

Building a first-party data strategy for gaming companies

How to collect, unify and activate player data in a privacy-first world

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Executive Summary

The player data advantage

The UK gaming market reached £5.4 billion in 2025, growing 7.4% year-on-year. With 39 million players across console, PC and mobile, the opportunity for gaming companies has never been larger. But the rules of engagement have changed.

Privacy regulations and platform changes have transformed how gaming companies can reach, understand and retain their players. Apple's App Tracking Transparency reduced access to device-level identifiers. Third-party cookies are disappearing. T

he traditional playbook for user acquisition and monetisation no longer works as it once did.

This whitepaper provides a practical framework for building a first-party data strategy that puts your gaming company back in control. You will learn how to collect valuable player data directly, unify it into actionable profiles and activate it across marketing, product development and monetisation without relying on third-party tracking.

Gaming companies that master first-party data see tangible results. Research from Boston Consulting Group shows that brands using first-party data for key marketing functions achieve up to 2.9 times revenue uplift and 1.5 times greater cost savings.

For gaming studios competing in a market where user acquisition costs have risen 20-30% since privacy changes, this advantage matters.

The UK gaming landscape

A market worth billions

The UK ranks as Europe's largest gaming market and the sixth largest globally. Consumer spending on video games reached £5.4 billion in 2025, representing the strongest growth since 2020. Mobile gaming leads this growth, generating £1.88 billion and accounting for more than a third of total revenue.
Beyond the headline figures, the market shows encouraging depth. Over 39 million people in the UK play games regularly, representing nearly 60% of the population. Gaming has become mainstream entertainment, with audiences spanning all ages and demographics.

The data disconnect

Despite this thriving market, most gaming companies struggle with a fundamental problem: they know surprisingly little about their players.

A 2025 study by PYMNTS Intelligence found that only 18% of gaming platforms both track and have access to market data in real time, even though 80% believe such access is critical. Just 4% have real-time sales data. Only 2.2% can track business performance metrics as they happen.

This data gap creates serious business consequences. Nearly three in four gaming platforms report missing business opportunities due to incomplete or untimely data. The problem stems from fragmented infrastructure, siloed systems and outdated approaches to data collection that were designed before privacy became a priority.

The mobile challenge

Mobile gaming, despite being the largest revenue segment, faces the steepest data challenges. Apple's App Tracking Transparency, introduced in 2021, fundamentally changed how mobile games acquire and understand their users.

Before ATT, the Identifier for Advertisers allowed publishers to track users across apps, measure campaign performance and target relevant audiences. With ATT, users must explicitly opt in to tracking. Opt-in rates hover around 29-36% for gaming apps, leaving publishers with limited visibility into the majority of their iOS players.

The impact has been significant. User acquisition costs increased 20-30% on iOS following ATT. Consumer spending on mobile games dropped by approximately £8-10 billion per year globally in the two years following implementation. Facebook, once described as the holy grail of user acquisition, became one of the smallest channels for many publishers as its targeting effectiveness declined.

What it means for you

The UK gaming market offers substantial commercial opportunity, but capturing it requires a different approach to data. Gaming companies that rely on third-party tracking and platform-provided insights will continue losing ground to those building direct relationships with their players through first-party data strategies.

Why first-party data matters now

The privacy shift

The decline of third-party tracking represents more than a technical inconvenience. It signals a fundamental shift in how digital businesses must operate.

Apple's ATT was the most visible change, but it sits within a broader trend. Safari and Firefox already block third-party cookies by default. Google continues developing its Privacy Sandbox as Chrome prepares for a cookieless future. GDPR and the UK Data Protection Act impose strict requirements on how companies collect and use personal data.

For gaming companies, this means the traditional user acquisition model is broken. You can no longer rely on ad networks to identify and target your ideal players. You cannot assume that mobile measurement partners will provide the granular attribution data you need to optimise campaigns. The data that once flowed freely now requires explicit consent and careful handling.

The first-party advantage

First-party data is information you collect directly from your players through your own platforms and touchpoints. This includes account registrations, in-game behaviour, purchase history, support interactions and survey responses. Unlike third-party data, you control its collection, quality and use.

The business case for first-party data is compelling. Boston Consulting Group research found that brands using first-party data for key marketing functions achieved 2.9 times revenue uplift and 1.5 times cost savings compared to those relying on third-party sources. These gains come from better targeting, more relevant personalisation and reduced waste in advertising spend.

First-party data also addresses the accuracy problem that plagues third-party sources. When you collect data directly from players, you know it represents real behaviour from real people who engage with your games. Third-party data, aggregated and sold across multiple buyers, often contains inaccuracies, outdated information and duplicate records.

What gaming companies can collect

Gaming companies sit on a goldmine of potential first-party data. Every player interaction generates signals that, when captured and unified, create a rich understanding of who your players are and what they want.

Data category	Examples	Business value
Identity data	Email, username, social logins, device IDs	Enables cross-platform recognition and direct communication
Behavioural data	Levels completed, features used, session duration, play patterns	Reveals engagement quality and content preferences
Transactional data	Purchases, subscription status, payment methods	Identifies high-value players and monetisation opportunities
Preference data	Game settings, communication opt-ins, genre interests	Supports personalisation and relevant recommendations
Technical data	Device type, OS version, connection quality, crash logs	Informs development priorities and technical support
Community data	Forum posts, social shares, friend connections	Shows engagement depth and advocacy potential



The key is capturing this data systematically and connecting it into unified player profiles. Most gaming companies already generate enormous volumes of data through their games and platforms. The challenge lies in organising it into an asset that drives business decisions.

What it means for you

First-party data is not merely a workaround for privacy changes. It represents a strategic asset that competitors cannot replicate. The player relationships and behavioural insights you build through first-party data create lasting competitive advantage in ways that purchased third-party data never could.

Building your data collection framework

Start with strategic goals

Effective first-party data collection begins with clarity about what you want to achieve. Data for its own sake creates cost without value. Data collected with purpose drives measurable business outcomes.

Consider the key question: have you made it easy for players to see the benefits of sharing their data with you? If you cannot answer this clearly and concisely, your data strategy needs more work before you start building infrastructure.

Common strategic goals for gaming companies include improving player retention through personalised experiences, increasing monetisation by identifying and nurturing high-value segments, reducing user acquisition costs through better targeting and lookalike modelling, and enhancing game development by understanding player preferences and pain points.

Each goal requires different data and different approaches to collection. A retention-focused strategy might prioritise behavioural signals that predict churn. A monetisation strategy might emphasise purchase history and engagement depth. Define your goals first, then design collection to support them.

Map your collection touchpoints

Gaming companies interact with players across multiple touchpoints, each offering opportunities for data collection. A comprehensive strategy captures relevant information at every stage of the player journey.

- **Registration and onboarding:** Account creation provides foundational identity data. Smart onboarding flows can gather preferences and interests while helping players get started. Four in five players will volunteer basic demographics like age and gender when asked during setup
- **In-game events:** Every action within your game generates behavioural data. Level completions, item purchases, feature usage, session timing and social interactions all reveal player preferences and engagement patterns
- **Transactions:** Purchase behaviour provides the clearest signal of player value. Capture not just what players buy but when, how often and through which payment methods
- **Customer support:** Support interactions reveal pain points and player sentiment. Properly tagged support tickets become a feedback loop for product improvement
- **Marketing responses:** Email opens, click-throughs, notification responses and campaign conversions show which messages resonate with different player segments
- **Surveys and feedback:** Direct player feedback fills gaps that behavioural data cannot address. Exit surveys, NPS measurements and in-game feedback mechanisms provide qualitative insight
- **Cross-platform behaviour:** Players who engage across mobile, console, PC or web provide particularly valuable data on preferences and usage patterns across contexts



Design for consent and transparency

Effective data collection in a privacy-conscious world requires earning player trust. This means being transparent about what you collect, why you collect it and how players benefit from sharing their information.

Consent mechanisms should be clear and accessible. Avoid dark patterns that trick players into sharing more than they intend. Provide genuine choice and respect the preferences players express. Build preference centres that let players control what data you collect and how you use it.

The value exchange matters enormously. Players will share data when they see clear benefits. These might include personalised game recommendations, tailored bonuses and promotions, improved matchmaking, social features that connect them with friends or early access to new content. Make the benefits concrete and visible.

One practical approach is the graduated consent model. Collect basic information needed for gameplay by default. Offer enhanced experiences for players who choose to share more. Let players see the connection between their data sharing and the benefits they receive.

What it means for you

Data collection should feel like a natural part of the player experience, not an intrusive demand. Design collection into your games and platforms from the start. The companies that make data sharing feel valuable to players will build larger, richer first-party datasets than those that treat it as a necessary compliance exercise.

Unifying player identities across platforms

The identity challenge

Gaming companies face a particular challenge in player identity. The same person might play your mobile game on their commute, switch to PC at home and occasionally pick up a console controller. They might interact with your website, respond to emails and engage with social media content. Without identity resolution, each of these appears as a separate individual.

This fragmentation undermines every aspect of player understanding. You cannot calculate accurate lifetime value if one player appears as five different records. You cannot personalise effectively if you only see a fraction of someone's engagement history. You cannot attribute marketing impact if you cannot connect an ad impression to an eventual purchase across devices.

Industry research suggests that 47% of the open internet is now unaddressable by traditional trackers. For gaming companies operating across platforms and devices, the percentage of unidentified players may be even higher.

Building unified player profiles

Identity resolution is the process of connecting disparate data points to create a single, persistent view of each player. This unified profile, sometimes called a Customer 360 or Golden Record, becomes the foundation for all player-level analysis and activation.

Resolution typically combines deterministic and probabilistic approaches. Deterministic matching links records that share a common identifier, such as the same email address, phone number or account ID. This provides high confidence that two records represent the same person.

Probabilistic matching uses statistical models to identify likely connections when no common identifier exists. Signals might include device characteristics, behavioural patterns, timing correlations and contextual factors. While less certain than deterministic matching, probabilistic approaches can significantly extend your ability to recognise returning players.

The role of customer data platforms

A Customer Data Platform is purpose-built software for collecting, unifying and activating first-party data. CDPs have become increasingly important for gaming companies seeking to address the identity challenge at scale.

Core CDP capabilities include automated data ingestion from diverse sources including game servers, mobile apps, websites and third-party services. Identity resolution algorithms stitch together identifiers from email addresses, device IDs, cookies and social handles to create unified profiles. Real-time processing ensures that player actions are captured and available for activation within seconds.

For gaming, CDPs offer particular value in several areas. They can track players across multiple games in a publisher's portfolio, enabling cross-promotion and portfolio-level analysis. They can maintain identity persistence even when players change devices or reinstall apps. They can support real-time personalisation within games based on comprehensive player context.

Architecture choices

Gaming companies have several options for building their player data infrastructure.

Approach	How it works	Best suited for
Traditional CDP	Vendor-hosted platform with built-in database, identity resolution and activation tools	Companies seeking quick deployment with minimal engineering investment
Warehouse-native CDP	Data stays in your cloud warehouse while CDP layer provides identity resolution and activation	Companies with existing data warehouse investments who want to avoid data duplication
Composable architecture	Modular, API-first tools connected to create custom data stack	Companies with strong engineering teams who need maximum flexibility
Self-hosted analytics	Purpose-built gaming analytics platform deployed on your own infrastructure	Studios requiring complete data control and creative freedom

The right choice depends on your technical capabilities, data maturity, real-time requirements and existing technology investments. Many gaming companies start with traditional CDPs for speed to value, then evolve toward more customised architectures as their needs become clearer.

What it means for you

Identity resolution is the technical foundation that makes first-party data valuable. Without it, you have disconnected data points. With it, you have a unified view of each player that enables personalisation, attribution and intelligent engagement at scale.

Activating data for growth and retention

From insight to action

Collecting and unifying data creates potential value. Activation creates actual value. This means putting your first-party data to work across the player lifecycle, from acquisition through engagement, monetisation and advocacy.

Research consistently shows that personalisation driven by first-party data delivers measurable results. Studies indicate 35-45% improvements in engagement when experiences are tailored to individual players. Monetisation gains of 15-25% are common when offers and pricing reflect player value and preferences.

Acquisition and user acquisition

First-party data transforms user acquisition even in a privacy-constrained environment. The key is using what you know about existing players to find new ones who share similar characteristics.

Lookalike modelling creates audience segments based on the traits of your best current players. Upload your high-value player profiles to advertising platforms and they will find similar users to target. Because you are providing first-party data with explicit consent, this approach remains effective even without device-level tracking.

First-party data also enables smarter budget allocation. By understanding which player characteristics predict long-term value, you can bid more aggressively for prospects who match your best customers and avoid overpaying for users unlikely to monetise.

Cross-promotion within your game portfolio offers another acquisition channel that does not depend on third-party data. When you understand player preferences across your titles, you can recommend new games to existing players with high relevance. Major publishers like Zynga and Playtika have invested heavily in building mega-userbases specifically to enable efficient cross-promotion.

Engagement and retention

First-party data enables personalised experiences that keep players engaged longer. Rather than treating all players identically, you can adapt based on individual behaviour and preferences.

Dynamic content recommendations suggest in-game items, features or content based on each player's history and predicted interests. If behavioural data shows that a player enjoys competitive modes, surface competitive content more prominently. If they prefer cooperative play, highlight social features.

Churn prediction models identify players at risk of leaving before they actually leave. Signals might include declining session frequency, reduced spending, abandoned sessions or specific behavioural patterns that historically precede churn. Early identification enables proactive interventions, whether through targeted offers, re-engagement campaigns or product improvements.

Lifecycle marketing delivers the right message at the right time based on where each player sits in their journey. New players receive onboarding guidance. Active players receive content updates and event invitations. Lapsed players receive win-back campaigns tailored to their previous engagement patterns.

Monetisation optimisation

First-party data drives smarter monetisation by revealing which players are likely to spend, what they are likely to buy and when they are most receptive to offers. Player segmentation divides your audience based on spending behaviour and propensity. High-value players might receive exclusive offers and VIP treatment. Players showing early spending signals might receive gentle nudges toward first purchases. Non-spenders might see ad-supported experiences rather than purchase prompts.

Pricing optimisation tests different price points and offer structures with different segments. First-party data enables sophisticated testing that accounts for player value, engagement depth and historical purchase patterns.

The timing of monetisation matters as much as the offer itself. Behavioural data reveals when players are most engaged and most likely to respond positively to commercial messaging. Presenting offers at optimal moments increases conversion while reducing the risk of interrupting positive experiences.

What it means for you

Data activation is where strategy becomes results. Every improvement in acquisition efficiency, retention rate and monetisation compounds over time. Gaming companies that activate their first-party data effectively will steadily outperform those still reliant on third-party approaches.

Technology and infrastructure requirements

Building the data stack

Implementing a first-party data strategy requires appropriate technology infrastructure. The specific tools matter less than how well they integrate into a coherent system that supports your strategic goals.

Data collection layer

The foundation is robust event tracking that captures player behaviour across all touchpoints. This typically includes SDK implementation in mobile apps and games, analytics instrumentation in web properties, server-side event logging for backend systems and integration points with third-party services.

Collection infrastructure must handle gaming-specific requirements. Games generate high volumes of events during peak periods. Real-time data is often necessary for live operations. Cross-platform tracking requires consistent event schemas and identifier management.

Data storage and processing

Modern data stacks typically centre on cloud data warehouses like Snowflake, Google BigQuery or Databricks. These platforms provide the scale and flexibility to store massive event histories while supporting both batch analytics and increasingly real-time use cases.

Gaming companies with real-time requirements may need additional infrastructure. Stream processing systems like Apache Kafka can handle high-throughput event data. Real-time databases support sub-second query responses for in-game personalisation. Edge computing may be necessary for latency-sensitive applications.

Identity and activation

Identity resolution can be handled through dedicated identity platforms, CDP functionality or custom-built solutions. The choice depends on your scale, complexity and engineering capacity.

Activation requires connections to the systems that deliver experiences to players. This includes marketing automation platforms for email and push notifications, advertising platforms for paid media, product systems for in-game personalisation and customer service tools for support.

Integration architecture

The most common challenge in gaming data infrastructure is connecting disparate systems. Games, marketing tools, customer service platforms and analytics systems often operate independently, creating data silos that undermine unified player understanding.

Successful implementation requires clear data flows between systems. Define which system serves as the source of truth for each data type. Establish consistent identifiers that enable cross-system joins. Implement real-time synchronisation where necessary for activation use cases.

API-first architectures provide flexibility to evolve your stack over time. Avoid deep dependencies on any single vendor. Build with the assumption that individual tools will change as your needs develop.

What it means for you

Technology should serve strategy, not constrain it. Start with clear requirements based on your activation use cases. Choose tools that integrate well and avoid over-engineering. Many gaming companies have built sophisticated data infrastructure that nobody uses. Focus on value delivery first, sophistication second.

Privacy compliance and player trust

The regulatory landscape

Gaming companies operating in the UK must comply with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. These regulations impose significant requirements on how personal data is collected, processed and protected.

Key principles include lawful basis for processing, which requires a valid legal reason to use personal data. Purpose limitation restricts data use to the purposes disclosed at collection. Data minimisation means collecting only what is necessary. Storage limitation requires deletion when data is no longer needed.

Gaming companies face particular scrutiny in several areas. Loot boxes and microtransactions have attracted regulatory attention, with the UK Gambling Commission classifying certain mechanics as gambling activities. Data collection from children requires additional protections and parental consent. Cross-border data transfers must comply with adequacy requirements.

Privacy by design

The most effective approach to privacy is building it into your data practices from the start, not bolting it on as an afterthought. This concept, known as privacy by design, is both a regulatory requirement and a practical business strategy.

Practical implementation includes conducting privacy impact assessments before launching new data collection or processing activities. Document your data processing activities and maintain records that demonstrate compliance. Implement appropriate technical security measures including encryption, access controls and secure data handling.



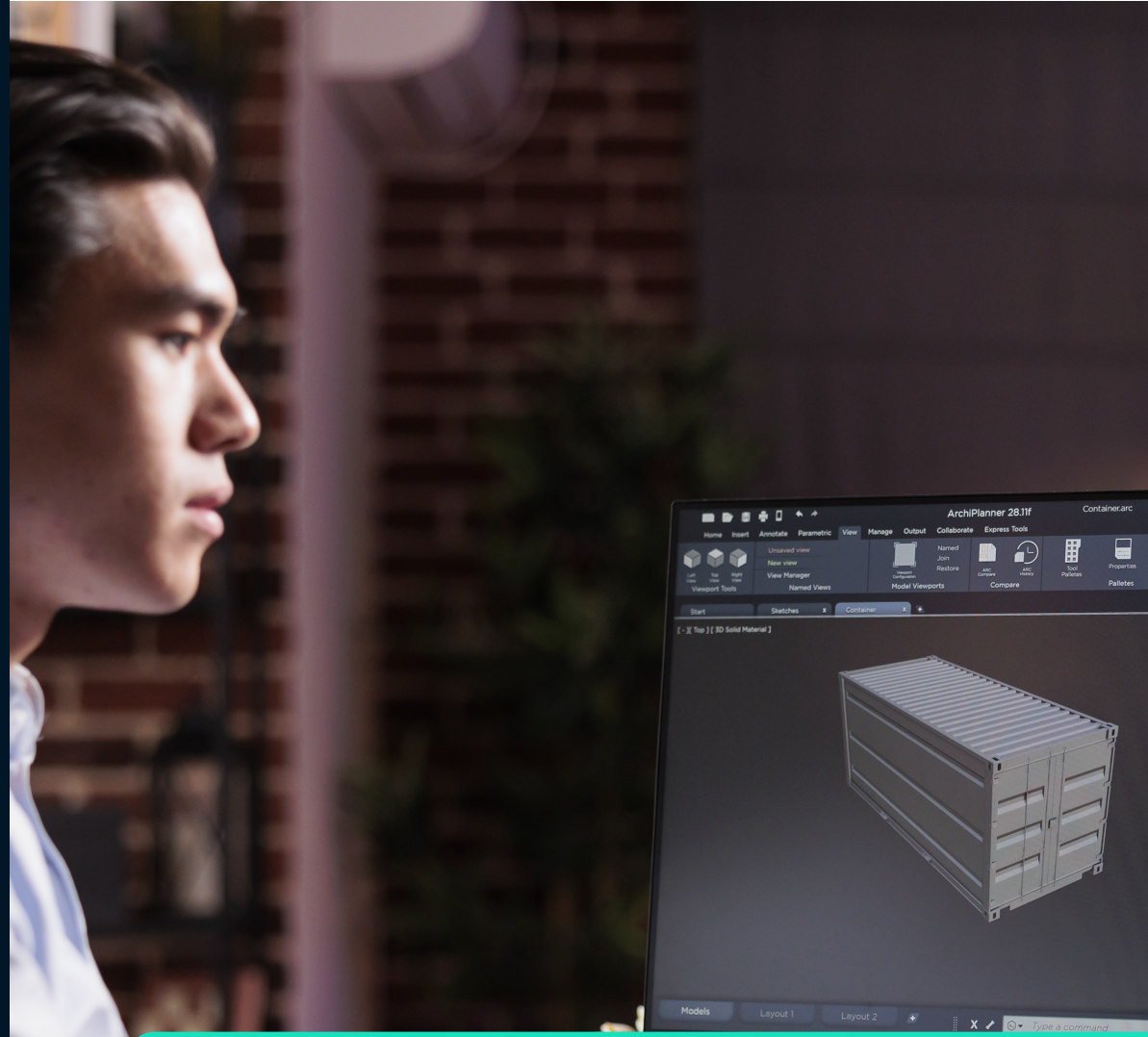
Data minimisation deserves particular attention. Collect only the data you actually need for defined purposes. Avoid the temptation to capture everything on the assumption it might be useful someday. The data you do not collect cannot be breached, misused or become a compliance liability.

Building player trust

Compliance is the minimum standard. Building genuine player trust requires going beyond legal requirements to create transparency and deliver visible value in exchange for data sharing.

Clear communication explains what data you collect, why you collect it and how players benefit. Avoid legalistic privacy policies that nobody reads. Create accessible explanations that players can actually understand. Consider layered approaches that provide summary information with links to detail for those who want it.

Meaningful control lets players manage their data preferences through easy-to-use preference centres. Make it simple to opt out of specific uses while remaining opted in to others. Honour player choices promptly and completely. The value exchange must be genuine. Players will share data when they see clear benefits. Empty promises or benefits that never materialise will erode trust. Deliver personalisation that actually improves their experience. Provide exclusive content or offers that reward their willingness to share.



What it means for you

Privacy and trust are competitive advantages, not just compliance obligations. Gaming companies that earn player trust will build larger first-party datasets with higher quality data than those that treat privacy as an obstacle to be minimised.

Key performance indicators

A first-party data strategy should deliver measurable business results. Tracking the right metrics ensures you understand whether your investment is paying off and where to focus improvement efforts.

Metirc	What it measuers	Traget direction
First-party data coverage	Percentage of active players with enriched profiles	Increase over time
Identity resolution rate	Percentage of events tied to unified player profiles	Higher is better
Opt-in rate	Percentage of players consenting to data collection	Increase through value exchange
Data freshness	Time lag between player actions and data availability	Decrease toward real-time
Activation use	Number of business processes using first-party data	Increase breadth of application
Personalisation uplift	Improvement in engagement from personalised experiences	Measure A/B test results
Acquisition efficiency	Cost per install or cost per valuable player	Decrease through better targeting
Retention improvement	Changes in D7, D30, D90 retention rates	Increase through personalisation
Monetisation impact	ARPU or LTV changes attributable to data-driven initiatives	Measure incremental revenue

Building a measurement framework

Effective measurement requires baselines, controlled experiments and clear attribution. Before launching data-driven initiatives, establish benchmarks for the metrics you intend to improve. Without baselines, you cannot demonstrate the impact of your efforts.

Use controlled experiments wherever possible. A/B testing allows you to isolate the impact of personalisation, targeting improvements or engagement campaigns. Compare treatment groups receiving data-driven experiences against control groups receiving standard experiences.

Attribution becomes more challenging in a privacy-constrained environment, but remains essential. Develop incrementality testing capabilities that measure the true additional value created by your marketing efforts. Media mix modelling can provide insights when user-level attribution is unavailable.

Continuous improvement

First-party data strategy is not a one-time project but an ongoing capability. Build processes for continuous learning and improvement.

Regular data quality audits ensure your profiles remain accurate and complete. Identify gaps in collection, investigate anomalies and address data degradation over time. Player preferences and behaviours change, so your data must stay current.

Activation effectiveness reviews examine whether you are getting full value from your data investments. Are there use cases you have not yet implemented? Are some activation channels underperforming? Where should you focus next?

Technology evolution assessments keep your infrastructure current. The data technology landscape continues developing rapidly. Periodically evaluate whether new tools could improve your capabilities or reduce costs.

What it means for you

What gets measured gets managed. Establish clear metrics for your first-party data strategy and track them consistently. The companies that treat data as a strategic asset worthy of measurement will extract far more value than those that implement technology without accountability.

Conclusion: Taking control of your player data

The privacy-first era has arrived. Gaming companies that continue relying on third-party tracking and platform-provided insights will find themselves increasingly blind to their players and outcompeted by those with direct relationships.

First-party data offers a path forward. By collecting data directly from players, unifying it into comprehensive profiles and activating it across your business, you can reclaim the understanding and targeting capabilities that privacy changes have eroded.

The commercial case is clear. Research shows 2.9 times revenue uplift and 1.5 times cost savings for companies using first-party data effectively. In a market where user acquisition costs have risen 20-30% and monetisation has become more challenging, these advantages matter.

The gaming companies that master first-party data will not only survive the privacy transition. They will emerge with stronger player relationships, more efficient operations and sustainable competitive advantage that cannot be easily replicated.

The choice is yours. Continue competing with one hand tied behind your back. Or build the data capabilities that put you back in control of your player relationships and business outcomes.

To build your first-party data advantage:

- Start with strategic clarity about which business outcomes you want to drive with data
- Design data collection into your games and platforms with transparency and genuine value exchange
- Implement identity resolution to create unified player profiles across platforms and devices
- Activate your data across acquisition, engagement and monetisation use cases
- Build appropriate technology infrastructure that serves strategy without over-engineering
- Treat privacy as a competitive advantage through genuine trust-building with players
- Measure results rigorously and improve continuously

Ready to build your first-party data strategy?

Contact Ascensor to develop a data strategy that puts you back in control of your player relationships and drives measurable growth for your gaming business.

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