Torstar and Enthusiast Gaming Join Forces to launch first-ofits-kind Community to reach Gen-Z audience

AFK to cover issues that matter to gamers Away From the Keyboard

TORONTO, Ontario (July 6, 2021) – Warren Jansons saw a gap – and an opportunity – in the gaming community. While attending gamer events, Jansons would hear gamers' banter during play and behind the scenes and realized how passionate they are as citizens of the world – beyond gaming.

Many of us have observed the activism and influence of Gen-Z in the digital realm, given our past 16 months of pandemic-boosted screen time. And we've seen gaming culture go from pop culture references to mainstream adoption.

Importantly, while marketers have aimed to make a connection with Gen-Z gamers, they have come to realize that brands that aren't a relevant fit in gaming culture have struggled to find an authentic way in.

To Jansons, a former executive at Enthusiast Gaming, what was missing was the space to talk to Gen-Z gamers about issues that matter to them away from the keyboard. It was a point that came up in talks with Mike Beckerman, Torstar's Chief Client Officer.

Now Torstar and Enthusiast Gaming are launching **AFK** (Away from the Keyboard) – a joint venture that closes the information gap for Gen-Z gamers and at the same time opens opportunities for marketers. Jansons will be the Chief Commercial Officer for AFK.

AFK is a new brand that brings content to Gen-Z gamers, leveraging the channels, brand and personalities under Enthusiast Gaming, a leading media and content platform for video game and esports fans.

For advertisers it's about sponsorship of AFK and the chance to reach Gen-Z with credibility and authenticity. AFK introduces a platform to talk about issues the audience cares about that are not gaming related and opens a space where a brand/advertiser is associated to news – rather than trying to "fit in" with gaming.

"AFK is a brand that brings credible insight and community to the issues that matter to gamers in a tone and format that feels familiar – short-form video content and message boards on digital-first platforms," says Torstar's Beckerman. "This gives brands access to an authentic and 'brand-safe' content platform that will reach a coveted and essential audience."

Authenticity is meeting Gen-Z gamers where they live and play. It's an innovative joint venture that eschews the expected to deliver what really fits.

"This partnership combines the strong suits of both companies to bring a brand new and meaningful quality information source and community to gamers," Adrian Montgomery, CEO of Enthusiast Gaming, says. "This venture aligns with our fundamental business strategy of delivering premium content to our community of 300 million gaming and esports fans worldwide," he adds.

Jansons says that "gaming is like any sport – it's not just about the competition – it's about the community. "Players are having conversations that extend beyond gaming culture. They're invested in what's happening in their city, and while they laugh through their pain, they worry about the future and want to change the world. They're also smart and don't tolerate pandering – authenticity is everything."

AFK kicks off with a soft launch in July, developing talent by hosting a crowd-sourced contest that will engage the next generation of content creators and online personalities.

Enthusiast Gaming influencers will help drive traffic and awareness of the AFK "Find a Host" contest, inviting people to submit a video audition around one of four topics: environment, social or economic issues, and cultural trends. AFK judges will pick six finalists for a series of challenges throughout the summer. The winner will be announced in a live event in September and offered a full-time hosting position at AFK.

AFK will have its official public launch in the fall.

About Enthusiast Gaming:

Enthusiast Gaming is building the largest media and content platform for video game and esports fans to connect and engage worldwide. Combining the elements of its four core pillars; Media, Talent, Esports and Experiences, Enthusiast Gaming provides a unique opportunity and integrated approach to reach and connect with its coveted GenZ and Millennial audience. Through its proprietary mix of digital media and entertainment assets, Enthusiast Gaming has built a vast network of like-minded communities to deliver the ultimate fan experience.

About Torstar:

Torstar's businesses include digital and print news organizations, including the Toronto Star, Canada's largest daily newspaper, six regional daily newspapers in Ontario, including The Hamilton Spectator, and more than 70 weekly community newspapers in Ontario and related businesses such as iPolitics, Metroland Parcel Delivery services as well as an interest in Sing Tao, one of Canada's leading Chinese language media companies. Torstar also holds a number of digital investments, including LeaseBusters, Canada's leading car lease re-negotiation business.

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