



GAMESCOM 2026 FROM THE OUTSIDE

Record crowds, a resurgent developer conference, GTA VI's Netflix surprise, press passes, and why the Future Games Show won my attention.

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368,000

VISITORS
FROM 131 COUNTRIES

1,743

EXHIBITORS
FROM 66 COUNTRIES

624M

DIGITAL
VIEWS

6,200+

GAMESCOM DEV
PARTICIPANTS

I'M GOING TO BE **EXTREMELY HONEST** ABOUT THIS ONE

For years, Gamescom and Devcom have been important parts of my gaming coverage. I've covered the video game industry for more than two decades, including Gamescom, Devcom, E3, Taipei Game Show, Summer Game Fest and other major gaming and technology events.

This year was different.

I was denied official press accreditation for Gamescom 2026 and the newly branded gamescom dev 2026 after previously receiving accreditation for these events for years.

That experience affected how I approached Gamescom week. But after seeing the final numbers, one thing should be established immediately:

Gamescom 2026 was a massive success.

368,000	131	1,743	36,000+	624M	78M
VISITORS	VISITOR NATIONS	EXHIBITORS	TRADE VISITORS	DIGITAL VIEWS	ONL VIEWS

It drew 368,000 visitors from 131 countries, more than 36,000 trade visitors, 1,743 exhibiting companies from 66 countries, and generated more than 624 million digital views. An extraordinary 72 percent of exhibitors came from outside Germany.

Meanwhile, the first conference operating under the new gamescom dev name attracted more than 6,200 registered participants, up 15 percent from 2025, with 397 speakers, 238 sessions, attendees representing 95 countries and more than 2,500 companies.

So this isn't a story about Gamescom failing. Quite the opposite.

It's a story about an event becoming bigger and more international than ever while I found myself increasingly interested in what's happening outside its biggest showcase.

And then GTA VI dropped a 27-minute bomb on Netflix. *More on that later.*

THE PRESS PASS ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Before getting to the games, I need to address what happened with my accreditation because it directly affected my coverage.

My application was initially rejected because I was told the documentation I submitted was incomplete or illegible.

I responded by explaining that my submission included an assignment letter, identification and links to previously published gaming articles on HHBMedia.com. I also provided examples of previous Gamescom and Devcom coverage.

The next objection was different.

I was told that my articles were more than six months old and that my editorial assignment had been signed by me. I disputed that characterization and provided additional documentation demonstrating my history as a gaming journalist.

Eventually, the explanation changed again. I was told that because of “limited capacity and growing global demand,” Gamescom could not accept every accreditation request.

Had Gamescom simply told me at the beginning, “We have more qualified applicants than available credentials,” I would have been disappointed, but there wouldn't have been much to debate. Instead, the explanations changed as I responded to the previous objections.

FOR THE RECORD

I cannot prove that race, DEI politics or any discriminatory consideration played a role in my rejection, and I am not claiming that I can. My criticism is based on something much easier to document: the explanations for rejecting my application changed during the process despite my previous history covering Gamescom and Devcom.

Readers can draw their own conclusions.

So I didn't watch Opening Night Live

For the first time in years, I decided not to structure my week around Gamescom Opening Night Live.

Instead...

I watched *The Bourne Identity*.

And you know what? It still holds up.

Jason Bourne spent the evening trying to figure out who he was while I was wondering what Gamescom was announcing. There's something strangely appropriate about that.

I wasn't boycotting Gamescom. HHBMedia.com continued receiving and publishing numerous gaming press releases surrounding the event, and we assembled approximately twelve to fifteen PDFs of material for readers. But I decided the journalists, influencers, podcasters and streamers who received accreditation could provide the minute-by-minute ONL coverage.

THE EXPERIMENT

Without a credential, press room, exclusive interview or Gamescom badge around my neck — which games would still force me to pay attention?

03 CRAFT

THE PRESS STILL MATTERS

Gaming journalism has changed dramatically. Traditional journalists now compete for access with YouTubers, Twitch streamers, TikTok creators, influencers, podcasters and personalities with enormous social audiences. That's not necessarily bad.

But independent journalists still serve an important function. Our job isn't simply to repost trailers.

We're supposed to ask questions. Provide context. Remember what happened five, ten or twenty years ago. Find games that aren't already backed by giant marketing campaigns. And occasionally tell a billion-dollar industry something it doesn't want to hear.

An event drawing people from 131 countries and exhibitors from 66 countries is unquestionably international. I believe its press corps should strive to reflect the enormous range of communities and perspectives that make up that international gaming audience.

LET'S GIVE GAMESCOM ITS FLOWERS: THIS THING IS ENORMOUS

Whatever disagreement I have with the accreditation process, the numbers make one conclusion unavoidable. Gamescom may now have the strongest claim to being the biggest international gaming event on Earth.

The 2026 event brought 368,000 visitors from 131 countries to Cologne. International attendance increased, while the show's 1,743 exhibitors represented 66 countries. More than 36,000 trade visitors attended, approximately half from outside Germany.

Think about those numbers.

This isn't merely a German gaming convention anymore.

It isn't merely Europe's largest gaming gathering.

It's effectively a gaming United Nations with controllers.

233,000m²

SOLD-OUT FLOOR SPACE

72%

EXHIBITORS FROM
OUTSIDE GERMANY

+670%

AWESOME INDIES
SHOW GROWTH

302,000

AWESOME INDIES
SHOW VIEWS

The event occupied approximately 233,000 square meters of sold-out exhibition space, while international exhibitors represented a record 72 percent of the total.

Its reach beyond Cologne was equally striking. Gamescom reported more than 624 million digital views, including 78 million views for Opening Night Live. Even the gamescom awesome indies show experienced a reported increase of more than 670 percent, reaching 302,000 views.

Those aren't the numbers of an event in decline.

They're the numbers of a global entertainment powerhouse.

Which makes the next question even more interesting. **If Gamescom is this big, why did the biggest upcoming game in the world choose somewhere else for its major reveal?**

GAMESCOM DEV DESERVES ITS OWN VICTORY LAP

One of the stories that shouldn't get lost beneath Gamescom's enormous consumer numbers is the success of gamescom dev 2026. In its first edition under the new name, gamescom dev attracted more than 6,200 unique registered participants, representing 15 percent growth over 2025.

That's significant.

6,200+

PARTICIPANTS

+15%

YOY GROWTH

397

SPEAKERS

238

SESSIONS

95

COUNTRIES

2,500+

COMPANIES

The conference also drew 57 partners and exhibitors across the conference and indie expo. While Gamescom is the gigantic public-facing celebration, gamescom dev represents another crucial part of the ecosystem: the people actually building the games.

Developers. Programmers. Artists. Designers. Producers. Entrepreneurs. Technology companies. Publishers. Independent studios. The people arguing at 2:00 a.m. about whether a virtual door should open inward or outward.

Gamescom dev's 15 percent growth suggests the professional side of Gamescom week is expanding alongside the consumer spectacle. Gamescom's own final reporting highlighted that increase as part of a more closely integrated “gamescom week.” That's an important achievement.

06 / THE DISTRIBUTION STORY

BUT THEN GTA VI CHOSE NETFLIX.

On August 27 — right in the middle of Gamescom week — the most anticipated game on the planet skipped the world's biggest gaming stage entirely.

27 min

"AN EXTENDED LOOK"

6 hrs

NETFLIX EXCLUSIVE WINDOW NETFLIX VIEWERSHIP,
HOUR OVER HOUR

+35%

+125%

WEB TRAFFIC VS. PRIOR
12 THURSDAYS

GTA VI DIDN'T NEED THE GAMING STAGE. IT CREATED ITS OWN.

On August 27, right in the middle of Gamescom week, Netflix released “GTA VI: An Extended Look,” a 27-minute presentation containing previously unseen footage from Rockstar Games' upcoming Grand Theft Auto VI.

Not Gamescom.

Not Opening Night Live.

Netflix.

According to the material I reviewed, Netflix received a six-hour exclusive window before the presentation became available through Rockstar's official YouTube presence.

How much bigger would Opening Night Live have been if the GTA VI extended reveal had happened there?

THE QUESTION COMING OUT OF GAMESCOM 2026

Think about it. Gamescom ONL already reportedly generated 78 million views. Now add Grand Theft Auto VI — potentially the most anticipated entertainment release of 2027. That could have turned an enormous gaming event into a genuine global pop-culture moment.

Instead, Rockstar and Netflix demonstrated that one of gaming's biggest reveals no longer necessarily needs a traditional gaming showcase.

According to Sensor Tower figures reported in the material I reviewed, Netflix viewership increased approximately 35 percent hour-over-hour around the GTA VI presentation and approximately 50 percent compared with the same time the previous day. Web traffic reportedly increased 125 percent compared with the corresponding average from the previous 12 Thursdays.

That's remarkable.

A video game trailer was driving traffic to Netflix.

For decades, games needed gaming publications, conventions and television programs to reach enormous audiences. Then came YouTube. Then Twitch. Then social media. Now a company can potentially turn the reveal of one gigantic game into a streaming-platform event.

That's not just a GTA story. That's a distribution story — and Gamescom should be paying attention.

Is this the beginning of the end for the mega reveal show?

I wouldn't call GTA VI choosing Netflix the “final nail in the coffin” for Gamescom Opening Night Live. The numbers don't support that conclusion.

Seventy-eight million ONL views isn't a coffin. It's a skyscraper.

But GTA VI raises a legitimate strategic question: why should the world's biggest publishers surrender their biggest announcements to somebody else's event?

Rockstar can apparently create its own media event. Nintendo has Nintendo Direct. Sony has State of Play. Microsoft can create Xbox showcases. Publishers have YouTube, Twitch, TikTok and their own social channels. Now Netflix has demonstrated another potential distribution window.

That means ONL increasingly has to provide something publishers cannot create themselves: **discovery, community, surprise, curation.**

And that's exactly where I think the Future Games Show becomes interesting.

FUTURE GAMES SHOW WON MY ATTENTION

For the past couple of years, I've increasingly found Future Games Show more imaginative than Gamescom Opening Night Live.

ONL has scale. Future Games Show has discovery.

ONL can deliver the franchise everybody already knows about.

Future Games Show can show me something that makes me ask: **“What in the hell is THAT?”** That's increasingly what I want from a gaming showcase.



FUTURE GAMES SHOW AT GAMESCOM — KEY ART

TREES HATE YOU

ABSURDIST ACTION • FUTURE GAMES SHOW 2026

Yes. That's the game. *Trees Hate You*.

One of the strangest games I encountered during Future Games Show 2026 involved trees apparently deciding humanity had enjoyed civilization long enough. I immediately loved the absurdity. The premise is funny, aggressively anti-eco in a deliberately ridiculous way and instantly understandable.

Trees. Hate. You.

That's basically the elevator pitch. But I immediately started imagining how much further the developers could take it. Why stop with generic trees? California redwoods could become lumbering bosses. Palm trees could launch coconuts. Willow trees could turn branches into whips. Different trees from different countries could have completely different attacks.

And then there's the level that absolutely needs to happen.

CHRISTMAS

You're walking through a peaceful Christmas-tree lot. The lights flicker. The ornaments start moving. Candy canes become weapons. Tinsel becomes a trap. The star launches itself from the top. Then an enormous fully decorated Christmas tree comes alive.

FINAL BOSS: ROCKEFELLER CENTER.

Tell me you wouldn't play that. That's what I mean by imagination. Sometimes a game doesn't need a \$200 million budget. It just needs an idea weird enough to make you immediately start imagining possibilities.



KETTLEBELL: INFERNO HOTEL — KEY ART

KETTLEBELL: INFERNO HOTEL

2D PLATFORMER • 16-BIT INSPIRED

Another new title that grabbed me from outside Gamescom 2026 is *Kettlebell: Inferno Hotel*. The previews presented it as a fast-paced 2D platformer inspired by 16-bit classics of the 1990s, packed with humor, destruction and hellish energy.

That combination works for me. Gaming technology continues advancing, but better graphics don't automatically create better games.

OLD-SCHOOL DESIGN, IN FOUR LINES

Here's your character.

Here's the level.

Everything wants to kill you.

GO.

Kettlebell looks like it understands that. Most importantly, watching it made me think: *I actually want to play this*. That's more valuable than another technically impressive trailer I'll forget tomorrow.

IS GAMING BECOMING TOO DEPENDENT ON FAMILIAR IP?

The Gamescom Awards also offer an interesting snapshot of the industry. CD PROJEKT RED and SEGA each received three awards, while Capcom and Ubisoft collected two apiece.

The winners included familiar brands and franchises such as The Witcher, Alien: Isolation 2, Onimusha: Way of the Sword, Forza Horizon 6, Rayman Legends Retold and Total War: WARHAMMER 40,000. But lesser-known titles including Wanderburg, Finding Polka, Tides of Annihilation and SOKO 1977 were recognized too.

That tension between giant established properties and strange new ideas may be the real story of gaming in 2026.

Hollywood has wrestled with this problem for years. Sequels. Reboots. Remakes. Legacy franchises. Recognizable intellectual property. Gaming increasingly faces the same dilemma.

There's nothing wrong with another great Witcher, Alien, Onimusha or Forza game. But an industry that becomes too dependent on familiarity risks squeezing out the experimentation that created its greatest franchises in the first place.

Somebody once had to pitch Grand Theft Auto before GTA was GTA. Somebody had to pitch The Sims. Somebody had to pitch Minecraft. And at some point somebody apparently walked into a meeting and said:

“I have a game about homicidal trees.”

THAT PERSON DESERVES LUNCH.

MY 2026 SHOWCASE SCORECARD

CATEGORY	GAMESCOM ONL	FUTURE GAMES SHOW
Major franchises	Winner	—
Global spectacle	Winner	—
Corporate announcements	Winner	—
Production scale	Winner	—
Discovering unfamiliar games	—	Winner
Indie personality	—	Winner
Weird ideas	—	Winner
Games that surprise me	—	Winner
“What did I just watch?” factor	—	Winner
Killer Christmas trees	—	Uncontested champion

But after GTA VI, I would add another category.

CATEGORY	GAMESCOM ONL	NETFLIX / GTA VI
Biggest “How did Gamescom not get this?” moment	—	GTA VI

That's the uncomfortable question Gamescom should be asking.

SO WAS GAMESCOM 2026 SUCCESSFUL? **ABSOLUTELY.**

Let's stop pretending this needs to be complicated.

368,000	VISITORS
131	COUNTRIES REPRESENTED BY FANS
1,743	EXHIBITORS, FROM 66 COUNTRIES
36,000+	TRADE VISITORS
624M	DIGITAL VIEWS
78M	OPENING NIGHT LIVE VIEWS
6,200+	GAMESCOM DEV PARTICIPANTS, +15% YOY

Those numbers establish Gamescom as not merely Europe's biggest gaming event but one of the most significant global gatherings in the entire video game industry.

Was I disappointed that I wasn't there as accredited press? Absolutely. Do I agree with how my application was handled? No. But I'm not going to allow that disagreement to distort what happened in Cologne.

Gamescom 2026 was huge.

The more interesting question is whether Gamescom Opening Night Live remains indispensable. That's where GTA VI choosing Netflix becomes fascinating. Gamescom itself is getting bigger. gamescom dev is growing. Gamescom's international reach is expanding. But simultaneously, the world's biggest gaming properties have more ways than ever to bypass traditional gaming showcases entirely.

That's not Gamescom's demise. It's Gamescom's next challenge.

See you in 2027?

Despite everything that happened this year, I'm not closing the door on Gamescom. I intend to apply considerably earlier for Gamescom 2027 and gamescom dev 2027, particularly after being told that limited capacity affected my 2026 application.

Gamescom has already announced that its 2027 week will run August 23 through August 29, beginning with gamescom dev, followed by Opening Night Live and Business and Media Day.

Maybe I'll actually be inside Koelnmesse. Maybe I won't. Either way, I'm going to keep covering games. I've been doing it far too long to allow a press credential to determine whether I'm still a gaming journalist.

Gamescom doesn't need my press pass to prove it's one of the world's biggest gaming events. And I don't need a Gamescom press pass to keep looking for the next game worth telling people about.

After more than two decades covering this industry, maybe that's the most useful thing Gamescom 2026 reminded me.

The biggest game isn't always the most interesting game. The biggest gaming event doesn't automatically own the biggest gaming reveal. And the future of gaming isn't necessarily going to arrive where we're expecting it.

Sometimes it arrives at Gamescom. Sometimes it arrives on Netflix. And sometimes... the trees just hate you.

David L. “\$Money Train\$” Watts

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OFFICIAL GAMESCOM RELEASES

26 AUGUST 2026 • KOELNMESSE

gamescom Opening Night Live unveils first highlights — more than 1,700 exhibitors at the world's biggest gaming event

Hosted by Geoff Keighley, the international show gives fans a preview of gamescom 2026 +++ Exhibitor numbers hit a new record of more than 1,700 +++ Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday already sold out

On Tuesday evening, gamescom Opening Night Live 2026 delivered one of the most spectacular international shows of the year. Host Geoff Keighley and co-host Eefje “sjokz” Depoortere took to the gamescom event arena to present a packed lineup of world premieres, new trailers and glimpses of gameplay across various titles. Key highlights featured a new look at Final Fantasy VII Revelation, the antagonist reveal for Gears of War: E-Day, and the reveal of The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt — Songs of the Past. 5,000 fans watched the show live on site, with millions more joining via livestream from around the world. The recording is available as an on-demand video on the official gamescom YouTube channel.

More highlights were presented on August 27 during the gamescom awesome indies show, live on gamescom's channels.

New exhibitor record for opening day

As gamescom kicked off, more than 1,700 exhibitors took over the halls of Koelnmesse for the first time ever, setting a new record and topping the 1,600-plus exhibitors initially expected. Additional registrations from group participation increased the number of exhibiting companies significantly. Together with the exhibition space of 233,000 m², fully booked for the first time this year, this underscores the event's global significance as the world's biggest gaming event.

Visitors enjoyed a diverse program of new releases, shows, community events, indie titles and cosplay, plus a wide range of opportunities for business, networking and professional exchange. Tickets for Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday sold out. Many program highlights were also streamed free on gamescom's official YouTube and Twitch channels.

gamescom award 2026: the winners

Three trophies each for CD PROJEKT RED and SEGA +++ Capcom and Ubisoft each won two awards +
++ Games Done Quick honored with the HEART OF GAMING Award

The winners of the 2026 gamescom awards were announced on Friday 28 August, with trophies presented across a total of 19 categories. The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt made a strong impression with its gamescom presence and picked up three awards. Fans voted the trailer for the remaster and the “Songs of the Past” DLC as Best Trailer / Announcement, as well as the pin and medallion as Best Merch; the jury honored the booth as well. SEGA also took home three trophies. Capcom won two for Onimusha: Way of the Sword, and Ubisoft won two more.

This year's HEART OF GAMING Award, the Special Jury Award, went to Games Done Quick. The charity speedrun event has already raised over 50 million dollars for good causes. Games Done Quick took place in Europe for the first time as part of gamescom, with all proceeds from donations and sponsorship going to Gaming for Democracy, an initiative that promotes democratic values and social engagement through gaming culture.

ARTS GROUP

Best Visuals	METRO 2039 — 4A Games / Deep Silver
Best Audio	Alien: Isolation 2 — Creative Assembly / SEGA
Best Gameplay	Onimusha: Way of the Sword — Capcom
Most Entertaining	Wanderburg — Randwerk / Sidekick Publishing
Most Epic	Tides of Annihilation — Eclipse Glow Games
Most Wholesome	Finding Polka — lidlocks / Parco Games
Games for Impact	SOKO 1977: Anti-Terror Task Force — Paintbucket Games / bpb

PLATFORM GROUP

Best Microsoft Xbox Game	Forza Horizon 6 — Playground Games / Xbox Game Studios
Best PC Game	Total War: WARHAMMER 40,000 — Creative Assembly / SEGA
Best Sony PlayStation Game	Onimusha: Way of the Sword — Capcom
Best Nintendo Switch 2 Game	Rayman Legends Retold — Ubisoft
Best Mobile Game	Where Winds Meet — Everstone Studio / NetEase Games

GLOBAL GROUP

Best Lineup (Jury)	SEGA
Best Booth (Jury)	The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt — Songs of the Past — CD PROJEKT RED
Best Booth (Consumer)	Arknights: Endfield — GRYPHLINE
Best Business Booth (Jury)	Ubisoft Business Lounge
Best Merch (Consumer)	The Witcher 3 — Pin & Medallion — CD PROJEKT RED
Best Trailer / Announcement	The Witcher 3 Remastered & Songs of the Past DLC — CD PROJEKT RED
HEART OF GAMING (Special Jury)	Games Done Quick

Coming up on the gamescom calendar

gamescom asia x Thailand Game Show

BANGKOK • 29 OCT – 1 NOV 2026

gamescom lan

COLOGNE • 19 – 21 FEB 2027

gamescom latam

SÃO PAULO • 22 – 25 APR 2027

gamescom & gamescom dev 2027

COLOGNE • 23 – 29 AUG 2027

About the organizers. gamescom is organized by Koelnmesse together with game — the German Games Industry Association, whose members span development studios, publishers, esports organizers and educational institutions. Further information: gamescom.global · [gamescom award](https://gamescom.award) enquiries: Awardbüro gamescom award, c/o Stiftung Digitale Spielekultur gGmbH, Marburger Str. 2, 10789 Berlin, Germany · award@gamescom.de

Note. Press-release material in this appendix is condensed from official gamescom communications dated 26 and 28 August 2026. Commentary, analysis and opinion throughout this report are the author's own.