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As a user researcher here at Blink UX, I've spent some time assessing and testing websites for the game industry. Game websites have a variety of audiences with unique goals, but the most notable ones are these:

- Support the brand or brands of the games and their manufacturers or creators.
- Attract new users to games and generate buzz or support, especially by teaching new visitors about the games.
- Serve as an online portal to begin playing games.
- Offer a Buy Now option, or inform visitors about how to buy or locate brick and mortar locations.
- Inform users about updates and enhancements to games they already know and love.
- Provide links to forums and online communities where players can meet others and exchange tips.
- Inform users about upcoming events and conferences where they can participate.

While the game site may also be helpful for investors, press, and employees, as an outward facing tool, it's mostly about the players: attracting more and keeping the ones you have. To keep this audience happy, engaged, and returning to your site, here are six best practices we've identified at Blink UX.

1. From the first moment a visitor reaches your game website, it's critical to provide a clear path to the games: either information about them, or a way to start playing immediately

An example of this done well is League of Legends with a central and obvious PLAY NOW button on the home page.

2. If your brand offers multiple games from a single site, it's important to call them out and describe them individually

This helps teach new players about what's available, encouraging them to try all the games offered. Frustrated gamers who cannot easily find information on their favorite game will not convert to repeat users or happy customers.

3. People want to see what games look like - both digital and tabletop games

Regardless of format, videos of game play are critical to helping new players learn about a game. This is especially true for younger players who prefer video examples to lengthy play manuals when learning games. The Skyrim home page is a good example of an easy-to-find video showcasing a game.

4. Use terms on your game website that even non-users will understand

Front loading your site with game-specific lexicon can create a barrier to entry for new players or non-players. Using your website to teach new players about the game's language is fine, but it should never completely shape the navigation on your site.

5. Game website visitors expect game support

Players want to talk to people from your company and they don't want to dig through your website to find the support or contact us button. Blizzard Entertainment has done a great job here of not only making support a top level item, but also providing a quick way to play, buy, or learn about World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, right from the landing page.

6. Lastly, we understand games need to be beautifully designed - why should the game website be any different?

It should be IF the design gets in the way of the site visitor's needs. Don't let beautiful art detract from the other great content on your site. This makes navigation and text difficult to notice and use. The user interface should not take a backseat to showcasing game visuals on the site.

Game on!