Put yourself in the position of a marketeer when TV was in its infancy. How would you have set about tapping into the power of this unprecedented new medium? Perhaps you could pay TV manufacturers to plaster your logo on the fascia around the screen itself. That would certainly guarantee you a fair amount of eyeball time. Or you could publish photographs in magazines of people enjoying your products while watching this glamorous new invention. You could even market new product lines for viewers to wear, use, or consume as they watched their favorite program: TV slippers, TV chairs, TV drinks, or TV dinners. Or would you try to get inside the box somehow? Why not have your logo flickering away in the top corner of the screen all the time? Or perhaps you could get your brands to appear within the programs like they did in the old radio soap operas. Or how about using the gaps between the programs? ... Hmmm ...

With the benefit of hindsight, the solution seems laughably obvious, but 60 years ago any of those options – and many more – might have been perfectly plausible. Today, gaming presents us with a similar conundrum. We might be able to identify our target, but which weapons to deploy to attack it is far from clear. So let’s look at seven of the ways in which marketeers are seeking to unlock the commercial potential of this extraordinary new medium.
The gaming celebrity

Probably the outstanding early example of the commercial exploitation of gaming by a major brand is the case of Lara Croft: the first real gaming icon and still the biggest star the industry has spawned to date. Lara was created by the young video artist Toby Gard in the studios of Core Design in the English Midlands town of Derby in 1995 and made her debut in the first Tomb Raider game the following year. In the game, Lara is hired to track down three parts of a mysterious artifact called the Atlantean Scion – a mission which takes her through Peru, Egypt, Rome, and the lost city of Atlantis. Along the way she has to negotiate a fearsome array of sadistic booby-traps as well as shooting her way out of tangles with hostile wildlife, such as rats, tigers, and even a Tyrannosaurus rex.

1996 – Tomb Raider
2003 – Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness
2006 – Tomb Raider: Legend

The evolution of Lara Croft

Although it was still fairly early days for the gaming industry, Tomb Raider rapidly became a global phenomenon. Within just a couple of years, the figure of a busty young woman wearing shorts and holding a pair of guns became instantly recognizable, not just within the gaming world but by many outside it as well. The communications industry was perhaps slow to spot Lara Croft’s potential. After all, here was an icon not only immediately recognizable in her home