

# MAKING MONEY WITH ONLINE GAMING

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# CHAPTER 1 THE ONLINE GAMING MARKET

It's a common refrain that gaming is a rapidly growing market. There are about two billion active gamers, who, combined, spend one billion dollars annually during online play. Almost 9 in 10 console gamers also play games on a desktop computer, so gamers are constantly browsing the web for game-related web content.

Yet this is a one-way market. Gaming companies lead you to believe that you're paying for a privilege. You're paying to play games that are entertaining but don't reward your skill or effort. You're paying to be part of the social network that the games provide, but your online friends pay the company as well. You've spent money that earns you back little but high scores, in-game inventories, and currency that has no real-world value.

Put like that, it doesn't seem like you're getting back what you put in. The truth is that most video game companies have no trouble making money off of the time that people spend playing games, but haven't really tried reimbursing players with money. The mainstream market has a blind spot when it comes to anybody who's not buying the latest and greatest games, and gives players almost nothing back.

This isn't a condemnation of the gaming industry, and you should be playing the games you love. The point to take away is simply that the games you are playing—or similar games—can be making you money online. Whether they are popular blockbusters or free web games, you can make money. Game companies invest plenty of money in advertising, data collection, and demographic targeting, all to market the game to you.

Yet you, the player, for the most part will never see a penny of the money that was spent marketing your favorite game to you. Despite the untapped potential of the invisible gaming market, it's not obvious how the average person can financially benefit from the gaming market without belonging to the inner circles of the gaming market.

Some of us only play games casually, on the web or on our smartphones. But you don't have to be a serious gamer, or know someone who is tight-knit with the giants of gaming, to make some money while you play. There are plenty of web startups that are helping gamers to benefit and share a little of the real wealth that's generated by the online gaming market.

So even if gaming is merely a hobby of yours, that is a good enough start, and you can begin earning money from games now. The next few chapters will explain how you can take advantage of the online gaming market just by playing.

## CHAPTER 2 WEB GAMES THAT PAY

### Paid to Play Games

Paid to play sites reimburse the time you spend playing a game. The site pays you a portion of the ad revenue they make, or a little money for doing surveys, writing reviews, making blog posts, completing referrals, or doing other content generation tasks that the games are interspersed with.

Some of these paid to play sites may charge money for a subscription. Other sites are free to sign up for, and some sites will let you choose between a free or paid account. If you pay for a non-free account, you may be paid a small portion of fees that other players have paid, or you may not be asked to view so many ads, or you may simply be paid a little more in site credits. Note that there is almost always a minimum amount that you must earn before you cash out your site credits for real money.

Some sites function more like arcades, and you are rewarded for skill. Note that since some of the games are simple Flash games without complicated scoring schemes, successful gaming is not necessarily rewarded. If the game does reimburse you based on your score, the more time you spend on a game, the less your score may be worth in site credits. It may be more beneficial to lose quickly and restart the game rather than invest your time in winning. Some sites will even reward you based on chance; these sites are often designed to resemble slot machines.

Experiment on various sites and find a point-earning strategy that works best for each. Here are a few sites to join.

**Swagbucks** is a major player that provides games that you can play to earn points, along with surveys and tasks. There are also tournament modes in which you compete for points against other players, in which skill is rewarded. Rather than requiring you to earn a minimum amount before you cash out, SwagBucks will let you redeem points for gift cards from various major retailers.

In other words, the minimum points for payout depends on which gift card you choose. If you want money deposited to your PayPal, you'll need to earn at least \$25 worth of points (currently 2500 points) for a PayPal gift card. If you don't want actual money, you can redeem points for Amazon Gift cards at a value as little as \$5.

**Cashdazzle** works on a principle similar to Swagbucks, and you receive a few free tokens to begin with. Once you use up these tokens, you'll get more by completing surveys and other offers. The minimum payout is \$20, paid to a VISA gift card or check.

**Lalaloot** awards tokens when you view advertisements, complete surveys and perform tasks. You can then enter these tokens in games of chance, which resemble slot

machines. You are given a few free bonus tokens to start. You'll need to achieve at least \$20 before a payout, which is paid to your credit card or by cheque.

**Cash Crate** is an older site in the mold of Swagbucks that has been in service since 2006. The site offers a good variety of games. You must have \$20 worth of credits before you cash out. The site pays by cheque.

**QuickRewards** is another mix of surveys, tasks, and free games. It has no minimum withdrawal for cash (though if you withdraw too little, transaction fees may make the transaction not worthwhile.) You must earn \$5 worth of points if you want to redeem the points for a giftcard instead.

**Paid Game Player** offers free and paid accounts, and operates similarly to SwagBucks, but has a smaller user base. For a small price, a premium account will reward you twice the points and will not interrupt your play with advertisements. In addition to online games it offers downloadable games. There are also poker and casino games, which link to actual gambling sites, so be sure you are not actually spending real money there.

**Tremor Games** works on the same principle as SwagBucks. You can redeem points earned from tasks to play games, which can be spent on rewards. You can choose

**Amazon Gift cards**, which is as close as you'll get to a cash payout on this site, but there is a lot of other game-related rewards and digital content, from Steam cards to ebooks.

**Razer Cortex** lets you play mainstream games like Grand Theft Auto and Starcraft in exchange for merchandise. You must own these games or purchase them through the Razer launcher software. Your winnings probably won't pay off the cost of the games, but you can redeem what you do earn for gaming equipment or credit from various online retailers. It's a good choice if you're not a fan of web games.

**InboxDollars** again offers games interspersed with tasks (signups, email responses, and surveys). The minimum payout is \$30 worth of points, either as a prepaid VISA card, a multi-retailer gift card, or a check.

**Appcent** is a paid to play site targeted at mobile devices. A web search may bring you to the Russian site, so be sure to navigate through the menus to the English version of the site.

**Pogo** is another paid to play site. It has a small monthly fee, is multi-platform, and pays out daily token multipliers and cash jackpots.

**KadoKado** offers skill-based games and pays out Amazon gift cards.

## Tournament and sweepstake sites

Some sites allow competitive tournaments, in which you and your opponents pay into a reward pool, and the winner will take some of the points (and the site will take a cut, of course). These pay out a little more, and are a good choice if you are skilled at a particular kind of game, and the site may even allow you to compete at games you already own. They also generally match you with opponents of your skill level, and give you chances to practice games for free.

Since these sites circulate points more quickly—often there are multiple winners—the points you win may not be worth cash. These sites are often (but not always) sweepstake-based. That means that unlike sites that allow you to cash out points for money, sweepstake sites allow you to enter your points in prize draws for large cash prizes. Sometimes these draws are for non-monetary rewards like merchandise or gift cards, but there are often cash prizes. Remember that if you win merchandise, you can always re-sell it for cash.

Here are a few sites:

**PCHgames** (Publisher's Clearing House Games) operate under this model, offering prizes that change fairly often. It offers not just gift cards, but also merchandise such as home appliances.

**Gamesville** awards you points that you can use to enter sweepstakes. In fact, this site seems to be a game site first and foremost, offering a wide variety of games. It's not obvious from the home page that you can enter in prize draws, but they are there.

**GSN Games** lets you compete on their web games. GSN stands for "Game Show Network", and many of the games are virtual game shows, like Wheel of Fortune, so winning is often a mix of skill and chance. You can enter your winnings into sweepstakes and auctions.

**Play and Win** is another tournament site, based in the United Kingdom. Again, the points you win in tournaments can be entered in a prize draw, and are not directly redeemable for a prize.

**Dollar Candy** is a tournament puzzle site, and lets you choose to pay high or low entry fees, which determine how high or low the winner's payout will be. You can also choose to split the winnings between up to three of the four players—this pays less but increases your chances of winning while you're learning the game early on.

**Givling** is a unique site. It is a trivia contest, and it donates some of the money paid by the entrants to students who need to pay off loans.

**Plunder League** is a competitive site for mobile gamers, compatible only with iOS. It

pays out to Amazon, Visa, iTunes, or Steam.

**XY games** lets you play games you own competitively, and matches you with players of equal skill levels. This is a good choice if you don't want to play Flash games. Although you enter site credits into sweepstake draws, if you do not win, you will get most of your site credits back.

**Exodus 3000 and Dragon Treasures** are massively multiplayer online RPGs with points that can be exchanged for cash. They are not sweepstake-based.

## Necessities

If you're playing web games online, the most important thing is Internet reliability—that is, a connection that does not drop off during the middle of the game, or upon loading a new page. Reliability is not determined by how much you pay for your plan. More important is how well your area is served by your Internet service provider: if you live in a remote area, or if you have other people in your house using the Internet at the same time as you, it may cause your connection to time out.

A few sites are particularly picky when it comes to tracking your earnings. Some sites may record your points unreliably if your connection drops, and some sites may require you to screenshot your progress as proof of your score. Essentially, you may get only one chance to access the page that sends points to your account, and if that page does not load properly the first time, you may not receive the points.

But your Internet **speed** is not really important at all, as web games are usually small enough that they'll load almost instantly regardless of your Internet speed. You don't even need your own private Internet connection—public WiFi at restaurants, libraries, and universities will be fast enough, and in fact, public connections may be better, since they are designed to handle several users at once without dropping. The point is that you do not want your connection to drop, as it may interrupt the transfer of site points that you are winning.

If you are playing online games, **JoyToKey** is a free and useful piece of software that can enable you to use a gamepad by mapping your keyboard to the gamepad buttons, even if the game doesn't support it. This is purely a matter of preference, but I find that it prevents you from accidentally closing the browser window when you are button-mashing.

You will need an up-to-date web browser to play online games. Any major browser will do. **Google Chrome** is a good choice—it's unique in that if one page crashes, the entire browser will not crash. You can also install an add-on that will let you play Android games. And you can even install an add-on called **iMacros** (available for Firefox as well as Chrome) that you may be able to use to automate some repetitive gameplay tasks.

## CHAPTER 3 ALTERNATIVE METHODS

There are a few other ways to make money by playing games. Apart from game testing, these methods are generally applicable to any game with online connectivity.

### Resource Farming

One option is to resource farm. You play until you gain in-game currency and inventory items, and then sell your inventory to other players. PlayerAuctions.com is one site that facilitates this. This method may not make you much money, as companies overseas run bot farms that can create and level-up accounts better, faster, and more cheaply than you can. If you do decide to resource farm, pick a smaller or newer game that is up-and-coming, one that is in-demand enough that people will want to pay for resources, but one that is not so profitable that bot farms will have taken over the market.

### Selling Customizations

For sandbox games, you can design custom maps and characters. Your creations are unique, and you can save time by generating them with programs rather than designing them by hand. In games like Minecraft, there are truly astounding world maps that have gone viral and sell for quite decent prices. You will have to be good at self-marketing, though, since you are selling a luxury rather than a game necessity that every player needs.

### Server Access

You also can sell server access to other players, even if you don't have an actual computer on hand that you can dedicate to being a physical server. You can buy a server on a site called Enjin, and run servers for games like Minecraft and other MMORPGs that players pay to access. Usually you can charge server access fees, and profiting from those fees is no issue. However, you often can't sell special in-game features exclusive to your server. You're essentially just selling a place for people to play online. Make sure to read the game's guidelines to find out what's permitted.

### Selling Accounts

One thing that is incorrectly touted as an easy money maker is account selling. If you spend some time playing a game, and achieve a few desirable assets, you'd think that your accounts would sell at a reasonable price to players who don't want to spend time level grinding. Then you would make a new account, repeat the process, and sell it again. This is not really practical, for two reasons. First of all, you can't really gain the trust of

potential buyers because, if you sell an account to them, you could change the password at any time, and sell the account to someone else. Secondly, the game company may shut down the account if they find out that you've sold an account. Read the terms and conditions of the game.

That said, you are free to try it if you wish, assuming you have a workable way of building trust with your buyers. eBay is one site where accounts are sold. eBay is not recommended, because although it reaches a wide audience, eBay has begun to crack down on account selling and may report you to the game company. PlayerUp is a site that is specifically meant to protect account transactions between buyer and seller. Opskins is another site that does the same.

Also: although trying to sell an account is at worst a waste of time, under no circumstances should you buy someone else's account with the intent of reselling it. You may be buying from someone who used illegal methods to gain access to the account, which you do not want to become involved in.

A better option is to share an account with someone who will pay you to level grind for them, as they will have a recovery email, and they can be confident that you won't lock you out of their account. Note that, for obvious reasons, no one will want to share their account with you if that particular game's profile contains their private financial information.

## Testing Games

You can make money testing games. While large companies will usually charge you for the privilege of testing an upcoming blockbuster, there are plenty of smaller newcomers who pay for players to test their games. You don't need any expertise to test games. If you don't feel knowledgeable enough to file proper bug reports, you can proofread the game's writing or simply report compatibility issues on certain devices.

Game testing is a good choice if you own a lot of gaming platforms, and the only drawback is that you might not get to choose the particular game or genre that you want to test in. Additionally, you may be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement, but that shouldn't be a problem.

These sites are generally quite trustworthy, as the apps genuinely need testers, and, unlike surveys and sign-ups, the tests are not interested in collecting your demographical information.

Here are a few sites that pay beta testers:

**PlaytestCloud** sends you a mobile or browser game, records your screen and comments

(but not your webcam) and lets you play for less than 30 minutes. They pay between \$7 and \$9 dollars per game to your Paypal.

**Betafamily** lets you choose from mobile games and other apps to test. The rewards are set by the particular developer, so it's hard to say what you will make. You will have to write reviews. The minimum you must earn before payout is \$10, and if it is taking an unreasonably long time to earn \$10, you can contact the site and they will pay the first \$10 in advance.

**VMC Game Testing** pays you an hourly rate. The exact rate depends on where you are located. It takes a while to get paid (up to 45 days) after you finish testing a game. The feedback you give is quite technical, and you also have to show up online for scheduled sessions (though you can reschedule if needed). This seems to be, technically, a job, and although VMC can't give you a reference letter, they can confirm in writing the number of hours you worked for them.

**UserTesting** is a general app testing site that pays, although only some of the apps are games. You get paid \$10 per test, which records you for 20 minutes and asks you to answer four follow up questions. It takes about seven days to get paid. They pay to PayPal.

**Testbirds** is another site that pays you to test software, including games.

## CHAPTER 4 LIVE STREAMS AND LET'S PLAYS

### Live Streaming

Live streams are a currently popular way of broadcasting your gameplay for money or as a hobby, and are usually broadcast on a site called Twitch. Unlike a Let's Play, the revenue for a live stream comes both from ads and directly from your audience. There are few ads during a livestream, so ad revenue will be lower than it would on YouTube. However, you won't need to worry about being disqualified for ad revenue, since live stream sites are intended for broadcasting gameplay of copyrighted games.

It can be hard at times to make money from your audience. You're not selling your audience anything, so their donations are fairly unpredictable and not reliable. One problem is that people may not bother donating unless they have a lot to offer—they can't just throw a quarter in your hat, because the transaction fees on both ends will leave you with pennies. Live stream sites are trying to fix this problem with microdonations, in which donors purchase points, which circulate faster and don't have transaction fees until you cash out. You might try making donation challenges: tell your viewers that if you earn 1000 points, you'll dress up as a game character, or something along those lines.

One disadvantage is that Twitch doesn't keep your content online permanently, so you will have to be a fairly active streamer. You will have to network with people to gain a following, since they'll be coming to see you rather than whatever game you're playing.

Since Twitch streams are broadcast live, you'll have to be good at improvising. You'll have to speak constantly and avoid dead air, although this can be fun and exciting if you're playing with other live streamers rather than alone. Your time zone also matters—although your stream will stay online for a while after it's broadcast, if you are too far out of the audience's time zone, you may find it difficult to broadcast at peak viewing times. You can also host other streamers on your feed when you're offline.

One controversial aspect of live streams is the question of whether men or women have more to gain, since you are selling your image, rather than just your game play. The common belief is that "sex sells": that the audience is largely men who are coming to see women, so attractive women have more successful live streams. The statistics aren't so clear cut, though: one study found that although women receive more followers and page views overall, their streams had fewer viewers at any given time.

Since live streaming is personal and competitive, jealousy and hate may run rampant. Often, you can appoint moderators for comments to make your quest for a following more pleasant, and you can appoint moderators preemptively, even if you are not being harassed.

## Let's Play

A Let's Play is a recording of a video game playthrough, usually found on **YouTube**. These have been around longer than live streams have. The attraction is in the content, either your ability to perform a monologue, your gaming skill, or the uniqueness of the games you play.

The main benefit of Let's Play over live streaming is that your videos will stay online for years and years, continuing to earn you ad revenue long after you post them. If you post on YouTube, you will earn **Google AdSense** payments with each view, and you can withdraw your earnings once you reach \$100.

**YouTube Red** is an alternative revenue model in which viewers pay YouTube a fee so that they do not have to see ads. A small portion of their YouTube fee is divided between all the channels that they subscribe to. This makes you less money, but pays more steadily and predictably, since you will be paid for subscribers to your channel even if they don't ever watch a single video that you upload.

Another benefit of the Let's Play format is that the recording process is extremely flexible. You can record your speech after gameplay instead of during it, and you can even reuse your speech. Additionally, you can edit out boring game segments, so you're not obliged to constantly talk or play for hours at a time. Editing can be as simple as splicing videos together, or as complex as adding effects. YouTube also provides a way to annotate the videos with pop-up text, so if you forget to say something, you can add it after. Speedruns of games or high-score achievements are popular things to record.

Newer games are more popular, but they're not the most popular, and it's good to balance popular games with unique ones. One method is to record playthroughs of game hacks. For example, each year, there is a contest for modifications of classic Sonic the Hedgehog games, with twenty or so games released that most audiences will not have heard of. You might record Let's Plays of these fan mods, which people will come for because they are under the popular banner of Sonic, but will stay for because the hacks themselves are obscure and interesting. Your Let's Play career could easily consist of Super Mario World hacks alone—there are literally thousands of them.

A major disadvantage is that it is easy to be disqualified for ad revenue. Since plenty of popular Let's Plays are not recorded for money, they don't typically include a video feed of the player. The main attraction is the game itself, not the person behind the controller. In theory, it would be easy for these popular game recordings to gain ad revenue. The catch is, if a video does not include a video feed of yourself, you may not qualify for ad revenue as you'll simply be broadcasting copyrighted images from the game under fair use policies. And since the recording is permanent, YouTube has plenty of time to comb through their videos and prevent them from earning ad revenue. So if your video has been marked "fair use", you will not be earning ad revenue.

Even if you broadcast your image as a major part of the Let's Play, you may run into copyright problems anyway. Avoid anything that isn't you playing the game: avoid non-interactive cutscenes, game segments that have been shown in trailers, and music. It's okay to record the game's music, generally, but avoid music that has been licensed specifically for that game, like the mainstream songs that are in Guitar Hero or Rock Band.

Also note that longer videos have more ads, so if your videos are too short, YouTube may not put ads on them at all. Consider compiling them into a longer video.

## Necessities

You're likely already playing video games, so you know what equipment you need to play your favorite games. But still, consider how the hardware will let you play for money, rather than how it lets you play for enjoyment.

Your internet speed is important if you're competing online or streaming games for money. Even the most basic plan is probably fast enough to let you play your favorite multiplayer games online. But what if you want to live stream those online sessions, and want to receive video feeds of your competitors? You may need a faster internet speed if you want to do all those things at once. Internet reliability is not so important here—if your live stream drops for a moment or two, the video stream will probably resume with no problems.

The same is true for your computer's RAM and processing power. If it's just fast enough to run a particular game at full speed, it may not have enough extra resources to run a screen recorder at the same time.

You don't generally need any software apart from the game to play for money. However, if you are downloading a new game, or a screen recorder, make sure you have an up-to-date virus scanner. Even if you are downloading reputable software, the installer may contain malware or adware. Also make sure that the virus scanner doesn't disrupt your online play; if it does, try a different one. If you're downloading an unfamiliar game that you don't trust, you may want to test run the game's installer in a sandbox or virtual machine, like Sandboxie or VirtualBox. Although you probably won't be able to play the game itself as these programs may prevent it from accessing your video card, the installer will work and you'll have a restricted, quarantined instance of Windows to leave the software to run on until you're sure it's safe.

## Contributing as a Guest

This may not bring in money itself, but may enhance your success with a live stream or Let's Play. You can write guest posts for blogs, or appear as a guest on a podcast.

Sites may or may not pay you for your contribution, but your content will attract you an audience for your preferred method of moneymaking.

If you are live streaming, hosting a game server, or selling game content, you can plug your services at the end of your contribution. This will supplement your main effort, because the more content your name is on, the more people will notice it. That's important, since your main method of moneymaking alone does not easily stand out to your audience.

## AFTERWORD

This guide explained how to make money by playing games. Whatever platform you use, and no matter how casual or serious a gamer you are, you can make money in just minutes. You can earn game credits online by completing surveys or other tasks, by competing online, by testing games, or by selling things like in-game resources, server space, or additional game content. You can also record your game play and broadcast it for ad revenue or donations via YouTube or Twitch. It's low risk: simply avoid offers that ask you to pay a sign up fee, keep your security software up to date, and comply with terms and conditions, and you will find lots of reputable gaming sites that pay out money reliably and quickly.