



White paper

---

# Casual Gaming; Serious Localisation...

**ALPHA LTD**

St Andrew's House  
St Andrew's Road  
Cambridge CB4 1DL  
United Kingdom

[@thisisalphaive](#)

[thisisalpha.com](http://thisisalpha.com)

Everything about casual gaming is smaller than its Massively Multiplayer Online big brother - except perhaps its market. Casual game spending, which is largely made up of in-game purchases, accounts for 27% of the games market and is set to outstrip console game spending by 2017.

As a result, many companies are now focussing on this quick-turnaround form of gameplay. Compared to the traditional First Person Shooter, Role Player or MMO games that require a PC or console, casual games also have much lower production and distribution costs. All that is required is a mobile phone download, with no need for shipping discs and cases to physical stores.

---

## The shape of the market

The casual game player comes from a different demographic than the hard-core gamer. This is not about sitting in your bedroom for seven hours, fending off a zombie attack with military style precision. It's about collecting gemstones during your coffee break, helping some anthropomorphic woodland animals to find their way home while you're on the bus, or figuring out the diabolically fiendish set of puzzles to let an unnamed stranger escape a mental asylum – all while you are waiting for a train.

Typically, these games – which can be of any genre – are played in short bursts, on the move. They are accessed on a mobile phone or, at most, a tablet or iPad. No one plays these games on even the smallest of laptops. The gamers are school children, housewives, politicians, and scores of people who have had their train, bus or plane delayed.

The gender divide of these players is pretty even as, on average, female players come in at 47-48% of the market. This is markedly different from the male-dominated world of the First Person Shooter. Big Fish, the casual games publisher, reports on its website that in 2016 the UK has over 17 million casual gamers. In the US, the figure is just over 100 million. In China, it's a staggering 270 million.

---

*The market in Arabic-speaking countries is also growing at a great rate.*

---

---

## Taking it global

King is the company behind the massively popular, spin-off-generating *Candy Crush*. The popularity of a single game can spread like wildfire across the globe when players access and share it via social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and *Candy Crush* was probably created with an eye on the international market right from the start. Despite the company being based in Sweden, it was founded as an English-language game with the Americanised term “*Candy*” in its title. Because of the dominance of US culture, the word “*candy*” is recognised throughout the world in a way that a term like the English “*sweets*” would not be.

Many of the games across the different genres in casual gaming rely heavily on visuals and less on language. When you pick the game up, you click on a few things, swipe a couple of times, and you soon pick up what’s going on.

These games typically have similar basic features: the ability to quickly reach a final stage, or continuous play with no need to save the game, and some also initiate a “*try before you buy*” business model or an advertising-based model to reel the player in. For the gamer who likes to keep things classic, many games are simply based on a pre-existing card game or board game. Think how *Solitaire* has survived; from cards to your desktop to any mobile device.

This all begins to beg the question: how much effort does a company need to make to specifically localising a game to each country, especially when all the player has to do is get the bunny to collect all the magic acorns on its journey through the forest? Back in the old days, when the tech was simpler, games like *Tetris* didn’t need an explanation of gameplay. Even if the current state of casual gaming retains some of that simplicity, the world of gaming has changed a lot: the tech has become more sophisticated, the availability of the tech has expanded immensely – and so have the gamers’ demands.

Further investigation shows that the games are played at what might be termed a *deeper psychological level* than just language, and the success of a game depends on truly understanding the culture of the market it is entering.

---

In an article in *The Guardian*, Dr. Simon Moore, a psychologist specialising in games, looked at exactly how people across the globe engage with the world of casual gaming.

---

According to Moore, there are differences in the way different nationalities engage with casual games. If let loose in a game with no directions, British and Japanese players will intuitively navigate in a clockwise direction while Americans will, by default, move anti-clockwise. Clued in Developers ensure that key elements aren't counter-intuitive for their target audience.

"In terms of east and west, there are big differences," says Moore. "Clan and team-based games are much more popular in the east than the west. We also know that when games have online team play options, most western gamers still play as individuals within that team (so show more selfish behaviour), whereas eastern players try to do more team-benefitting actions, even if that means personal loss."

Take these factors into consideration when looking at more complex games that involve character and story. The hugely popular *Forever Lost* series by Glitch Games, for instance, centres on an amnesiac doctor trying to track down the truth of what happened to his unstable fiancée during her stay at the specialised hospital at which he worked.

---

*Understandably, the level of localisation a company chooses becomes a make or break factor in the success of games dealing with this kind of narrative sophistication.*

---

According to the gaming website *Pocketgamer.biz*, the most profitable Japanese, Korean, and Chinese developers are spending big - both in terms of localising their content and investing in western companies - to take their success global. In its annual listing of the top 50 developers in the casual gaming sector, *Pocketgamer.biz* cited British, Finnish, US, and Canadian companies also travelling the globe with their wares, all building on their local successes proving that localisation is always the next logical step.

The most recent supernova phase of gaming to hit the world has been, of course, *Pokémon Go*. No one on the planet can escape Pokémon right now, no matter how hard those little critters are to find. Anyone can download the game onto their smartphone, the comfort and familiarity of their own neighborhood forming the backdrop of the game itself.

Technically, *Pokémon Go* falls into the category of location-based or augmented reality gaming. The concept has been around for more than a decade but it has never achieved this level of mainstream awareness. This is the genre's watershed moment. *Pokémon Go* has burst into the world of casual gaming, so arousing the curiosity of many half-hearted gamers that they pick it up in their lunch hour and become instantly hooked.

*Pokémon Go* was here for the summer – it had an ideal launch, first in the US, followed by Australia and New Zealand and ultimately becoming available in more than 30 countries to coincide with vacation time, enabling thousands of kids to wander free in search of Pikachu and his buddies.

Because it is so popular with school-age children, Pokémon would probably not have seen this level of success if it hadn't been released in time for summer vacation. While school is in session, the craze drops off. But Pikachu's had it good – this is his third global comeback proving that once you've got a strong core concept (cute cartoon animals are about as universal as you can get), you can adapt it, re-market, and re-launch numerous times.

The success of *Pokémon Go* has proven once again that the boundaries between different kinds of gaming, and other forms of media, are fluid. *Angry Birds* from Rovio, based in Helsinki, has been a stalwart on the casual gaming scene for quite a while. Now they've had their first mainstream movie release.

It works the other way as well, with shows like *The Walking Dead* and *Dexter* hitting the tiny screen. In these cases, good localisation becomes the most important factor in a game's success in order to fuse gameplay with narrative in a way that works within each culture specifically.

When it is estimated that 200 million consumers play casual games online worldwide every month, many of whom don't even think of themselves as gamers or fans of video games, it seems that gaming won't even be a casual pastime in the near future – it'll just be something that everybody does.

### **Found that interesting?**

If you're not already signed up to our newsletter, email [marketing@thisisalpha.com](mailto:marketing@thisisalpha.com) to receive lots more great articles that will help you on your journey to going global.