



GAMESFORUM  
BARCELONA

10-11 February | InterContinental Hotel

# Spotlight Series: The Future of Ad Monetization

Insights from Industry Leaders

By Mariam Ahmad, Head of Content, **Gamesforum**



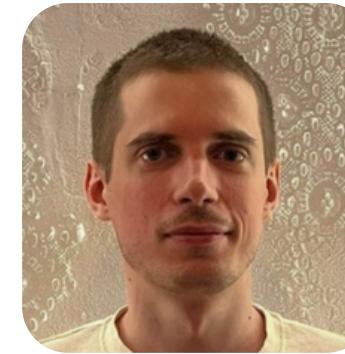
# The Future of Ad Monetization

## Panel Preview

Ahead of their Gamesforum Barcelona 2026 panel “The Future of Ad Monetization,” three experts: Tatiana Kondratyeva, CEO and Co-Founder of **PlayPack**, Damjan Kačar, Ad Monetization Specialist at **GameBiz Consulting**, and Maksim Amosov, Head of Ad Monetization at **Nekki**, share their perspectives on the trends, challenges, and creative opportunities shaping the next generation of ad monetization.



**Tatiana Kondratyeva**  
CEO and Co-Founder  
**PlayPack**



**Damjan Kačar**  
Ad Monetization Specialist  
**GameBiz Consulting**



**Maksim Amosov**  
Head of Ad Monetization  
**Nekki**

# Tatiana Kondratyeva

## CEO & Co-Founder, **PlayPack**

### **Ad Monetization as a System**

By 2025, ad monetization has shifted to be one of the hardest systems in mobile gaming to get right. Even outside of hyper and hybrid-casual sections, it's very clear that ads are not 'bonus revenue', but rather a big part of your game economy and loops designed around it. A well-placed ad can double the duration of a session or kill the playtime.



## Monetization is now a creative discipline.

### **Hybrid Models in Action**

At PlayPack, we've seen this evolution up close. Our Merge-2 title, Merge Away, runs on a hybrid monetization model that combines ads and in-app purchases. Throughout its lifetime, we have seen how the interaction between those two factors has the power to make or break profitability. As a small studio we need to find the angle to be competitive with bigger players, and it's literally a million dollar question how to do it.

### **The Data Merge Revolution**

The biggest change for us in 2025 was the final merging of monetization based on behaviour analytics and user acquisition goals. The same data you use for acquisition is now used in a good ad-mon setup. Quick-reward casual games should appear in your ad stack if your UA campaign attracts a particular kind of user. Richer, progression-based offers and possibly no ads at all should be visible to IAP-driven spenders that your UA attracts. ROAS is destroyed when the wrong cohort is shown the wrong content. And we've all witnessed the abrupt drops in revenue of 30% caused by misaligned sources.

### **Adaptivity as the New Frontier**

That's why I believe the real frontier now isn't just new formats; it's adaptivity. Monetization tools must understand where the user came from and how users are interacting with your game. What is their behavior: ad-driven, hybrid, or spender. Ad kill switches, rewarded placements, and even frequency configs should adapt automatically to that data. While the newer SDKs from partners are moving in that direction, with machine-learning-based personalisation, most studios still treat monetization as static.

## Visibility and Accountability

Another pain point is that too often when ad revenue drops, no one can explain why. It's a black box. For small studios like ours, that's unacceptable. Every percentage point of yield matters. You need full visibility into which sources are performing, which campaigns got paused, and which partners actually deliver clean traffic. We've built internal dashboards that cross-reference ROAS and retention by UA channel just to get that clarity. Without it, you're flying blind.

## User Experience Matters

The user experience side matters just as much. Players are fatigued by heavy ad loads. They expect ads to feel optional, quick, and rewarding — not like punishment for playing. In our games, we integrate ad moments as “side quests,” never blockers. It's about keeping momentum, not stopping play to monetize it.

## Final Takeaway

Looking forward, the winners in ad monetization will be studios that design with ads in mind, not around them. Monetization is now a creative discipline as much a design decision as the core loop itself. Respect the player, understand your data, and treat your ad stack as a living system that evolves with your audience.



# Damjan Kačar

Ad Monetization Specialist, **GameBiz Consulting**

## The Hype vs. The Reality

Every few months you hear news about the success of new ad formats, such as App Open, Audio ads, Immersive/In-Game Ads and similar. Despite the hype, these formats have not achieved the widespread adoption of staples like rewarded video, interstitial and banner ads. So what's holding them back?

## Shared Struggles Across Formats

It's a bit unfair to group all these formats together since they serve different purposes. Still, after seeing them tested across different portfolios, they tend to suffer from similar problems: technical friction, poor user experience, and lackluster performance.

## Technical Friction

The further your tech stack is from "standard", the harder it becomes to integrate new formats. Each format has its own quirks and getting it to work smoothly often takes more time than planned. An experienced developer can add a rewarded video or a banner in a day or two, while some non-standard integrations take weeks to get right. At that point, the cost can outweigh the potential revenue gains.

What we need is more control — not another interstitial in disguise.

## Poor User Experience

Formats like App Open or Audio Ads can be frustrating to users. Nobody likes being hit with an ad before they've even seen the main menu, or having a voice start talking over their gameplay. Immersive ads are much better in terms of UX, but only if they fit your gameplay, which limits them to a few genres. If you're going to use a disruptive format, closely track retention and user feedback to make sure that the revenue uplift is worth it.

## Lackluster Performance

Even when they work technically, most of these formats underperform against standard ones. They often struggle getting any fill outside the Tier 1 (or even just US). App Open doesn't have fill issues, but their eCPMs can be up to x9 lower than regular interstitials, which limits their potential.

## Practical Advice for Experimentation

From my experience, a few tips that can help with experimenting and utilising new formats:

- Don't believe the sales pitch. The promises will actually sound reasonable, but often won't be delivered. Protect yourself by getting a solid contract that makes sure that at least your development effort will be repaid.
- If a format risks harming the user experience make sure it pays well. For intrusive formats like App Open or Audio Ads, experiment with high price floors. You'll sacrifice fill but only showing ads at high prices will help balance revenue and churn risk.
- Use the opportunity to promote ad-free purchase. Exposure to intrusive formats can create conversion pressure. Pair it with discounts and targeted "No Ads" offers to maximise conversions.
- User segmentation is key in getting the most out of new formats. Intrusive formats can be a great way to get the most value out of the users who are likely to churn anyway.

## Final Perspective

You might get the impression that my view of new ad formats is quite negative. On the contrary, in the right niche, they can be great. I've seen them bring in 10%-30% of total ad revenue, when they find the right fit.

But are they the future of ad monetization? Definitely not. When something truly works universally, it gets mass adopted fast. None of these formats clear that bar.

With top-grossing games moving away from ads or never using them in the first place, it's hard to argue that piling on more ad formats is the future of ad mon.

What we need is more control. Better ways to optimize existing ads and tools to improve the ad experience. Delivering that will be the next big thing in ad mon, not another interstitial in disguise.

# Maksim Amosov

## Head of Ad Monetization, **Nekki**

In 2026, the most valuable in-game currency won't be gems or gold — it'll be time. Players have learned to treat their attention as a resource, and the industry is finally catching up.

The future of ad monetization isn't about showing more ads — it's about showing the right one to the right player, at the right moment.

### Segmentation of Interaction

Not every player values time the same way. Some see an ad as a shortcut, others as a distraction. That's why the next evolution of ad design lies in segmentation of interaction — building adaptive ad experiences that fit the player's comfort, motivation, and session flow. For one user, it might be a rewarded video before a tough mission. For another, a contextual offer inside a live event. For others, branded challenges or limited-time boosts that feel like part of gameplay rather than something external to it.



The future of ad monetization isn't higher frequency — it's higher empathy.

### Contextual Value Exchange

When ads become contextual, they stop feeling like interruptions and start to act as meaningful choices. The player trades time for value — and when that value aligns with their current goal in the game, satisfaction replaces frustration. It's the difference between "watching an ad" and "unlocking a bonus".

### LiveOps Meets Ad systems

The next few years will push this logic even further. LiveOps will integrate advertising directly into events and limited-time systems. Instead of static placements, we'll see dynamic, data-driven touchpoints where offers appear only when they make sense — during a progression wall, or at the end of a milestone. Ad personalisation will evolve from targeting users to understanding context.

### Empathy as the Foundation

Players already decide how they want to pay — with money or with time. Our job as designers and monetization architects is to respect that choice, making both paths equally engaging and fair. The future of ad monetization isn't defined by higher frequency, but by higher empathy.

# Join Us at Gamesforum Barcelona 2026

## The Future of Ad Monetization Where the Next Era of Ad Strategy Takes Shape

Join Tatiana, Damjan and Maksim at Gamesforum Barcelona (10-11 February) as they dive deep into:

- How data, design, and monetization teams can work together to build adaptive ad systems
- The balance between user experience, personalisation, and profitability
- What truly drives sustainable ad revenue in 2025 and beyond

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