

EARLY ACCESS & EMBARGO PROGRAMS

What do game devs/publishers get out of it?

- Completely free source of extremely targeted and timely marketing campaigns, maybe even a highly reliable one, especially if the youtuber is closely controlled and intensively managed, and especially if the youtuber is trying to make a business out of youtube during all this.
- The freedom to choose who gets to be doing the free marketing, according to their own private criteria, and the freedom to tier them into additional subgroups as they might desire, factoring for size of audience and track record for reliability and problem free compliance.
- Free early warning system for problems with the game, giving lead time on launch. Youtubers essentially serving as a free specialist (expert) QA, if needed.

What do youtubers get out of it?

- A free copy of the game, lol
- Access to a time window where you're in an exclusive group that monopolises views (and ad revenue) while interest is peaking - unfair advantage over all peers on youtube in the run up to launch.
- An unfair headstart on planning and anticipation. Regular youtubers get access on launch day like everyone else and are way behind while you've already got the whole day (or week) planned out.
- Familiarity advantage with the game (unless just a talking head grifter youtuber, only really valued by competitive gameplay-focused powergaming youtubers, rare in Total War), and assists in weeks and even months post-launch.

Consequences:

- Youtubers almost invariably feel indebted for a multitude of reasons, from the fact they get a "free" game, to the social aspect of interaction with developers. This causes conflicts of interest which can be difficult to compensate for and ultimately extremely compromising for the youtuber, especially when this aspect remains unacknowledged or otherwise simply understated to the captive audience.
- Youtubers are motivated to rush in order to make the most of the opportunity. The tragedy of the commons and the beginning of the playing-off of youtubers against one

another. A good example of this was with Rome: Remastered when some youtubers were uploading a video a day for a whole month.

- Youtubers can be financially motivated to profiteer ruthlessly, at worst, this involves the liberal shilling of pre-order links for games that they are otherwise not even allowed to either openly endorse or condemn, due to embargo. Condoning (or even encouraging) customers acting against their interests and making poor decisions with unjustifiable risks involved (a loss of all money for a bad product, to fall victim to the bait and switch). This is a multiplicative synergising of two separate evils - the inherent imprudence of pre-ordering as a customer behaviour, with the unscrupulousness of openly encouraging it as a middle man and shill, exacerbating the problem.
- If feedback channels are made available to early accessers, then they get to feel like they have input on the game, even when they might not at all. The feedback isn't being paid for, so it isn't necessarily sought after or valued, and could simply serve as a venting channel to allow the letting off of steam, and give youtubers a way to rationalise and offset against their compliance for a questionable arrangement. Or more likely, this kind of feedback could just be used to gauge temperament and volatility of youtubers and the likelihood of continued compliance, and the actual player experience aspect of the feedback only serves as a ruse.

End Result:

- Youtubers that are more compliant and co-operative will have more competitive advantage events and will progressively begin to unfairly dominate market share on youtube. This could conceivably snowball over years/decades, ultimately drowning out smaller independent channels without this proclivity for unprincipled submission.
- The balance of power is against individual youtubers, who are numerous and disunited, so youtubers that resist can be progressively cowed for compliance, and if that fails, ultimately being discarded, we have seen blatantly efforted manipulation of this nature be explicitly confirmed before:
https://www.reddit.com/r/Volound/comments/op6716/if_only_they_put_as_much_effort_into_making_good/
- Youtubers who are more willing to engage in baseless hyping will have more success with shilling pre-order links as part of their unethical pre-order advocacy behaviour, or will simply be more grifty with their video titles and thumbnails. Youtubers will be incentivised to snowball the hype and the marketing efforts of the company, in effect becoming an extension of the marketing apparatus, an unpaid marketing employee with their platform effectively hijacked and audience subsumed.
- Youtubers that don't meet the undisclosed criteria of the company will become disillusioned at the unfair treatment and leave the market and conversation, (we probably saw this happen most transparently with AdmiralPrice, who ultimately shat on CA and dipped, after spending months becoming more and more contentious, as I shifted the overton window he attempted to flexibly operate within).

- Games will sell progressively more on the back of how well they can be marketed by youtubers for free, further reducing the emphasis on the gameplay itself, as early access marketing begins to represent more and more of the sales generated:
https://www.reddit.com/r/Volound/comments/nflave/what_is_the_root_cause_of_cas_dec_line/gymxhyx/?utm_source=reddit&utm_medium=web2x&context=3
- Inauthentic coverage provided before launch contributes to creating a post-release inertia as video and stream watchers uncritically assimilate what they've heard (no opposing viewpoint exists) and become mouthpieces for the same inauthenticity. A smokescreen that takes a while to clear will continue to deceive people long after launch, as residual positive dispositions take time to disperse and make way for the reality.

Why Unionisation is necessary:

Without co-operation of Youtubers to prevent **The Great Shilling Operation** from achieving its goals of having a completely supine fleet of shills with massive audiences willing to market the game for free, youtubers will be constantly pressured to toe a line of compliance that will be largely unresisted, lest they lose their favoured status and face future competitive disadvantage. Individual action to improve the collective situation has a high likelihood of complete failure coming at substantial individual cost.

Youtubers, if they are going to be marketing the game, should either be a part of a union that can negotiate fair fees for them which they can then disclose receipt of to their captive audience (in the interest of full disclosure for properly informed customer decision-making), or else given the game for free and without condition, on the hope that they like the game and are willing to cover it purely on its own merits, and without conditions attached. This is necessary not only because of the increasingly manipulative behaviour of companies which will inevitably be motivated to get as much money from as little work as possible, but because Youtubers themselves are often very susceptible to financial motivations. What could have been an opportunity to protect customers from bad products while driving them towards only the good ones, to reward good games with coverage while punishing bad games with being forgotten and ignored, has been twisted into a worst case scenario. We are now at a stage where unethical grifters could actually be motivated to start youtube channels simply to bandwagon onto **The Great Shilling Operation** and make a cheap buck from exploiting hype and FOMO, and accelerating the worsening of games and the lack of gameplay focus. Channels are being accepted into these programs and railroaded into serving this purpose when they have only a few hundred subscribers. The amount of time between starting a youtube channel and getting to the size required to be granted early access and engage in hyping bad games, has never been shorter, and getting to that position has never been easier, and the games have never been worse.

A fully unionised community of youtubers/streamers availing of their expertise and insight could be pooling their different skill-sets and knowledge bases to vet Total War games before they even launch, potentially even assisting in ensuring and raising quality with their feedback. They

could be doing it for invested captive audiences that the youtuber has spent years collaborating with to understand what makes a good game. There could be trust well earned by un-impugned youtubers that have never before endured the humiliation of mass-encouraging people to buy shit games with trainwreck launches, and these trustworthy youtubers could be communicating effectively without restrictive embargoes muddying the waters for everyone, so it could be easier than ever for an attentive audience to perceive good work well done by game developers, which would incentivise good games to be made, which, as I've always said, is the one thing that matters above all else to everyone.

Easy to see how things could be better. Difficult to see how they could be any worse.