

## Nielsen: Video Games Approaching "5th Network" Status

March 24, 2009

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Americans, as a whole, spend more time playing video games than they do watching the CW. And video games—the real “5th Network”—may even be closing in on NBC.

Those are just a few of the conclusions that can be drawn of a new report issued by Nielsen PreView called The Video Game Handbook, which provides marketers a sense of the scope and scale of the growing video game audience. According to the data derived from Nielsen’s National People Meter back in the fourth quarter of last year, usage of console video games (gaming systems which are connected to a user’s TV) accounted for a whopping 64 billion minutes in December.

Only four other networks accounted for more viewing time during that period, says the report. And though Nielsen does not identify those networks, based on ratings patterns they are presumed to be CBS, ABC, FOX and NBC.

According to the report (the full version of which is available on [nielsenpreview.com](http://nielsenpreview.com)), though it’s possible that given the continued growth in popularity of video games may push that number higher in the coming years, the TV business doesn’t necessarily need to feel threatened. Nielsen (which like Mediaweek, is owned by The Nielsen Company) found that since 1999 console usage has grown steadily while TV usage has remained steady, even growing slightly.

In fact, big time gamers are also big time TV viewers: The top quintile of gamers—who average 93 minutes of console usage per day--consumed as many minutes of TV as the weakest video game users, according to the research cited. “Gamers are a sophisticated media consumer, digesting media at a higher rate than the average,” reads the report.

Interestingly, video game users appear to shift back and forth from video game mode to TV mode in a consistent pattern. Among console users, their gaming peaks around 7:00 p.m. while TV viewing peaks around 9:00 p.m. That perhaps indicates that advertisers should attempt to use both media to reach consumers in tandem, said Nielsen. “In general, many gamers give way to the primetime TV hour as it approaches, indicating a complementary approach to the two mediums would be most efficient,” read the report.

Plus, those brands might want to factor in seasonality, since game usage tends to peak around June and at the end of the year, while dipping in August and September, found

Nielsen. While weather may play a role, the report attributes this trend to peak release periods for new games, particularly the holiday shopping season.

Nielsen's report also puts one more nail in the coffin for the enduring young male, pasty-faced gamer stereotype. Console game usage has become more and more mainstream, particularly with the explosion in popularity of the family friendly Nintendo Wii, which has sold 18 million consoles versus 11.6 million for the Xbox 360 and 5.7 million for Sony's PlayStation3.

Overall, the Wii now accounts for the highest percentage of usage minutes for adults, per the report. And not necessarily young adults; nearly of third (32 percent) those usage minutes were consumed by women 35 and older.