

In today's media landscape, it can feel like video games and streaming platforms are locked in a battle for our screen time. Whether you're binging the latest series on Netflix or diving into a new open-world game, both experiences demand your attention—and <https://vancouverguardian.com/how-vancouvers-entertainment-industry-is-changing-in-the-digital-age/> the rising tide of digital entertainment options means viewers and players must choose where to spend their hours. But why do games and streaming feel like they compete in the same 'time and attention economy'? To understand this, we need to look under the hood of how film, TV, and interactive media have evolved, especially in British Columbia's vibrant creative industries.

The Digitization of Film and TV Workflows: Setting the Stage

Over the past decade, the film and TV production world has undergone profound transformation due to digitization. Traditional linear workflows—think shooting on film, then editing separately—are increasingly replaced by integrated digital pipelines. Digital cameras, advanced editing software, and cloud-based collaboration tools allow productions to move faster and adapt more flexibly to creative and business needs.

British Columbia, with Vancouver as a global hub, has been at the forefront of implementing these technologies. The region's growth in visual effects (**VFX**), animation, and post-production talent has made it a competitive spot for international studios, driving high-quality content production that competes on a global scale.



Virtual Production and Real-Time Visualization

Two major technological advances exemplify this shift: **virtual production** and **real-time visualization**. Virtual production broadly refers to a suite of techniques using LED walls, game-engine-powered previsualization, and in-camera effects so that filmmakers can see finalized digital environments and effects live on set. This approach cuts down post-production time and deeply integrates digital and physical elements in filmmaking.

Real-time visualization leverages game engines (like Unreal Engine) to render photorealistic visuals instantly, enabling directors to explore scenes from any angle, adjust lighting on the fly, and refine storytelling in a hands-on way. Notably, this is the same technology underpinning many modern video games.

These tools blur historical boundaries between film and gaming workflows, meaning skills and ideas now cross-pollinate more than ever before.

VFX and Animation: Competitive Advantages That Influence Viewer Expectations

Visual effects and animation have long been key competitive advantages supporting film and streaming content. As digital workflows mature, VFX studios become faster and more sophisticated in producing blockbuster-level imagery that appeals to global audiences.

BC's VFX and animation sectors have grown tremendously, attracting work from Marvel, Netflix, Amazon, and others. This scale not only fuels the creative ecosystem but also elevates content quality and viewer expectations. When streaming platforms can deliver cinematic experiences—complete with seamless digital worlds and stunning effects—they raise the bar for everything else competing for viewer attention.

But Here's the Twist:

The very technologies that make streaming shows visually engaging also power games, whose interactive nature offers a different kind of engagement. While VFX-heavy shows are passive—you watch and absorb narrative—games invite active participation, requiring player input and decision-making.

The Attention Economy: Interactive vs. Passive Consumption

The screen time that consumers allocate daily is finite. Herein lies the core tension: games demand active involvement, challenging players to invest cognitive resources and physical action. Streaming, on the other hand, offers passive consumption, where you can relax and absorb the story without extra effort.

From an "attention economy" standpoint, these are two fundamentally different value propositions competing for the same resource: **your attention**. Platforms want more of your screen time because that directly correlates to revenue—through ads, subscriptions, or in-game purchases.

How They Compete

- **Time Investment:** Playing games requires long, often deep immersion, which can cut into time that might be spent watching shows.
- **Emotional Engagement:** Streaming offers emotional arcs crafted by professionals; games offer agency and empowerment, shaping personal narratives.
- **Social Interaction:** Multiplayer games incorporate social elements that streaming can only mimic through live chats or social media.

In practice, this competition results in audiences sometimes feeling torn about whether to pick up the controller or fire up the streaming app—their leisure hours are a precious, zero-sum resource.



Platform Competition Is Global, but BC's Creative Industry Benefits Locally

While it's easy to frame this competition as a turf war among apps and devices, the reality is the platform rivalry plays out on a global economic scale. Streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon—and game platforms like Xbox and PlayStation—make content decisions based on international data, trends, and budgets.

British Columbia, however, stands out as a unique hotspot where these industries overlap and thrive together. Its robust infrastructure and talent pool in gaming, VFX, animation, and virtual production mean that BC companies and creators participate actively in shaping the products vying for our screen time worldwide.

Rather than seeing games and streaming as isolated industries, British Columbia exemplifies a creative ecosystem where interactive and passive digital media intermingle, share technologies, and drive innovation.

Summing Up: Why Do They Feel Like They Compete For The Same Time?

Factor Games Streaming Why They Compete Consumption Style Interactive, active participation Passive, linear storytelling Offer fundamentally different experiences drawing on limited free time Technology Overlap Game engines powering real-time visualization Use virtual production blending digital & physical Shared digital tools and talent pool intensifies content quality competition Viewer Investment Long sessions, cognitive and social engagement Continuous bingeability, emotional arcs Both demand significant emotional or mental attention Business Model Subscriptions, microtransactions, multiplayer economies Subscriptions, ad-supported, licensing Revenue depends on maximizing screen time & loyalty

Looking Ahead: Complementary, Not Just Competitive

Despite the battle for attention, there's strong potential for collaboration between game development and streaming. With real-time visualization, augmented reality, and interactive storytelling emerging, future media experiences may blend interactivity with cinematic narrative seamlessly.

British Columbia's role as a creative powerhouse positioned at the intersection of these technologies and industries will be critical—and that ultimately benefits audiences with richer, more immersive entertainment options.

So next time you wonder why playing a game or watching a streaming series feels like a tough choice, remember this competition reflects deeper shifts in how our digital world creates, distributes, and values content—and how we all must choose how to spend our limited screen time.