



Tournament Best Practices & Preparation Checklist

Preparation

- Prepare 2 weeks in advance:** For any tournament it's critical to start preparing at least two weeks in advance. Retail staff are your troubleshooters, salespeople, and VR evangelists to your customers. They will be doing the day to day work and will be key for a successful event. Talk to your staff about the goals of the tournament.
- Decide your tournament format:** There are generally 2 ways to execute a VR arcade tournament. Rolling High Score Competition OR dedicated tournament periods. A rolling high score is the easiest type of event to do. As people come into the arcade that day, explain to them the game. Record their high score and keep a running high score board throughout the day. These are easy to do since they don't interrupt throughput, but have tradeoffs in community building for the arcade and word of mouth marketing. Follow details below for Dedicated Tournaments.
- Use physical marketing in your arcade:** Put up a sign advertising the who, what, when of the tourney - preferably right by the register. Studies from game developers have shown that having posters of game content up in your arcade does a few things. It increases your overall conversion in the store, and then it increases the conversion of that title specifically. For example if you have a poster up of Raw Data, then more people will purchase time in the arcade vs if you had a blank wall, and two, more people will play Raw Data. It seems obvious, but it's also backed by data. This applies to upcoming events.
- Pre-sale tournament admission:** At Virtualities, we always aim for at least 50% of the tournament sales to be "pre-sales". From talking to local comiccon conventions, if you can get at least 50% of the tickets sold beforehand you will have a successful event. For most arcades, this is a simple upsell at the register. When they pay, ask if they want to pay to participate in the upcoming tournament, and talk about the prizes, the game etc. Explain that the only way to guarantee that they will get a spot will be sign up before. We noticed that getting arcade guests to commit this way was much more successful than a simple sign up sheet.
- Invite the local gaming community to jump in:** Those are just the in store sales. You will also get a lot of traction from letting other people know. A lot of gaming communities are already organized in every city. For instance, at one of our recent tournaments we had participants from the University of Utah gaming club and the Utah VR meetup group. There are over 40 VR meetup groups across the country. Additionally, we are also active participants in a number of discord servers focused around Twitch as well as in esports at local universities and we announce our tournaments in those places as well.
- Use social media to generate awareness:** Make a social post on your facebook/insta/twitter and if you regularly boost your facebook pages, spend a few dollars to get a bit more visibility into it. We have found facebook to be one of our best platforms for ROI. We also collect emails during our active waiver signup process and typically get a couple of people that sign up with an email blast.
- Have your event details ready beforehand:** Beforehand you will also want to select the game title, prices, the game rules, and what format your competition will be in and prizes (if any). These will vary pretty widely based on the game title and whether its just a local tournament or a national VR arcade league tournament.

Running the Tournament

Great, now you have a bunch of signups for your tournament and you have an upcoming event—how do you run it?

- Make it a party!** During our events we try to make it as much of a party atmosphere as possible. Crank up the radio, bring in pizza or other snacks, and bring out your special lighting!
- Have extra staff.** For people to run the tournament we typically find we can also supplement arcade staff with volunteers, which will help you run a profitable event. Volunteers can be those who have participated in past tournaments, or family or friends who are down for some free pizza and VR.
- Keep selling!** On the day of we really start to focus more on pre-sales of the tickets. Its pretty easy for someone to commit when they are already in town or looking for something to do. For some tournaments we have also had an arcade staff outside the arcade actively talking up the tournament to people walking by. Our two locations have both been located in malls, so we have a steady supply of foot traffic so this works for us, but people can also get creative with signs, etc. We have also sometimes charged a spectator entry fee of \$5 dollars.
- Have other things to do:** One key thing we learned from the University of Utah gaming events was the importance of side activities. In addition to food, bring in a N64 on the side or something for people to bond over while they wait their turn or watch. Have a board game corner. Building those connections between people is not only key for you as an arcade owner, people start to show up to tournaments again because you are doing something of real value to them- you are creating a community, real life friendships, and a place to celebrate VR.
- Get all the players on the same page:** During the tournament carefully explain the rules to people beforehand.
- Record top scores and brackets:** Have staff to watch the high scores. In our national Blasters of the Universe tournament we took screenshots of the high scores in our high score competition. For Sprint Vector, we did a single elimination bracket tournament, and the tension would build as the finalists got closer. For your last two competitors people gather around for the final head to head. It can be quite intense, as spectators eyes are fixed on the two athletes, every single score counts, and the stress levels ratchet up. It's like the olympics but in VR.
- Document your event!** Film it, because both you and everyone there will want to remember it - well the winners anyways! But even those who don't win it its lights a real competitive fire.

Post Tournament Work

- Gather the emails** and start to build a list of the regulars. For prize allocation this matters too, since building trust is a critical esports principle.
- Invite to join** your Discord or Facebook group.
- Gather phone numbers:** We found that getting the phone numbers of our regulars allowed us to send out group texts and get a few future sign ups easily.
- Post tournament results up on social media** as well as a clip of what happened as way to build buzz.

Summary

For us at our second location tournaments and associated purchases started to account for around 10% of our total revenue which was fantastic for us as VR arcade owners. Typically our return customer rate was around 17%-25% depending on the month, but we noticed that those who participated in a tournament had return rates of over 50%. Some eventually spent significant amounts at the arcade. This wasn't because we were microtransacting them to death (looking at you EA) but because we had built a sense of community, of ownership, of self improvement through athletics. All the good stuff that comes along with sports can apply just as easily to VR esports. Eventually, we envision a world where VR esports is on par with both esports and classic sports in both viewership and scale. VR arcades will be a vital part of getting there and are a natural home for VR esports. Good luck!

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