

# Poki Yoki — Game-Funnel Strategy Dossier

Can a free branded game be a cheaper top-of-funnel than buying cup sales directly? A research-grounded answer for the women-27-45-mother segment.

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**How to read this.** Section 1 is the verdict and the money math. Sections 2-4 are the inputs (the customer, the acquisition cost, the conversion bridge). Sections 5-7 are execution (creative, psychology/retention, promotions + legal). Section 8 is the risk register and the one experiment that decides everything. Every load-bearing number is cited inline; soft assumptions are flagged.

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## 1 Verdict & unit economics

**The thesis holds — in corrected form, not as written.**

"Sub-\$1 CAC" is real for a **game play**, not for a **signed-up mom**. The defensible model: **web-instant play + giveaway/leaderboard virality → \$0.80-\$1.50 blended per signed-up mom**, converting at **4-7%** into \$45-\$85 orders → **effective cup CAC of ~\$11-\$38** against a ~\$30 direct benchmark. That's a **1-3x improvement with real brand/WOM upside** — not the 10x collapse implied by "\$1 CAC." It is an **experiment to instrument, not yet a replacement** for the direct channel (which is already profitable). The single number that decides the business — the 90-day **mom→buyer rate** — has no public benchmark anywhere; Poki Yoki will generate the first dataset, and should buy it for <\$5K before scaling a dollar (see §8).

**The funnel is a multiplicative chain — that's the whole story**

Effective cup CAC = (CPM ÷ 1000) ÷ CTR ÷ ClickToPlay ÷ SignupRate ÷ BuyerRate

Five conversion steps multiply. A 2× gain in *any* single step halves CAC — but so does a 2× loss. "Cheap traffic" is one of five levers, and the math below shows it is **not** the binding one.

### Scenario model (US/mom benchmarks; contribution margin, not gross margin)

STEP	■ CONSERVATIVE	■ BASE	■ AGGRESSIVE	■ DREAM (VIRAL)
CPM (US mom audience)	\$16	\$14	\$11	\$9
CTR	1.5%	2.0%	2.5%	3.0%
Click → plays (web, no app gate)	50%	60%	70%	75%
→ <b>Cost per PLAYER</b>	\$2.13	\$1.17	<b>\$0.63</b>	<b>\$0.28*</b>
Player → signs up	25%	30%	40%	50%
→ <b>Cost per SIGNED-UP MOM</b>	\$8.53	\$3.89	\$1.57	<b>\$0.56</b>
Signup → buys cup (90d)	3%	5%	7%	10%
→ <b>EFFECTIVE CUP CAC</b>	<b>~\$284</b>	<b>~\$78</b>	<b>~\$22</b>	<b>~\$5.60</b>
1st-order P/L (Starter, ~\$22 contribution)	<b>-\$262</b>	<b>-\$56</b>	<b>+\$0</b>	<b>+\$16</b>
vs. direct cup CAC (\$30)	<b>9× worse</b>	<b>2.6× worse</b>	<b>1.4× better</b>	<b>5× better</b>

\*Dream blends ~30% organic/referral players ( $k \approx 0.4$ ), so paid cost-per-player ( $\$0.40 \times 0.70$ ). Margin: COGS \$5.76–\$23.54, GM 72–80% per key-numbers.md; but **contribution** margin nets ~\$10–13/order for shipping+3PL+payment, so Starter contribution  $\approx$  \$22 (not \$34), Family  $\approx$  \$50. Household \$119 is **sold out** → AOV anchors \$45–\$85.

#### The two things this table proves

**(1) Cheap traffic alone loses.** The **Base case** (~\$78 effective CAC) is *worse* than buying cup sales directly. The funnel only wins once you stack a cheap channel **and** a high player→buyer rate. **(2) The whole business case lives in a 2-point conversion swing:** at \$2/signup  $\times$  3% = ~\$67 CAC (no better than direct); at \$1.50/signup  $\times$  5% = ~\$30 (flywheel real). The bridge, not the reach, is the business.

## Breakeven: the buyer-rate you must clear

BLENDED SIGNUP COST	BEATS \$30 DIRECT AT	FIRST-ORDER PROFITABLE (~\$22 CONTRIBUTION) AT
\$0.75	≥ 2.5%	≥ 3.4%
\$1.50	≥ 5.0%	≥ 6.8%
\$3.00	≥ 10.0%	≥ 13.6%

Cheaper signups collapse the conversion bar. This is why **virality is a structural requirement, not a bonus** — it's the only benchmark-supported route to ≤\$1.50 blended signups (\$3). Comparators independently re-verified: [Triple Whale](#) baby-category Meta CPA \$30.04; [Klaviyo](#) welcome-flow benchmarks.

## 2 The customer: mothers 27–45

**31.3M**

US mothers on social (93.3% of all moms) — eMarketer 2024

**4h 15m**

avg. daily internet time; 98% own a smartphone — Edison "Moms & Media" 2024

**5–6 min**

median game session, 4–6 app opens/day, 8 PM peak — GameAnalytics 2025

**She is Millennial-dominated and aging into her income.** Millennials are 60–70% of new moms; birth rates are falling under-30 and rising over-30, so the average first-time mom is moving *into* the 27–45 window with more money and more research habits (CDC via Newsweek 2025; Pew 2018). The "Tesla Mom" (28–38, HHI \$100K+) is the dense center.

**Where her attention actually is** (rank-ordered for paid + organic): **Facebook is still #1** — 54% of social moms use it most, and FB+Messenger time is >2× her TikTok minutes; **TikTok tripled to 19%**; **Pinterest over-indexes hard at 64.7% mom reach** (≈2× the general population) and is pure high-intent planning mode (EMI Research; eMarketer 2024). 82% consume online audio; 43% are weekly podcast listeners. **Facebook Groups** are her trust infrastructure.

**She grew up gaming.** 57% of gamer-moms have gamed 10+ years; ~74% play mobile daily, 75% play *solo* as decompression (Activision Blizzard Media "Mom's Got Game," 8,500 respondents; Crossplay 2024). A game is nostalgia, not a foreign medium — but it competes for a **fragmented ~3 hrs/day of interrupted leisure** (BLS ATUS 2024). **Design implication:** the stack-and-care loop in 3–10 min units with daily-care hooks is exactly the right session shape for her day.

**How she buys kids' products.** Discovery is social (65% of Millennial moms research products on social vs 45% Gen X; 44% trust influencer recs), validation is peer-driven (registries, mom-groups, reviews), and the toddler-mom (28–40) is the bullseye — it's the sippy-cup window and the peak of

the mold/replacement frustration. Her #1 skepticism trigger is **marketing at her child** — which makes a COPPA-clean, no-ads, no-IAP architecture a *trust asset*, not just compliance.

### 3 Acquisition: the cheapest paths to a play

The "\$0.40 CPI" is a mirage for this audience. That number is a global-blend artifact (LATAM CPI \$0.14 subsidizes it). Constrain to US women 27–45 and you're buying the most expensive region: **North America blended gaming CPI is \$1.68, up 31% YoY**; casual averaged \$2.17 in 2024; iOS \$1.50–\$2.50 (FoxData 2026; GameBiz Consulting; Liftoff/Singular 2025).

**But the web game avoids the install gate.** A click ≈ a play (no App Store step), which cuts ~25–40% of funnel loss vs. an app install. Realistic **cost per play-start: \$0.50–\$2.00** (\$0.35–\$0.80 achievable with viral-grade ASMR cup-stack creative on TikTok/broad-mom Meta). The signup gate is where sub-\$1 dies:

COST PER PLAY ↓ / SIGNUP RATE →	15%	30%	50% (PRIZE-GATED, 1 FIELD)
\$0.50	\$3.33	\$1.67	<b>\$1.00</b>
\$1.00	\$6.67	\$3.33	\$2.00
\$2.00	<b>\$13.33</b>	\$6.67	\$4.00

**Plan of record: \$1.50–\$5.00 per signed-up US mom on paid alone; \$0.80–\$1.50 blended only with a working viral loop.** Healthy referral k-factors run 0.3–0.7 (k>1 is rare and unsustainable); at k=0.4 + 20% organic, a \$2 paid signup blends to ~\$1.20–\$1.40 (LaunchList; Saxifrage k-factor data).

#### Cheapest channels, ranked for Poki Yoki

- **Childcare/Montessori seeding list** (the existing 1,031-facility asset) — **~\$0 marginal** cost per reach; warm, local, mom-dense.
- **Giveaway-fused launches** — documented **\$0.17–\$1.00/lead** (the cheapest paid path; see §7 for the legal/list-quality caveats).
- **Pinterest + Meta with ASMR cup-stack creative** — \$0.40–\$1.40/play; Pinterest is under-priced for the mom-research mindset.
- **Nano/micro momfluencer seeding** — ~\$0.50–\$1.50; retain usage rights to amplify winners as paid "dark posts."
- **Facebook mom-groups** — organic trust infrastructure; share-driven, near-zero marginal.

### 4 The bridge: player → buyer (the crux of the entire model)

Every dollar of the thesis rides on the conversion step nobody has measured for a branded-game→physical-product funnel. Here is what the evidence base actually supports.

## The base rate is sobering, the design lift is real

- **Freemium free→paid: 2–5% median** (ProfitWell's 6,800-product index: 2.6% organic → 5.1% with feature-gating; Reforge: 2.8% paid traffic → 4.9% with activation-first design — **funnel design ~doubles conversion at the same spend**).
- **Mobile-game free→payer is harsher: 1–3%**.
- **Gamified signup capture converts 9–13% vs ~3.5% static** (779M-impression dataset) — ~3x lift on the email gate itself (Claspo 2025).
- **Playable's 650-brand benchmark** (best available for "what % of game arrivals hand over an email"): **41% registration, 63% game-start, 42% completion, ~67s with brand**.
- **The honest catch:** a game-acquired email is structurally lower-intent than a shopping-site signup (she signed up to save a pet, not to shop); sweepstakes lists are the worst-converting list type in email. Realistic **game-list→buyer: 2–6% at 90 days** — below the 8–18% rosier models assume. **No public benchmark exists** for branded-game→physical purchase.

## Case evidence — the pattern is unmistakable

CAMPAIGN	RESULT	LESSON
<b>Webkinz</b> (plush sold <i>with</i> a code unlocking a virtual-pet world)	<b>\$100M+/yr at peak; 2M+ plush on near-zero ad spend</b>	<b>The single most relevant case for Poki Pet.</b> The pet bond drove physical purchases because the product was the key to the digital world.
<b>KFC Japan "Shrimp Attack"</b> (web game; score = discount voucher)	<b>854K plays, 91% completion, +106% sales, sold out</b>	The gold standard bridge: <b>score-unlocks-an-expiring-discount</b> . Effort justifies the deal & protects price integrity.
<b>McDonald's Monopoly</b> (purchase-gated game pieces)	<b>+2–6% sales/run; &gt;\$2B incremental in a decade</b>	Most financially-proven game funnel ever — but <b>buy-to-play</b> . Borrow it as a "buy the cup, unlock the rare Poki Pet" layer.
<b>Chipotle "Guac Mode"</b> (game unlocks reward, gated behind Rewards signup)	<b>mobile ordering +133.9% → 50.1% of sales</b>	Game as <b>loyalty-enrollment bait</b> : the prize is gated behind the account you actually want.
<b>Magnum Pleasure Hunt</b> (browser advergaming)	<b>7M players, 5-min sessions — no sales data</b>	The cautionary tale: <b>massive cheap attention ≠ measured sales</b> . Engagement without a bridge is vanity.

**Pattern across every winner:** the sales lift came from a **redeemable, expiring, purchase-adjacent reward** (voucher, free item, unlock code) — never from brand exposure alone.

## The four bridge mechanics to build (in priority order)

- **1. Score/achievement → expiring discount on the cup.** KFC's +106% proof. Incentivized in-game CTAs hit CTRs up to 43%. *Earn* it (protects the premium price), make it *expire* (urgency).
- **2. Email/SMS nurture on the captured list.** Klaviyo welcome flows: \$2.65 RPR, top-decile 10.53% placed-order, >50% of welcome-clickers buy. The workhorse — expect below-average at first, rising with engagement scoring.
- **3. Retargeting warm players.** Warm retargeted audiences convert ~2–4× cold (≈15.8% vs 4.3% in vendor data; the multiplier is robust), ROAS ~4.2×. Game events (D7 retention, Poki-Pet level-ups, leaderboard rank) are first-party custom-audience gold — and web pixels dodge the ATT/IDFA problem entirely.
- **4. The bonded-mascot effect.** System1/IPA: campaigns with characters are 37% more likely to gain share, 73% more likely to drive significant profit. The Tamagotchi bond is Poki Pet's structural edge — **but "pet bond → buys a separate physical product" is the thinnest-evidenced link in the chain.** This is the number to prove.

## 5 Creative strategy

Hook in **~1.7 seconds**; **85% of mobile video is watched muted** (text + visual carry, sound is a reward layer); spray 5–8 concepts, kill the bottom by day 5, scale the winner, refresh every 7–10 days. Top-quartile creative delivers 2–3× the median IPM — creative *is* the targeting in a post-ATT world.

**Poki Yoki's unfair creative asset:** the **magnetic click** is a ready-made ASMR moment that most DTC brands have to manufacture — and the in-game stack makes the *same* sound. Product, game, and sound are the same thing. Lead with the click.

### Formats that fit (and the hard "do-not")

**DO** Satisfying/ASMR (the click) · UGC mom confessional · genuine playable (the real stack mechanic) · before/after ("cup-drawer chaos") · self-aware "this is secretly relaxing."

**NEVER** **Fake-fail / rage-bait / misleading playables.** Playrix's pin-pull ads were ASA-banned; deceptive ads retain 14% D1 vs 32% honest, and for a *kids* brand selling to research-driven moms it's a reputational + FTC event (the \$20M Genshin settlement sets the enforcement appetite). Honesty isn't just ethics here — it's the cheapest CAC, because trust is the conversion.

### Five concepts to test first (scripted opens)

- **"The Click"** (ASMR, Reels): extreme close-up, two cup parts snap together — that sound, no VO. Overlay: "12 magnets. One click. No mold ever again." Cut to the in-game stack making the same click.
- **"Cup Drawer"** (UGC, TikTok): mom opens a cabinet, mismatched cups fall out. "POV: the cup drawer." → "I counted. 23 cups, 6 brands. I threw them all out."

- **"Poki Pet Morning"** (lifestyle, Reels): toddler tapping the pet game; the real cup sits beside the phone, same color. "She named hers Butter."
- **"Can You Beat My Stack?"** (challenge, TikTok): leaderboard screen — "Nobody has beaten this mom. Prove her wrong." Uses the real national leaderboard → viral loop.
- **"This Shouldn't Be Satisfying"** (self-aware, Reels/TikTok): "I downloaded this to test my kid's cup. I've been playing for 40 minutes."

## 6 Psychology & retention — and what Poki Yoki already has

The compulsion loop is the Hook Model (trigger → action → **variable reward** → investment) running on variable-ratio reward schedules. The durable levers, mapped to the existing Arcade:

LEVER	WHAT IT DOES	POKI YOKI STATUS
Variable rewards	unpredictable payoff sustains response	✓ stars, raffle entries, unlock celebrations
Loss aversion / care obligation	fear of losing a bonded thing > joy of gaining	✓ Poki Pet decline → "texts from your Poki" (strong, ethically built — never dies)
Streaks & daily rewards	endowed progress + return habit	✓ daily rewards, streaks
Social proof / competition	leaderboards, city battles	✓ national leaderboard + Poki Nation
FOMO / limited-time	urgency to act now	~ limited drops in the hook copy; not yet a live events engine
Endowed identity / investment	named, customized, leveled pet = sunk value	✓ adopt-a-Poki (name + cup + personality, up front)
Juice / game feel	satisfaction drives "one more"	✓ particles, sound, the teeter skill loop

### The ethical line — non-negotiable for this brand

These are kids (3–8) and the buyer is a mom whose #1 trigger is manipulation of her child. **Ethical engagement** (a pet you care for, streaks, fair competition, honest urgency) builds the trust that *is* the conversion. **Dark patterns** (a pet that truly "dies," pay-to-revive, manufactured loss, anything that pressures the *child*) would be a brand-ending mistake and an FTC risk. Poki Yoki's current build sits on the right side of this line — keep it there, and make "nothing here manipulates your kid" an explicit selling point.

**Retention benchmarks to instrument:** casual D1 ~40% (50%+ is the 2025 bar), D7 ~20%, D30 single digits. Daily-care mechanics and streaks are the proven movers for this audience's fragmented rhythm.

## 7 Promotions, giveaways & legal guardrails

The promos that convert players to buyers for this demo: **(1) earned, expiring discount unlocks** (KFC mechanic); **(2) product-only sweepstakes** (a Family System, not cash — keeps the list product-congruent); **(3) referral / "rep your city" leaderboard virality** (the only route to  $\leq$ \$1.50 blended CAC); **(4) limited drops** for the FOMO lever. Gamified loyalty drives 3x purchase frequency among existing customers (Limango, a German mom-shopping club — the closest comp) — i.e. the strongest evidence is *retention-side*, which is also where Poki Yoki's pet shines.

### Legal guardrails (do not scale without these)

- **COPPA** (amended rule in force since April 2025): players are under-13 → **parent-account architecture, neutral age gate, zero behavioral ads/IAP to kids**. Only parent emails count as leads. This also *is* the trust story.
- **Sweepstakes law:** "no purchase necessary," published official rules, and **state registration/bonding (NY & FL) if the prize pool exceeds ~\$5K**. Use a platform (ViralSweep/equiv.) + rules counsel.
- **SMS/email consent:** explicit opt-in; the "texts from your Poki" feature must stay **in-app** until real SMS consent + a provider are in place (already scoped as a legal gate).

## 8 Risks + the one experiment that decides everything

### Risk register

- **The kid trap** (most likely failure): the Arcade is *too* good at attracting children → signups skew kid/parent-of-convenience, mom-verified conversion lands at 1–2%, effective CAC balloons to \$75–150, plus regulatory tail risk. Inflates per-mom cost 1.7–3x. **Mitigation:** mom-verification at signup + measure *verified-mom* conversion, never raw signups.
- **Freebie-list rot:** giveaway entrants who never return — a list of 50K emails that behaves like 3K. **Mitigation:** product-only prizes; gate signup on pet/leaderboard *investment*, not the front door.
- **Death by denominator:** 6 months optimizing cost-per-player (vanity) while conversion is never instrumented — tying up cash in a 90-day funnel when a \$30 direct sale was profitable today. **Mitigation:** the sprint below.
- **Attribution inflation:** the game adds a second over-attribution surface (every buyer who ever touched it gets "credited"). **Mitigation:** holdout discipline.

## ★ The highest-leverage move: a <\$5K proof-of-conversion sprint — before scaling a dollar

One monthly cycle that buys the only number that decides this business — the 90-day **mom→buyer rate**:

- **Offer:** a Family System prize; signup **gated on saving the Poki Pet** (investment, not the front door).
- **Mom-verification at signup:** a "ship-the-prize-where?" field does it naturally.
- **Spend:** \$3–5K on Meta + Pinterest (ASMR cup-stack creative) + the childcare seeding list.
- **Instrument:** last-touch, deduped, with a **clean holdout**.
- **Decision rule:** prints  $\geq 5\%$  mom→buyer → pour fuel (creative scale, momfluencers, Poki Nation city battles). Prints  $< 3\%$  **twice** → the Arcade is a brand + retention asset (a fine thing to own), not a CAC machine, and the spend case gets rewritten on LTV grounds.

**Everything else is a multiplier on a number nobody has measured yet. Measure it first.**  
And keep the direct channel running in parallel — it's the control arm and it's already profitable.

**Open data needed from Cristina/Eric:** actual per-order fulfillment cost (3PL + shipping + payment fees). The ~\$12/order estimate above moves the breakeven conversion bar by  $\pm 2$  points.

## 9 Sources

Benchmarks & data: FoxData 2026 UA Cost Benchmarks · Liftoff/Singular 2025 Casual Gaming Apps Report & Mobile Ad Creative Index · GameBiz Consulting 2026 · GameAnalytics 2025 · Adjust Gaming Insights 2026 · Segwise · Admiral Media · Business of Apps (CPI, TikTok) · Triple Whale & Sovran & Bestever (Meta CPM/CPA) · Klaviyo 2025 Benchmark Report (welcome/abandoned-cart RPR) · Claspo (gamified pop-ups) · Playable.com (650-brand registration data) · ProfitWell/GetMonetizely & Reforge/MKT1 (freemium conversion) · LaunchList & Saxifrage (k-factor) · SQ Magazine & Cropink (retargeting). Customer: eMarketer "US Mothers 2024" · Edison "Moms & Media 2024" · Pew Research (screen time Oct 2025; Millennial moms) · BLS American Time Use Survey 2024 · Activision Blizzard Media "Mom's Got Game" · EMI Research · Numerator · Porch Group Media/YouGov. Case studies: Webkinz (Wikipedia/Investcrystal) · KFC "Shrimp Attack" (Bazaarvoice/Gamify) · McDonald's Monopoly (Ainvest/CNBC) · Chipotle (Marketing Dive) · Magnum Pleasure Hunt (Campaign Brief) · Burger King Xbox (VideoGamer/GameSpot) · Gucci x Roblox (Exclusible/Dezeen) · Pokémon GO (PYMNTS/TechCrunch). Academic: van Berlo/van Reijmersdal "Gamification of Branded Content," *J. of Advertising* 2021 · Ghosh, *Psychology & Marketing* 2022 · System1/IPA on mascots (Adweek/The Grocer) · Tamagotchi-effect literature. Creative/psychology: Nir Eyal *Hooked* · ASA Playrix ruling (Game Developer) · FTC kids-focus 2025 (Reed Smith) · COPPA guidance (Promise Legal). Repo: `marketing/key-numbers.md` · `brand/positioning.md` · `marketing/shopify-store.md`.

Poki Yoki Game-Funnel Strategy Dossier · synthesized from a 7-agent Fable 5 research swarm + 3 prior analyses (UA economics, ad creative, retention psychology) · for marketing/ad-professional review · figures are decision-grade

estimates with sources; the one number that matters (90-day mom→buyer) is unmeasured by design until the §8 sprint runs.