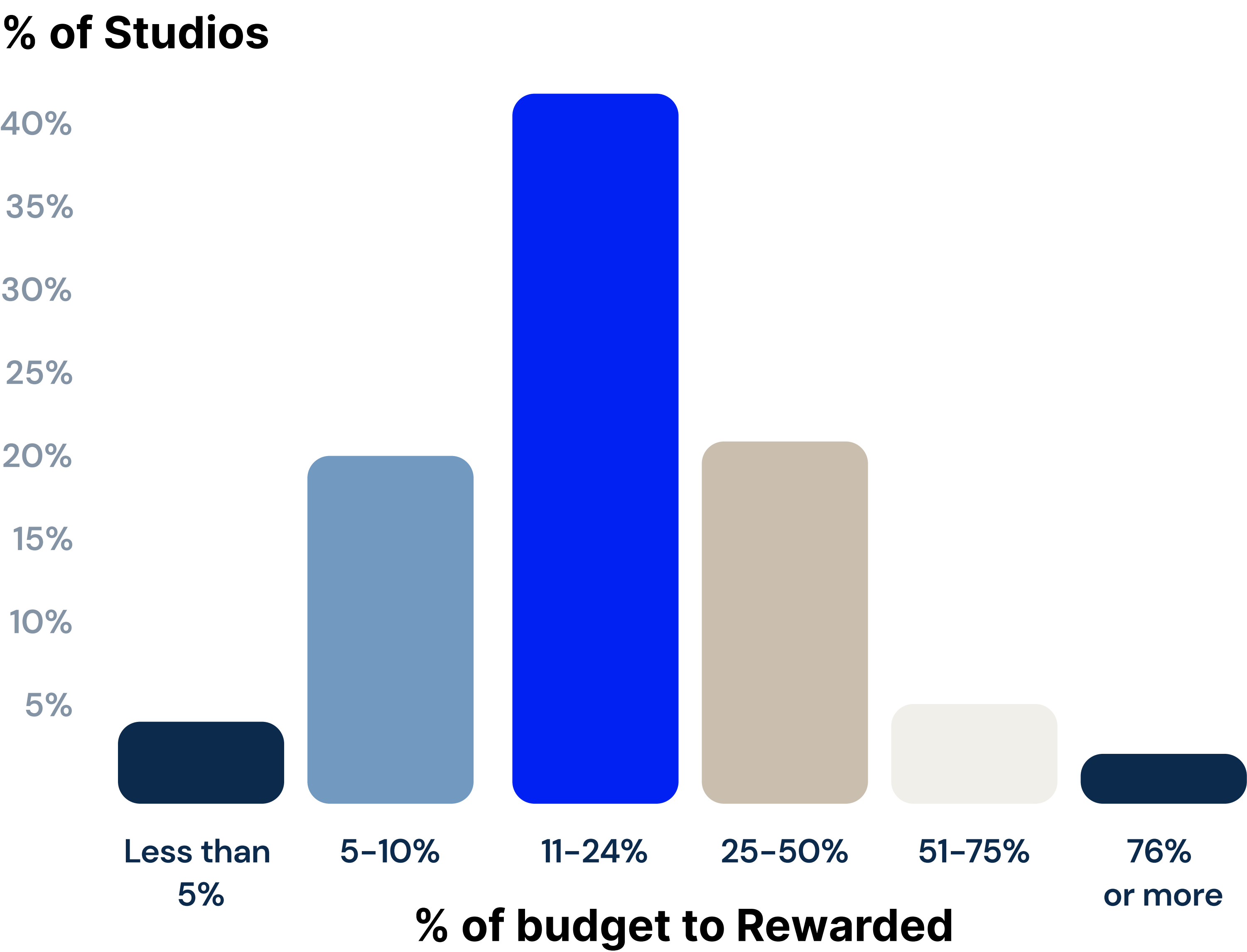
Spending on Rewarded UA

Budget Share

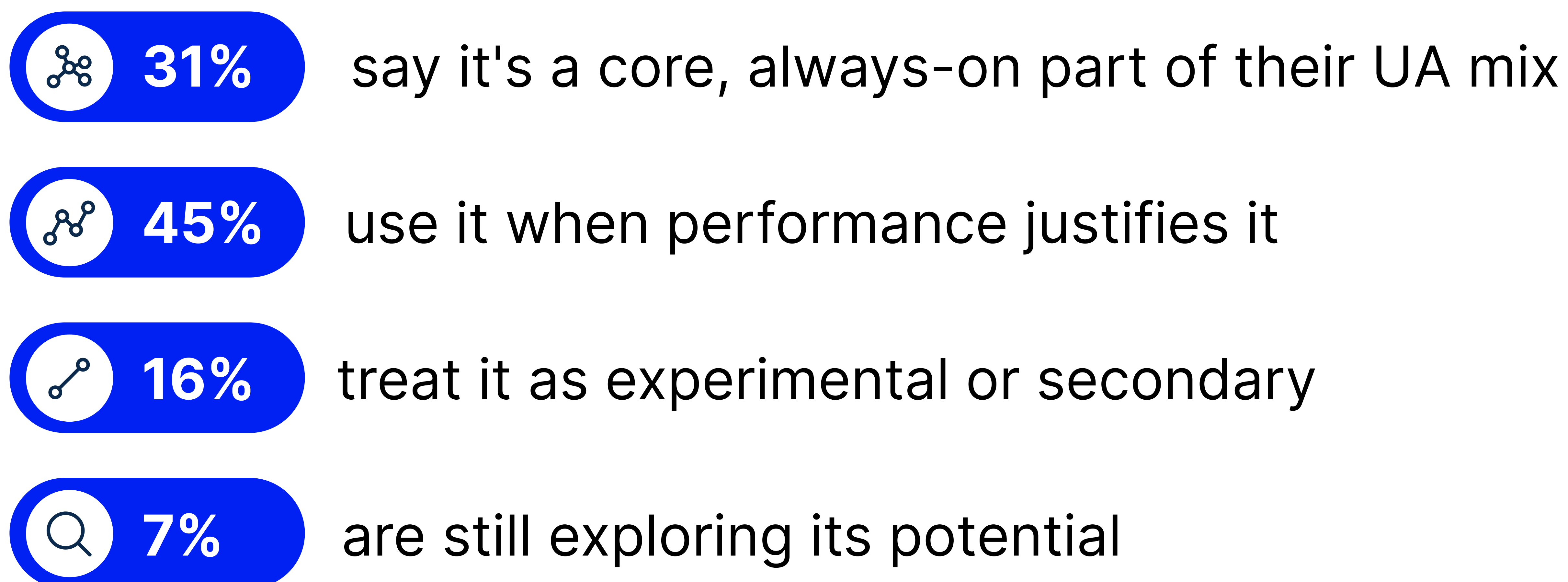
So how much do these studios actually commit to Rewarded?

43% of studios are allocating between 11 and 24% of their total UA budget to rewarded UA, with a further 22% allocating between 25 and 50%. These numbers are comparable to most major channels, and as they increase, we can expect these trends to continue.

In fact, almost 1 in 10 studios using Rewarded UA allocate over half of their budgets to those channels.



What advertisers say about their long-term view of rewarded UA:



The 45% who run rewarded when performance justifies it aren't sceptics. This is how any good UA team manages any channel. A third have it as a core channel, and they have already seen enough to make it permanent. With four in five studios (82%) positive or becoming more positive, expect the always-on number to keep growing.

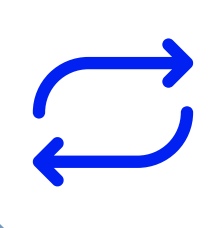


How Advertisers Run Campaigns

When to Launch Rewarded UA

Almedia recommends adding rewarded to your UA mix within the first 90 days of global launch, or sooner if you run soft launch campaigns in relevant geos, beforehand. The key point is to wait to implement rewarded funnels once sufficient user behaviour and purchase activity data has been collected. The sooner developers can pinpoint aspects of gameplay and their potential rewarded value, the sooner they can benefit. Running rewarded at soft launch can be a huge boost, but only if enough data from comparable internal campaigns is present to maximise value.

The market confirms this. Around 2/3 of studios activate rewarded at or near launch, with 93% launching within the first year. Rewarded is part of the go-to-market plan, not something added after exhausting other channels.

 Lifecycle stage	% of studios
Soft launch	17%
Global launch – First 3 months	46%
Global launch – 3 to 12 months	30%
Global launch – 12 months +	7%

Stages of game lifecycle studios begin Rewarded UA

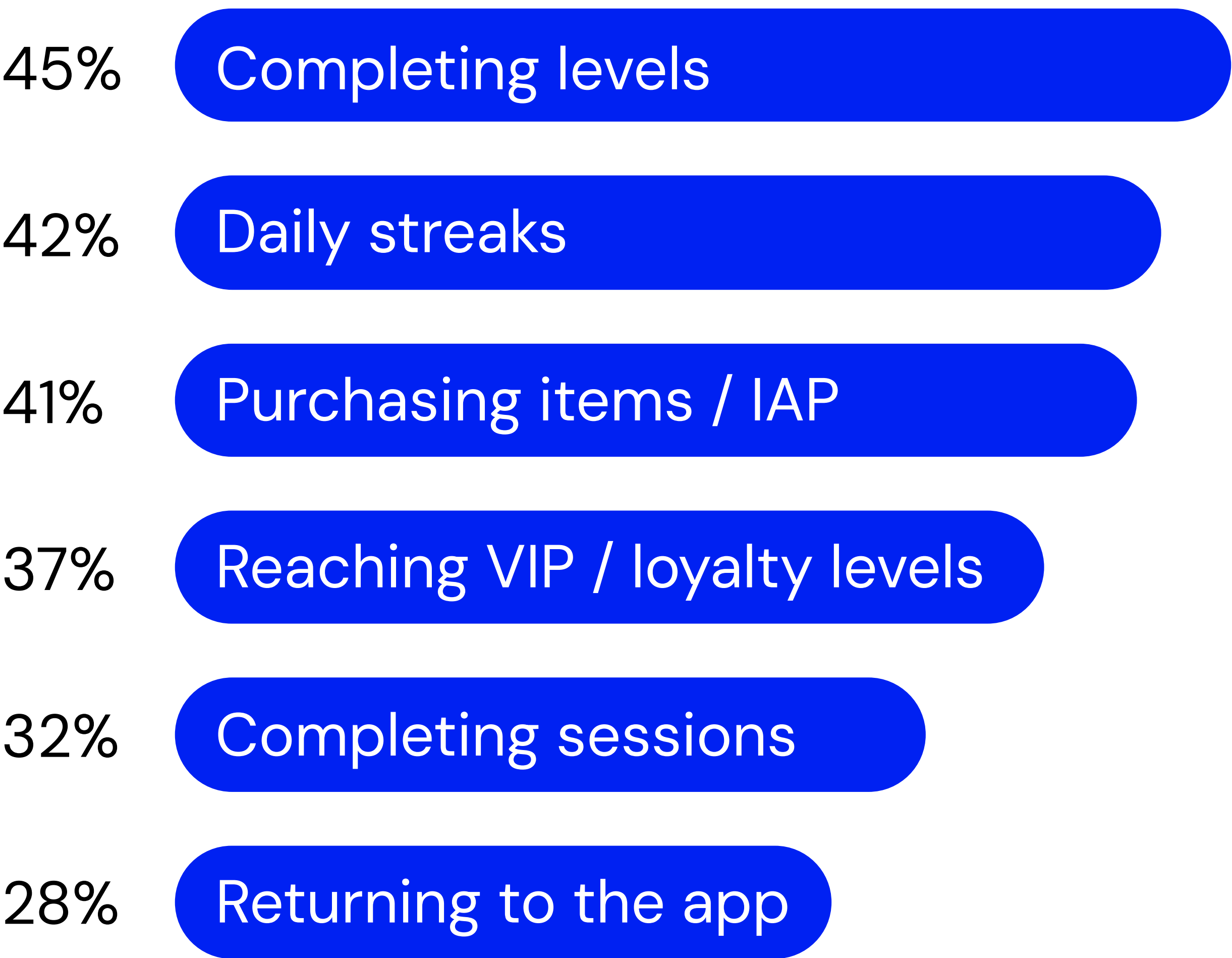
Design Your Game for Rewarded UA

The best-performing rewarded campaigns run on games that are structurally set up for long engagement funnels. This directly reflects the reward structures that maximise engagement and loyalty. If you’re building or updating a game with rewarded UA in mind:

- **Build deep level structures.** Games with hundreds or even thousands of levels give rewarded campaigns more room to optimise and reward over time. A 30-level game caps your reward funnel at 30 levels.
- **Create meaningful progressive milestones.** VIP tiers, seasonal passes, and unlock sequences give platforms more events to optimise against and give users reasons to stay.
- **Design in-app economies that support repeat purchases.** Currencies, boosters, and consumables create natural purchase events that rewarded campaigns can target over months, not days.
- **Make daily returns valuable.** Streak mechanics, login bonuses, and daily missions keep users coming back. 42% of campaigns already optimise for daily streaks.
- **Think in months, not weeks.** The studios seeing the strongest results treat their game’s event architecture as a long-term investment that pays off through sustained rewarded performance.

These aren’t theoretical. The survey confirms that the events studios actually optimise for are the exact behaviours these design principles create:

% of campaigns



Most commonly used in-game events in rewarded UA campaigns



What Events to Optimise for

In rewarded UA, an 'event' is a specific in-game action that triggers a reward for the user and a signal to the platform. The more events a campaign optimises against, the more data points the platform has to find and retain high-value users.

A strong campaign uses a layered event structure with meaningful progression:

Early events

to engage users in the first sessions (e.g. completing levels, daily streaks)

Mid-funnel

events to build habit and retention (e.g. reaching VIP levels, purchasing items)

Deep events

that sustain long-term play (e.g. milestones that even purchasing users rarely reach too quickly)



The goal is a varied distribution across the funnel. When early events hook users, mid-funnel events keep them, and deep events give them something to work towards, playing the game becomes a habit — not a task to complete for a reward.

Yan Reizin
Strategic Growth Lead at Almedia

The data backs this up. IAP/hybrid games, the most committed rewarded UA users, run an average of 3.25 distinct event types per campaign, compared to 2.39 for IAP-only and 2.13 for IAA games. Studios that invest most deeply in rewarded UA also layer the most events.

Setting Up Your First Campaign

1. **Collect baseline data first.** Run traditional UA or soft launch to benchmark conversion rates on key events (level completion rates, D30 retention, purchase rates). Your rewarded partner can also advise based on similar titles.
2. **Start with D30 reward structures.** D3/D7 metrics look strong for every rewarded campaign. D30 is where you start seeing real differentiation.
3. **Extend as data supports it.** Move to D60, then D90. At scale, D180+ reward structures deliver the most sustainable performance.
4. **Layer multiple events.** Campaigns optimising 3+ event types consistently outperform single-event campaigns over time.
5. **Share deep event data with your platform partner.** The more events they can optimise against, the better the campaign performs long-term.



How Much Budget to Allocate

Almedia recommends opening with a test campaign at \$500/day, then scaling up to a minimum daily spend of \$3,000 to generate meaningful campaign results and give campaigns the volume needed to A/B test across different target groups and reward structures.

Higher budgets accelerate data analysis. As more volume means faster optimisation cycles, more geos tested in parallel, and quicker access to tools like MaxROAS that perform best at scale.

As shown earlier, 43% of studios allocate 11-24% of their total UA budget to rewarded, with a further 22% at 25-50%. Among studios that use rewarded, it commands roughly 31% of their marketing mix, approximately the same share as Meta.

Smaller studios can start at the \$500/day floor, prove the returns, then scale from there. More experienced or larger advertisers can confidently open with higher budgets to maximise returns.

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\$3,000/day is where campaigns **reach meaningful scale**

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How Many Rewarded Channels to Run

Diversify across multiple platforms. Different rewarded channels have different inventory, audience profiles, and optimisation capabilities. Running a single platform limits your reach and leaves performance on the table.

93%

Already spending on rewarded UA

Three-quarters of studios are managing rewarded as a portfolio. This means they are optimising across platforms, diversifying supply, and treating it with the same operational rigour as any other major media channel. Studios running 4+ channels get more optimisation levers, broader reach, and reduce dependency on any single source.

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74% of studios running 4 or more rewarded UA channels

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What to Look for in a Rewarded Partner

When choosing a rewarded UA partner, prioritise user quality above everything else. Studios want users who engage, retain, and spend, not just download.

Smart targeting (47%), product innovation (40%), case studies (40%), and geo scale (38%) follow.

52% say quality users is the #1 factor

Factors sought	% of advertisers
Scale / geos	38%
Smart targeting	47%
Product innovation	40%
Quality users	52%
Metrics/Case studies	40%
Other	0%

Key factors sought when selecting rewarded UA channels

Features Advertisers Want

Once rewarded partners are chosen, the process doesn't end. Advertisers are constantly seeking improvements in their rewarded product in order to gain a competitive advantage. With a high number of feature requests, advertisers are often best advised to begin their first foray into rewarded UA with larger, more established platforms.

Many of the below features are already offered by platforms like Almedia. By constantly innovating and iterating, Rewarded UA providers can solve problems before they even exist.

 Feature	% requested
Full automation (bidding, targeting, ROAS)	43%
Smart targeting	39%
Web-shop performance	36%
Easy scaling in new geographies	34%
KPI-optimised account management	33%
Self-service campaign tools	28%

Most requested features from rewarded advertisers

MaxROAS: Automating the Returns

The #1 request from 43% of studios is full automation. **Almedia's MaxROAS replaces fixed CPI bidding** with dynamic adjustment based on predicted performance ($\pm 5\text{--}10\%$ CPI variation, built-in max cap). Since launching in Dec 2025, we've seen:

- An average **100% spending increase**
- Up to **35% ROAS uplift** across participating advertisers

What's next? We expect rewarded platforms to offer target-ROAS bidding (set your target return and the platform adjusts bids automatically, like Google Ads), dynamic per-segment rewards, predictive churn models, and deeper data exchange windows beyond D180.



Proving Long-Term Value

Studios unfamiliar with rewarded UA are typically concerned that users will churn right after the rewards end. However, thanks to the continuous development of engagement mechanics by sector leaders like Almedia, the last few years have proven that rewarded UA is first and foremost a loyalty-building channel.

When studios commit to longer reward structures and share deep event data, rewarded campaigns compound over time, leading to better retention, stronger purchasing behaviour, and payback windows that justify scaling.

 **CANDIVORE**

Case Study: Candivore – Match Masters

Candivore extended their Freecash reward structure from 50 days to 90 days for Match Masters:

 Metric	Result
D7 ROAS	+40% , reaching 2x the D7 goal
D30 ROAS	+65% , reaching 2x the D30 goal
D90 ROAS	+70% , between Feb and April 2025
D60 retention	+50%
Avg profit per user (APPU)	+50% vs 50-day structure
Ad spend	Scaled 25% without compromising performance



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The close collaboration between Candivore and Almedia’s team allowed us to design and iterate on a strategy that exceeded our performance goals.

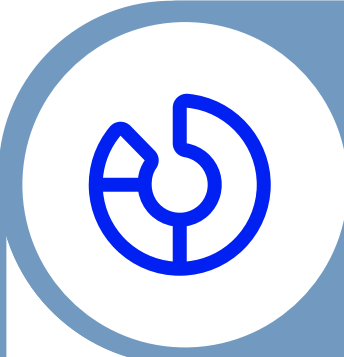
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Adi Tubul
UA Manager at Candivore



SUPERBOX Case Study: Superbox – Jewels Jungle

Superbox, an IAA-focused puzzle publisher, needed a UA partner that could deliver both ROAS and retention. Most channels could do one but not both. With Almedia, they launched their first CPI-based rewarded campaign designed specifically for ad-driven titles:

 Metric	Result
D30 ROAS	1.5–2× higher vs non-rewarded channels
D60 ROAS	1.5–2× higher , with continued uplift beyond D30
D30 retention	3× higher than other rewarded channels
Daily Spend	4× growth with consistent ROAS/retention
Market expansion	Scaled into Japan and Korea



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Almedia proved that rewarded UA can deliver both high ROAS and strong retention — a combination we hadn’t been able to achieve before.

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Jade Baeck
Senior Manager at Superbox

More Results

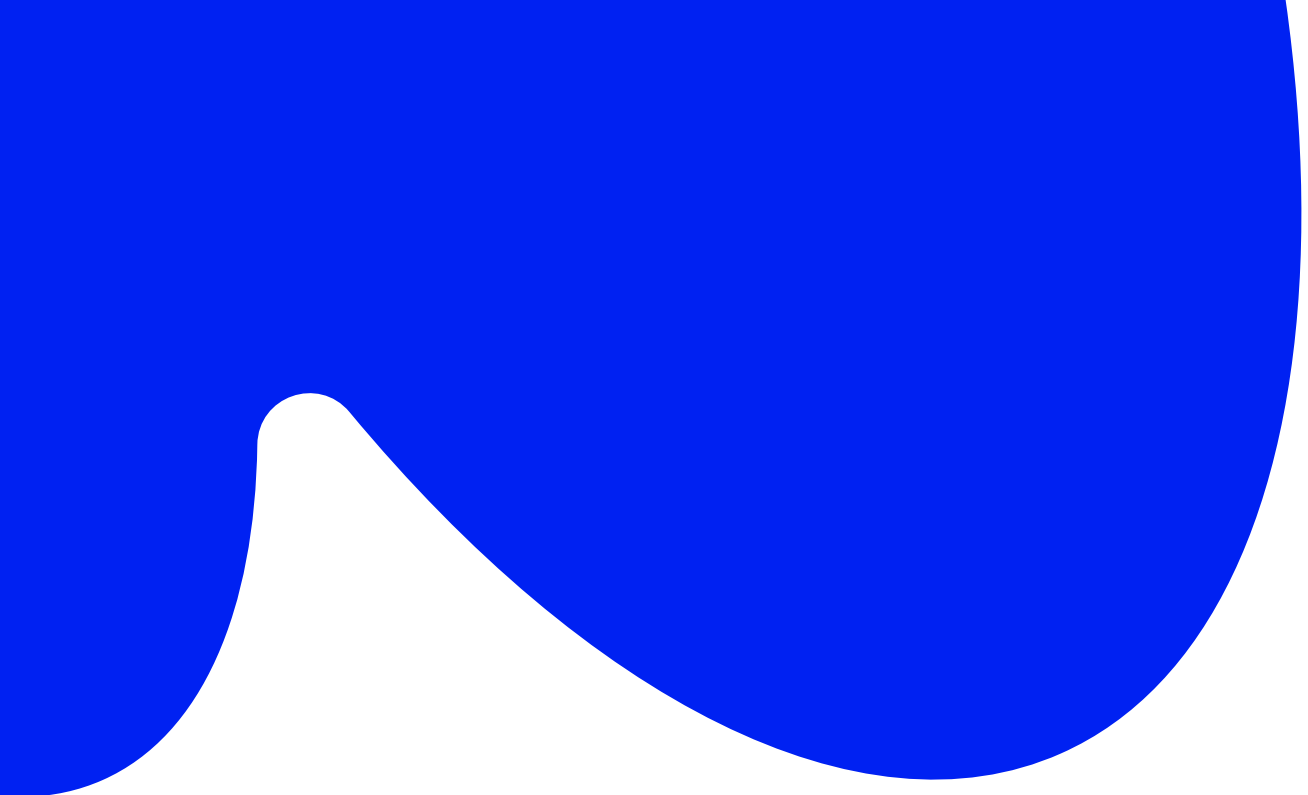
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Achieved D30 retention 70% above industry benchmarks for Animals & Coins
- 

Scaled Word Collect by 20x globally
- 

Boosted ROAS by 50% across 30+ geos in three months





Common Concerns and What to Do About Them

Concerns surrounding any UA channel are valid, and rewarded is no different.

Rewarded platforms constantly work to mitigate these issues, and move quickly to do so.

Here's what studios are most concerned about and how to address each one.

Concern	% of advertisers raising
Users leaving after rewards end	42%
Data volatility	39%
Fraudulent traffic	37%
Limited scale	36%
Lack of transparency	34%

Most common rewarded UA concerns

Users leaving after rewards end (42%)

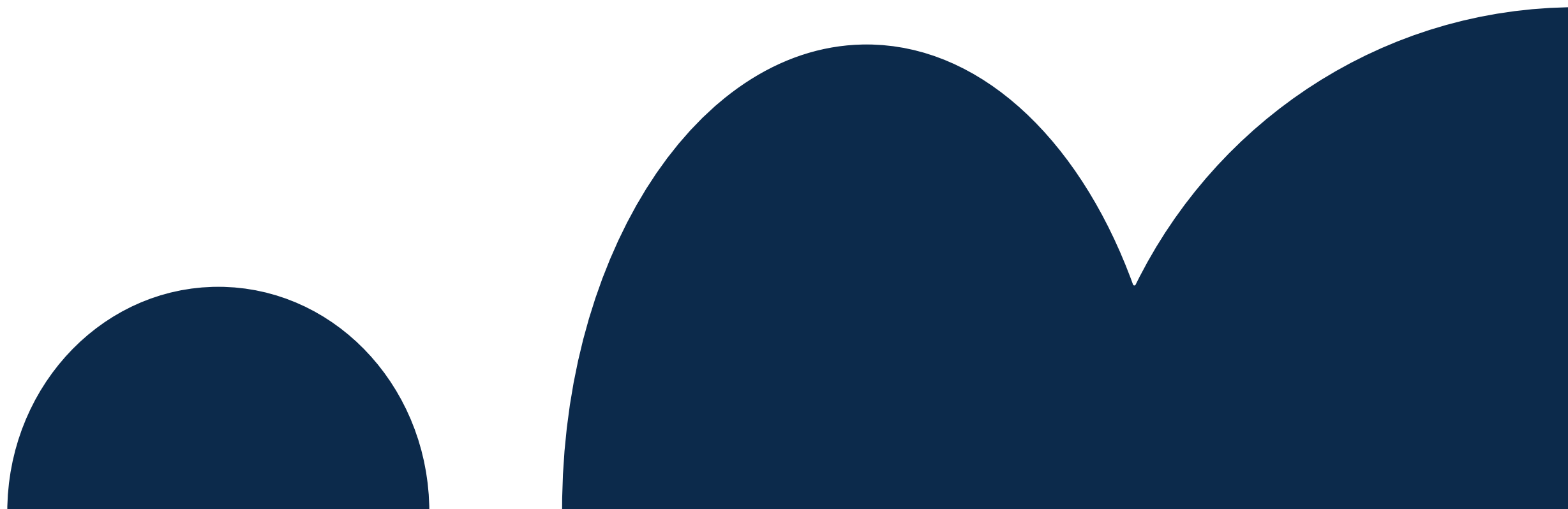
This is the D30 cliff concern: strong early metrics followed by drop-off when the reward structure ends. The fix is structural: extend your reward window. Candivore's move from 50 to 90 days boosted D60 retention by 50%. Almedia also offers lifetime reward structures for studios running at scale.

Think of rewarded UA like a loyalty program. Airlines and hotels don't stop rewarding their best customers and hope they keep spending. Your late-funnel users are typically the highest quality, with a proven return on their rewards investment. Their loyalty should be especially rewarded so they keep spending.

Data volatility (39%)

Early campaign data is inherently noisy, but some volatility is a sign your platform is doing its job. Good platforms do a lot of A/B testing on traffic sources, targeting via game recommendations, and reward structure optimisation as they try to scale.

This leads to fluctuation, but only if you take those risks regularly will you get better and better results, especially at the start. This goes hand-in-hand with having sufficient budget to test enough. If your numbers swing in the first weeks, that's the platform learning, not a reason to kill the campaign.



Common Concerns and What to Do About Them

Fraudulent traffic (37%)

Two things need to work together: your MMP (e.g. Adjust, AppsFlyer) and your platform's first-party anti-fraud tech. Align on what metrics are tracked. Ensure your rewarded partner has its own fraud detection. Relying solely on MMP-level checks is not enough. Ask specifically what tools they use and how they handle flagged traffic.

This is especially important because MMP detection programs are optimised towards non-rewarded traffic. Rewarded users behave differently by design, and without platform-level fraud tools calibrated for rewarded patterns, legitimate high-engagement users can get misclassified. Overall, put less focus on what is or isn't fraud, and more on overall quality. Fraud is just another set of low-quality users that don't deliver performance. For rewarded specifically, it drives up unnecessary costs. Good platforms want to avoid it out of their own interest and instead spend rewards on high-quality users to drive real performance.

Limited scale (36%)

Scale is a function of how many platforms you run, how many geos you target, and how deep your event architecture goes. 74% of studios run 4+ rewarded channels. Dynamic bidding systems like MaxROAS are designed specifically to unlock incremental scale without sacrificing ROAS.

Lack of transparency (34%)

As rewarded moves toward more granular and user-based personalised optimisation regarding sources and rewards given, transparency will naturally decrease. It is more important than ever to track daily progressions and alert your platform in case of differences in performance, so they can step in manually.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Testing with too small a budget or a low-quality vendor**, then concluding rewarded doesn't work. First impressions from a bad setup are not representative.
- **Dictating the reward funnel yourself** instead of collaborating with your platform partner. They have data from hundreds of similar titles. Share your perspective, but trust your partner's experience.
- **Judging campaign performance on D7 alone.** Funnels are set up for D30 to establish a baseline and learn from the results.
- **Treating rewarded as a one-off test** rather than an ongoing channel. The studios getting the best results run it continuously, not in bursts.



Non-Gaming Apps: The Next Frontier for Rewarded UA

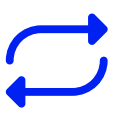
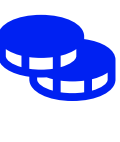
Now that rewarded UA has emerged as an integral part of the media marketing mix for mobile games (both IAP and IAA), where do we go from here?

One obvious opportunity is non-gaming apps. According to State of Mobile 2026, apps overtook games in IAP revenue for the first time in 2025. Apps grew to \$85.6 billion, compared to \$81.8 billion for games (not including direct-to-consumer web shop revenue).

Over the years, app developers added gamification and habit-forming features from best-in-class mobile games to drive engagement and retention, including:

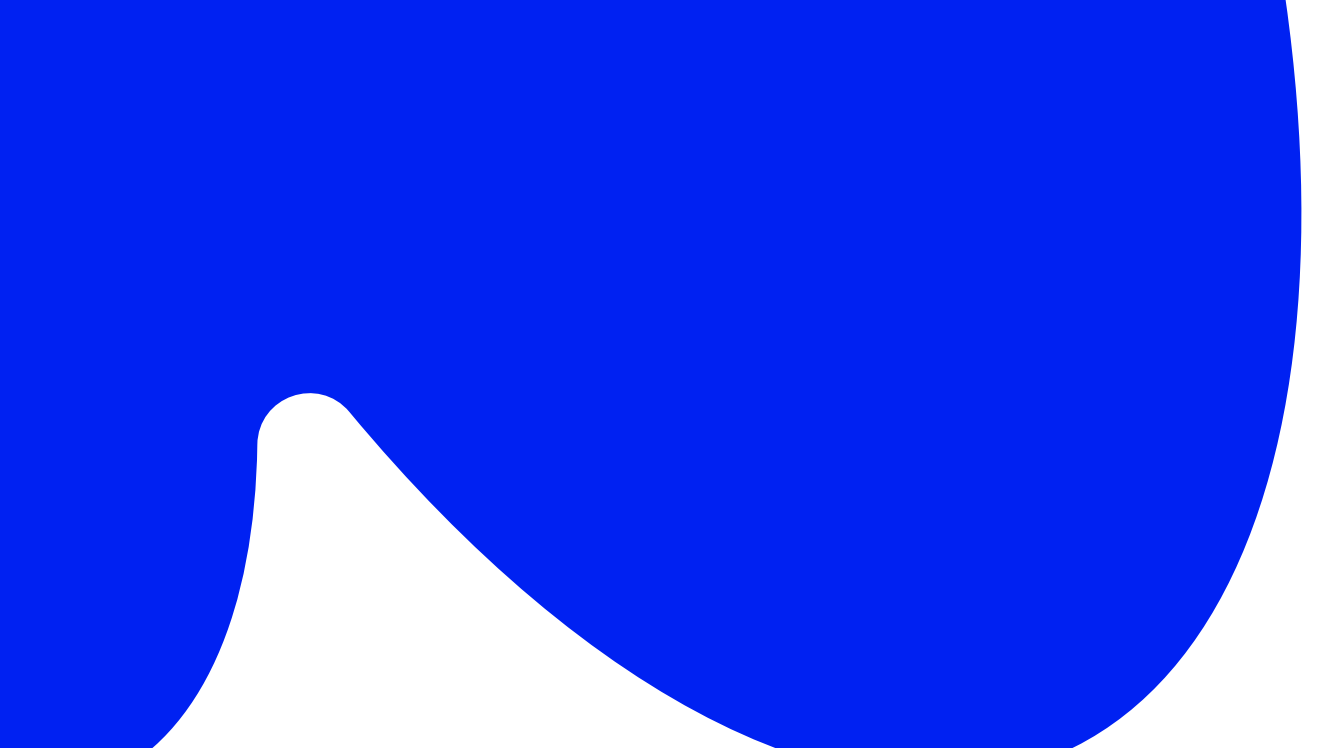
-  **Daily streaks**
-  **Progressive milestones** (levels and/or session completions)
-  **VIP levels**

These are the exact same events game advertisers are optimising for rewarded campaigns based on our survey. Common gaming events have non-gaming equivalents that can be smoothly applied in a rewarded UA context

Gaming Event	Non-gaming equivalent	Example Apps
 Daily streaks	Habit / login Streaks	 Duolingo, Strava, Headspace
 Completing levels	Milestone completion	 Coursera, onboarding
 Sessions	Workout / lesson	 Nike Run Club, Calm
 Returning to app	Re-engagement	 Universal
 VIP / loyalty	Loyalty tiers	 Retail, travel
 Purchasing items	In-app purchases	Any freemium app

The broader gamification market is valued at ~\$26B in 2025, projected to reach ~\$168B by 2033 at a 26.4% CAGR (SkyQuest).

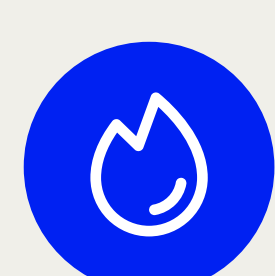




Non-Gaming Apps: The Next Frontier for Rewarded UA

The Model Is Already Expanding

The big difference between games and non-gaming apps is in-app economies. Games support repeat purchases and ad views, while non-gaming app revenues are driven by one-time purchases and/or subscriptions. However, this is evolving. Non-gaming apps are diversifying beyond subscriptions, into in-app purchases, in-app advertising, and e-commerce:



Short drama apps monetise through both subscriptions and ad-driven free content, including rewarded ads that unlock extra episodes. Rewarded video ads now deliver eCPMs up to 165x higher than standard banner ads on iOS (Mintegral, 2026 Non-Gaming App Trends Report).



Shopping apps like Dick's Sporting Goods drive daily engagement through their loyalty program for hitting daily activity goals, redeemable for in-store rewards.



Duolingo's engagement is driven by daily streaks and levels/sessions completed. To maximise use of engagement, Duolingo is building out its own advertising platform to supplement subscription revenue.

Almedia's experience over the past year is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for non-gaming apps. Still, we can apply the best practices proven in mobile games to scale rewarded growth while maintaining performance, by designing and optimising reward structures unique to each niche vertical category, with app-specific postback events and KPIs.

The most promising verticals so far are fintech, drama shorts, iGaming, and e-Commerce (e.g., cashback), with fintech leading as the first non-gaming vertical adopting rewarded UA at scale. Regardless of vertical, any app with a sophisticated economy can grow with rewarded UA.



Checklist: Is Your Rewarded Campaign Set Up to Win?

- ☐ Baseline conversion data collected (from traditional UA, soft launch, or partner benchmarks)
- ☐ Reward structure designed for D60+ (ideally D90 or D180)
- ☐ 3+ distinct event types integrated and shared with platform partner
- ☐ Progressive milestones built into game (levels, VIP tiers, purchase events)
- ☐ Anti-fraud alignment confirmed between MMP and rewarded platform
- ☐ Reporting agreed: cohort data at D30, D60, D90 minimum
- ☐ Dynamic bidding enabled (e.g. MaxROAS) for scaling without manual CPI management
- ☐ Web-shop integration considered (84% of studios have one)
- ☐ Multiple rewarded channels in portfolio (74% of studios run 4+)
- ☐ Game economy supports long-term in-app purchases (currencies, boosters, passes)

Methodology

Online survey, 912 mobile game developers, 10 markets. Atomik Research (MRS-certified).
Dec 2025 – Jan 2026.

Important: respondents pre-screened for familiarity with rewarded UA. All stats reflect this sample, not the total developer population.

Markets n=101+: USA, UK, EU, Turkey, Israel, South Korea, China ($\pm 8\text{--}10\%$). Japan, Vietnam, India (n=51, $\pm 13.7\%$) in global totals only.

About Almedia

Berlin-based Almedia is a growth and monetisation platform focused on rewarded user acquisition and loyalty campaigns for mobile apps and games. Its flagship platform, Freecash, connects more than 70 million registered users with advertisers through outcome-based campaigns that drive measurable return on ad spend.

In addition to UA, Almedia's monetisation solution, Link, enables publishers to convert high-intent users into incremental revenue streams, increasing ARPU and lifetime value. Almedia was recognised by the Financial Times as Europe's fastest-growing advertising company and works with leading app and game publishers across the world.





Maximise engagement
Connect with millions
Monetise globally

Recognised by industry partners



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