Digital Promotion ... Beyond the Screen
The example of **Game of Thrones**

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Game of Thrones: Bridging the frontier between two universes

Before being a television drama, Game of Thrones is a unique narrative world, made of cities, landscapes, characters and of their stories. This world exists for the sole purpose of being explored by readers, first, and viewers, then.

Luring viewers into the Game of Thrones universe has been the goal of all television channels programming the series and of HBO first: as producers brought to life the many stories and characters of the Game of Thrones world, programmers focused on creating gateways into this world, to lure in viewers. In this, if the series represents the universe, its promotional surroundings are the bridges and gateways letting people in.

A panorama of digital promotional practices

Although many promotional initiatives for television dramas are focused on trying to bring the viewers within the show's narrative universes, Game of Thrones' promotion has been particularly consistent in trying to build these bridges between the world of Game of Thrones and the world of the viewers, outside the TV screen.

Digital promotion has been crucial to HBO's strategy of promoting this series since the very beginning. Over the three years the show has been airing, a range of very different digital initiatives has been used to promote the show. The series could be read as one interesting master example of television drama promotion: a panorama of digital promotional practices ranging from the latest trends in terms of digital extensions (**SEASON TWO CATCH-UP GUIDE p. 9, JOIN THE REALM p. 11**), to more peculiar and unique initiatives to push the boundaries of the show's promotion (**GAME OF CONES - THE IRON CONE, p. 28**).

Game of Thrones has been capable of exploring additional ways to extend its brand online, embracing the latest tendencies and social trends, and diversifying its efforts to lure in different types of viewers, some out of curiosity, sometimes out of the sheer beauty of the series' world other times foregrounding the richness of its stories and characters, such of a complex novel.

On the other hand, HBO has been consistent in launching interactive immersive experiences, somehow a trademark of the show's digital promotion, associated to each of the series' seasons. The tendency to privilege immersive, articulated forms of engagement with its viewership (**THE MAESTER'S PATH p. 6, INTERACTIVE VIEWING p. 19, VIEWER'S GUIDE SEASON TW p. 8**) can be interpreted as an heritage from the literary origins of the show and speaks to its core, highly engaged viewership.

Creating immersive experiences beyond the digital world

But at the same time, in their effort to bridge between different fictional and ordinary universes, many promotional initiatives around Game of Thrones have been developed outside of the digital universe of website, mobile apps and social networks.

Therefore, the series is a key example of how different types of promotional efforts, both digital and not, have been integrated since the very launch of the first season, from the initial viral launch promotion (**PROMOTIONAL BOXES p. 5**), to the much awaited Ascend online game (**p. 23**), to numerous merchandising and trendy "IRL" initiatives such as food trucks (**p. 29**) or the intriguing billboard and newspaper shadow promotion (**p. 26**).

Digital promotional initiatives are a privileged space for the HBO and Game of Thrones brands, allowing them to start the dialogue with their viewers at the heart of their daily digital life, where ordinary digital practices can become an extraordinary trip to another universe.

But beyond the digital world, unlike many other shows, Game of Thrones has been capable of reaching out to its viewers and fans this onto their ordinary world, creating even more compelling arguments, to explore the series world on the show on TV.

What follows is a selection of 25 cases aimed at illustrating both online and offline promotional initiatives created by HBO, BSkyB and Canal+ Spain to extend the universe and brand of Game of Thrones to its viewers screens… and beyond.

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❷ Inside these kits, recipients found a letter from HBO with the instructions of what to do and various items, e.g. fragrances to help build ambiance for certain locations featured on the show, maps of Westeros and other items - all of what should help them to succeed on The Maesters Path, a series of interactive puzzles which was launched shortly after.

❶ "Game of Thrones" premiered on April 17, 2011. Around six weeks before the premiere, HBO started the promotion with sending out real packages to devoted fans, bloggers and creative writers. Recipients of these kits were asked to film themselves opening the parcels and upload those videos to YouTube for other fans to see.

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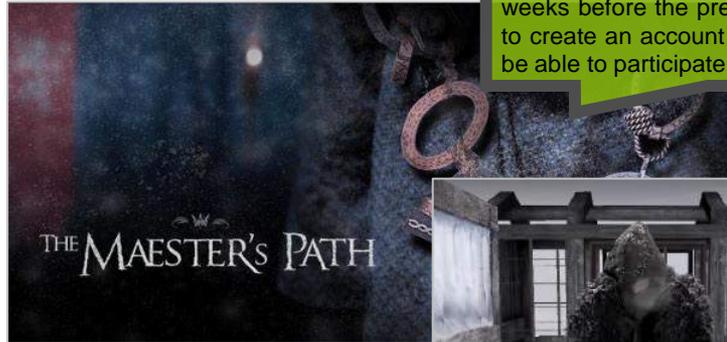
❶ The Maester's Path was launched five weeks before the premiere. Users were asked to create an account or log in via Facebook to be able to participate and save their progress.

❸ Over the period of five weeks, each week a new puzzle was released. In order to walk the entire path and become a Maester, players had to solve five sense-based challenges and recruit five novices.

❷ In these challenges, users were lead to various sceneries - icy walls, mysterious inns or a dark forest - where they had to fight intruders, listen to conversations or connect symbols with one another.

❺For each solved mystery, users were rewarded with never before released video clips of the series.

❹ Knowledge of the original book was useful, if not necessary to earn all rewards on the path. To solve the various mysteries users had to e.g. know the symbols of the houses of Westeros or to be able to read the unique alphabet. HBO sent out hints and solutions to bloggers and soon enough dedicated minisites with helping solutions appeared on the net. More clues were posted on the HBO website.

❶ Due to the complexity of the story of "Game of Thrones", more explanation needed to be posted on the format site after the series started to air. Therefore a detailed viewer's guide with weekly updates was created.

❷ Users could find information about the different kingdoms, dynasties, and characters playing an important role. A synopsis of each episode was also available after it aired.

❸ On an interactive map of Westeros, users could click on various areas to get more information on the meaning of places for the plot.

❹ A detailed description for every episode of the first season with links to the places on the map and is available.

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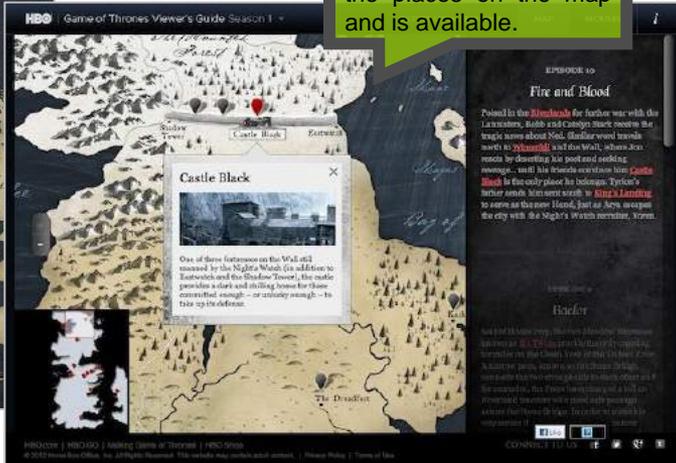
❶ HBO updated the "Game of Thrones" viewers guide for the second season, which premiered in April 2012. The guide contains a variety of new information.
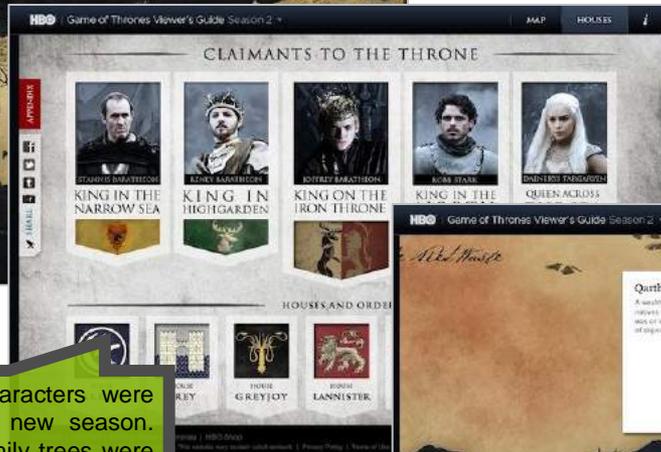
❷ Many new characters were introduced in the new season. Their bios and family trees were added to the interactive guide.

❸ In addition, a full map of Essos, the land east of Westeros, has been made available. It was the first time, an official map of this fictional country has been published.

❹ The appendix was also updated with new details on Westeros and a new season 1 catch-up guide with summaries and links to HBO Go.

❶ "Game of Thrones" returned in late March 2013. Weeks before the season 3 premiere, cabler HBO unveiled a new 'Season 2 Catch-Up Guide' providing a look back at the second season.
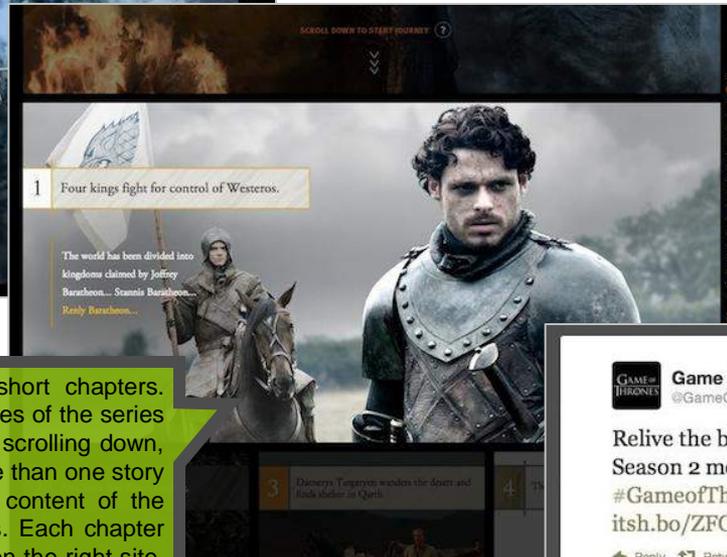
❸ The launch of the guide was promoted through the official "Game of Thrones" Twitter and Facebook accounts.

❷ The interactive guide is separated in 13 short chapters. Layouted similar to a comic book, it features scenes of the series and text boxes explaining the story bit by bit. By scrolling down, new chapters appear. Some of them contain more than one story element. Sometimes, users can swipe through content of the picture boxes uncovering new pictures and texts. Each chapter can quickly be accessed by clicking on the dots on the right site. Users can share the catch-up guide via Facebook and Twitter.

❶ Along with the global Blu-ray & DVD release of "Game of Thrones" season 1 in March 2012, a website was created for advertising purposes. The website contains information about the characters, photos and short videos. The depicted iron throne is an important element of the series' storyline. Via mouse-over, quotes of the series' characters appear. The swords of which the throne is built of, can be clicked on, to access information about all the protagonists of "Game of Thrones".

❸ The website also features short sneak peaks for every episode, full trailer and additional content consisting of a season 2 preview and a behind-the-scenes videos.
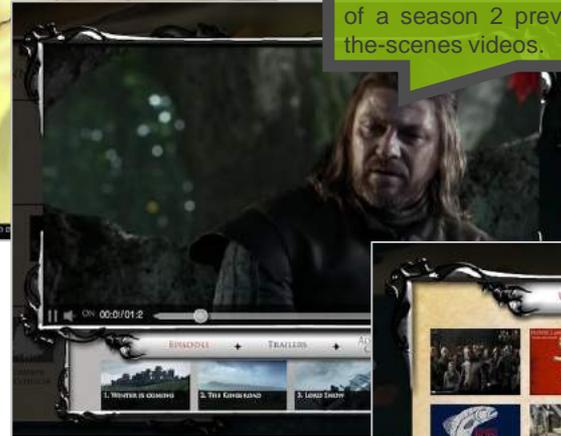
❷ By clicking on the swords, users access an interactive 3D map of Westeros where the story takes place. The map contains information about the characters, family trees and background stories of the houses. Within the Seven Kingdoms map, users can pledge their allegiance and 'become a bannerman' to their favorite family via Facebook. The website shows the number of current supporters of the different houses.

❹ Moreover, fans can download free desktop and iPhone wallpapers, avatars and screen savers on the website.

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❶ HBO introduced 'Join the Realm' ahead of the "Game of Thrones" season 3 premiere. Fans can create their personal coat of arms choosing from a huge variety of default logos, items, colors, frames, backgrounds etc. In addition, a name and a slogan can be entered.
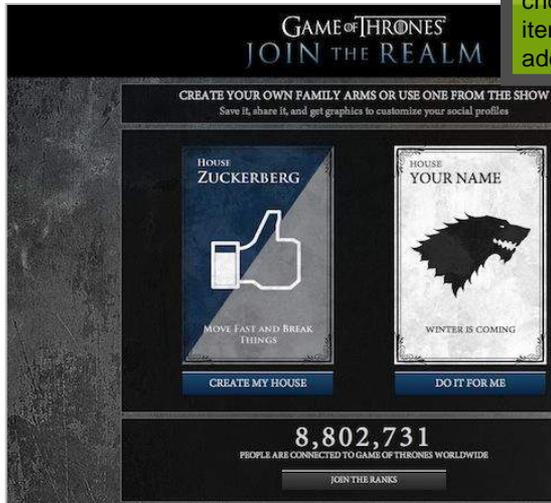
❷ With the Do-It-For-Me option, the app generates a coat of arms based on the users' Facebook information - if logged in with Facebook Connect. The app is available in various languages. The final coat of arms can be shared with friends, used as profile pictures for Instagram, Twitter and Facebook or downloaded as wallpaper.
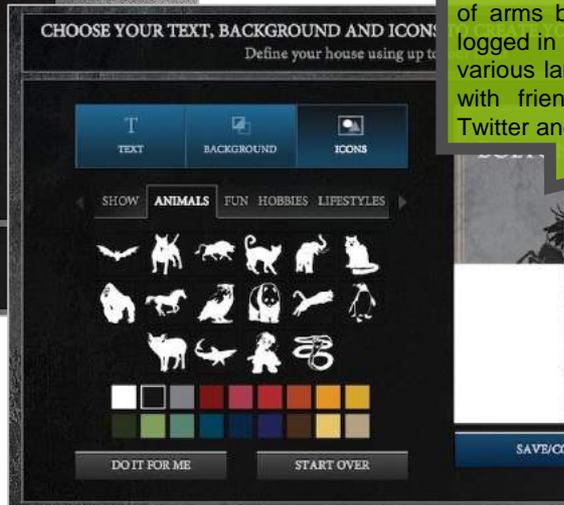
❸ In a short period of time, the HTML5 app was accessed by more than 1 million fans from more than 200 countries. They spend an average time of 11 minutes and created more than 600.000 coat of arms.
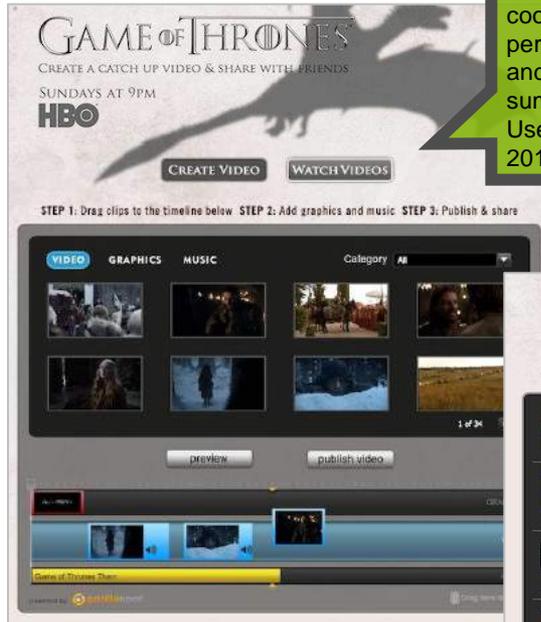
❶ HBO released the Facebook application 'Catch Up Contest' in cooperation with GorillaSpot. The app allowed users to create personal trailers for the show by piecing together given video clips and adding music and graphics to the video. The trailers ought to summarize what happened in the first two seasons of the series. Users who created their videos in the period between March 6-22, 2013, and filled out an entry form were electable to win a grand prize.

❸ During the contest period, viewers were able to vote for the video submission they liked best. At the end, the 10 entries with the most votes were judged by a sponsor who selected the grand prize winner. The grand prize winner received a trip to Northern Ireland for two and could attend the Game of Thrones launch event of the series' exhibition on June 8, 2013.
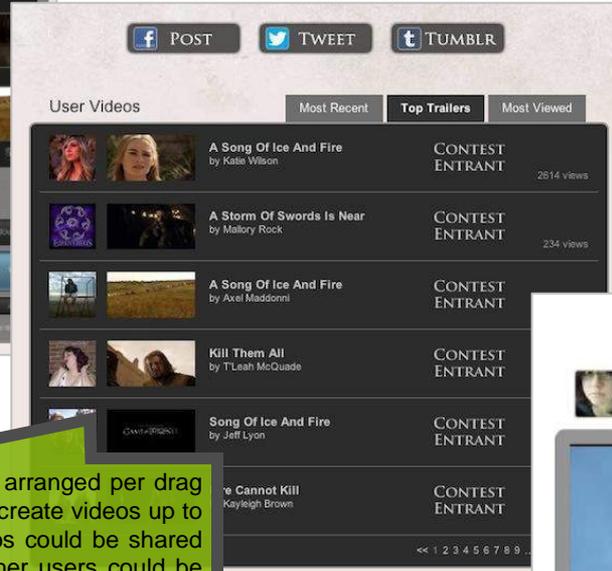
❷ The provided audio and video clips could be arranged per drag an drop on a timeline. With the app, users could create videos up to a total length of 60 seconds. The finished videos could be shared on Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. Videos of other users could be watched within the Facebook app. The videos were subdivided in 'most recent', 'top trailers' and 'most viewed.'

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❶ HBO launched an user-generated content competition on Tumblr for season 3 of "Game of Thrones". Fans were asked to create and upload a season 3 poster to win series-related items and the 'ultimate bragging rights'.
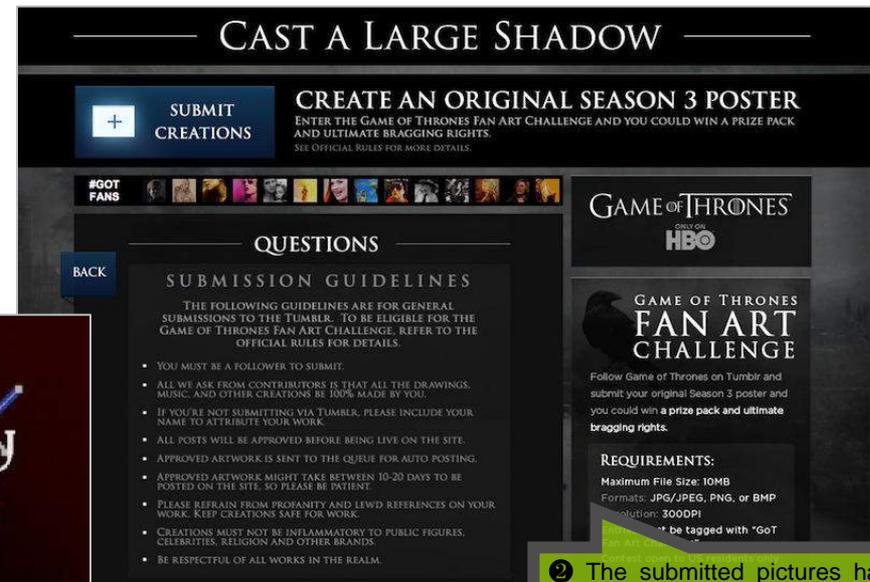
❷ The submitted pictures had to be made 100% by users and be tagged with 'GoT'. Winners will be announced in Summer 2013.

❶ In spring 2012, HBO launched the UGC-community photo blog "Cast a Large Shadow" on Tumblr for "Game of Thrones. Fans were asked to send in self-made illustrations, photos or videos related to "Game of Thrones.

❷ The blog - titled after a quote of the series - was launched in conjunction with the season 2 premiere. It was the first-ever Tumblr blog for any HBO show.

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❶ To promote the release of season 2 on DVD and Blu-ray in February 2013, HBO and agency Campfire launched the interactive website MyWatchBegins.com. Fans of the drama series are asked to record their personal version of the Night's Watch oath. The Night Watch is a key element in the series which guards a huge wall in the northern territories of a kingdom. Guards of the Night Watch swear the oath of duty which is binding for life.
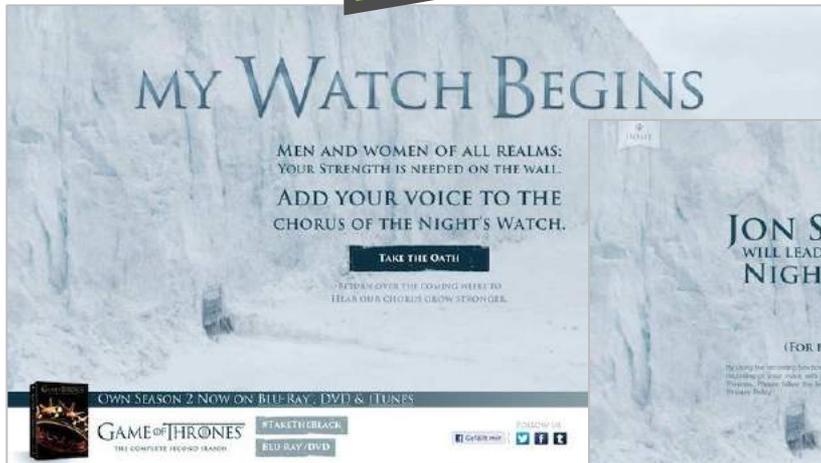
❷ Fans have to turn on their microphones and read the default text. The words which should be read one after another are highlighted and accompanied by a voiceover by a main character of the series.

❸ If the recorded oath is good enough, it will be added to a chorus of other recorded oaths. Users could share it on various social networks to encourage others to join the oath's party.

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❶ HBO launched a Facebook-based campaign for "Game of Thrones", when the premium cabler released the first season on DVD in early April 2012. A dedicated Facebook app - titled "Game of Thrones: Dethroned" was released, letting fans compete against each other in a photo-based contest.

❷ First, users needed to take a photo with a webcam. Then, they could challenge friends who also needed to take photos of themselves. Afterwards, their friends were asked to vote for their 'favorite' friend.

❸ After all votes have been placed, a reproduced short first-person point-of-view clip was sent to the players. The actors' faces in the video were replaced with the users' webcam photos. The final winner held the head of the loser in its hand.

❶ HBO partnered with the Twitter curation service Paper.li, to promote the second season of "Game of Thrones". A branded daily curated fan newspaper composed of content pulled from tweets about the show was launched.
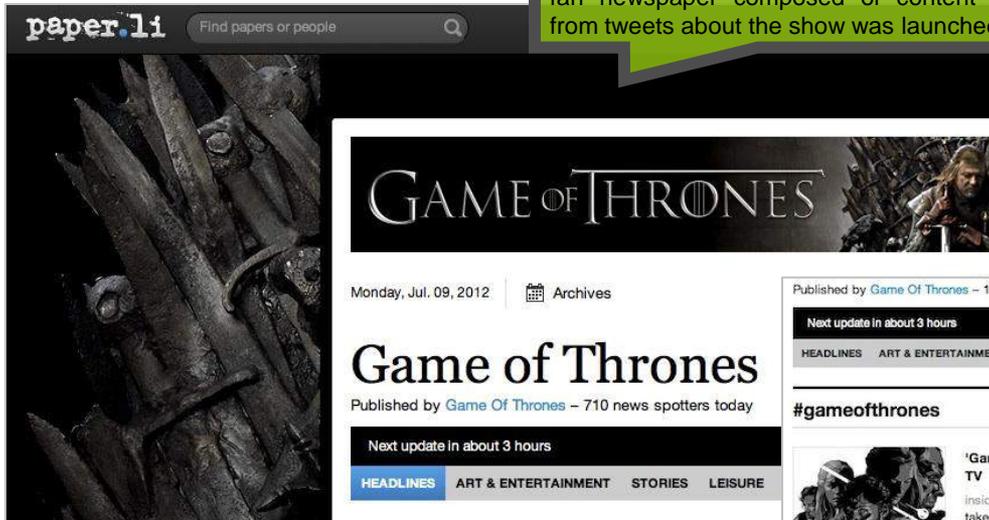
❷ Paper.li aggregates tweets about the series and organizes them into a newspaper-like visualization, complete with categories such as technology, arts, entertainment, etc. and the different hashtags used to talk about the show.
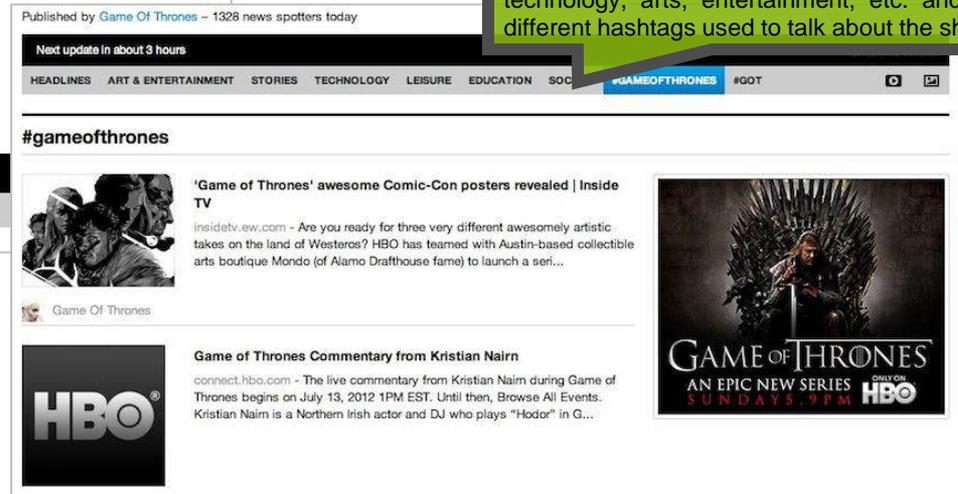
❶ To promote the second season of "Game of Thrones", Canal+ in Spain launched an interactive map in April 2012. The map includes information about the noble houses and visualizes tweets regarding these houses by colored spots which vary in size depending on the amount of Twitter mentions. For the noble houses, there are different hashtags for fans to use in order to show their support for the aspirants to the throne. This feature was implemented due to the fact, that the story of season two is about various protagonists claiming the iron throne for themselves and fighting against each other.

❷ Users can alter the visual display of the map by choosing the season and the episode to get an impression of the amount of social conversations about a particular episode. The overlay showing the social chatter can be turned on and off in the right corner of the website.

❶ For the second season premiere of "Game of Thrones", HBO released an interactive viewing feature for its iPad app and the online service HBO GO, which launched on April 1, 2012. The new alert feed for unseen bonus content appeared below the episode on the iPad and was synched with the on air episodes. While accessing the bonus features, the currently watched episode was paused until users closed the feature.
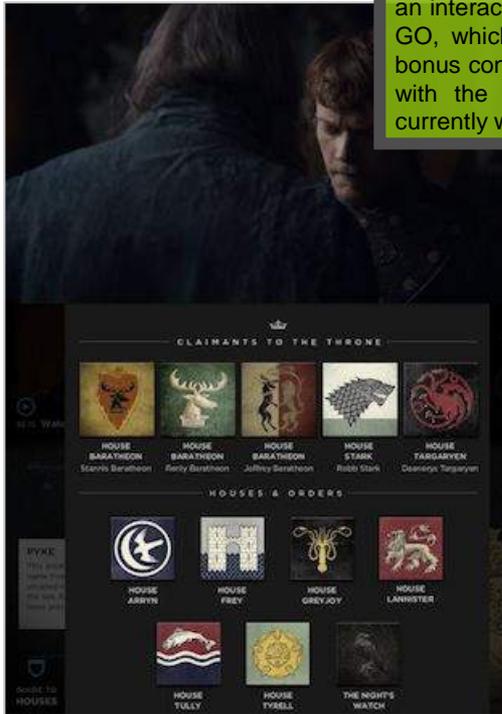
❸ Some features were only available within the app such as Facebook and Twitter updates or shareable quotes. In the portrait mode of the iPad, users could watch both the episode and simultaneously browse character profiles and locations.
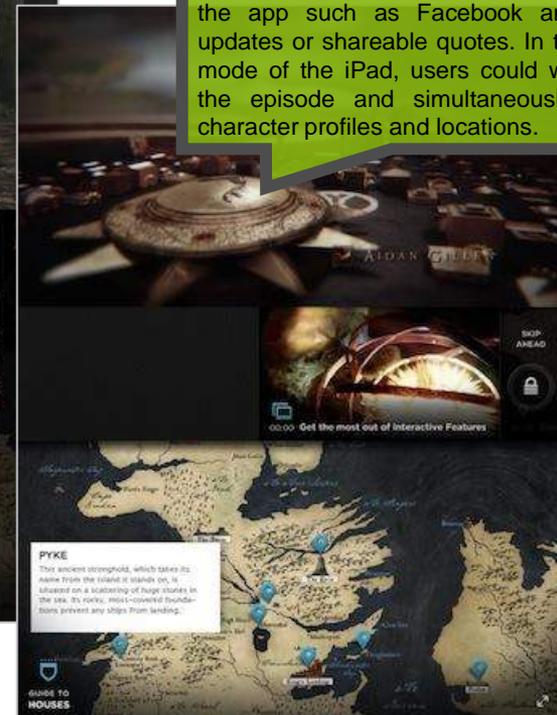
❷ The alert feed featured commentaries of cast and crew members, interviews, descriptions of new characters as they appeared in the episodes, photos and concept art, a map, a guide to settings, and background information.

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❶ In late March 2013, Spanish pay TV channel Canal+ launched a second-screen app for "Game of Thrones". The third season premiered a few days after the release of the app 'Vive Poniente'. The second-screen app was built by the Israeli company Applicaster and is available for iOS and Android devices.

❸ During the broadcast, a timeline in the companion app contains quotes front the current episode, videos and trivia games. As each episode progresses, the background image changes reflecting the location of the current episode's storyline.

❷ Users can check-in while watching an episode and synchronize the app with the on-air happening. Fans can earn badges and points to unlock exclusive content or win series-related products such as DVD boxes.

❹ Users can and invite friends and chat using Facebook Connect and the Twitter live feed. Very engaged users have the chance to win sponsored trips.

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❶ HBO launched the "Game of Thrones" branded iOS weather app "Ice and Fire" which combines real weather forecast with sceneries from the series.

❸ The app shows a scene from Westeros matching the current weather of the chosen location.

❷ Users can switch between location-based GPS weather or default locations.

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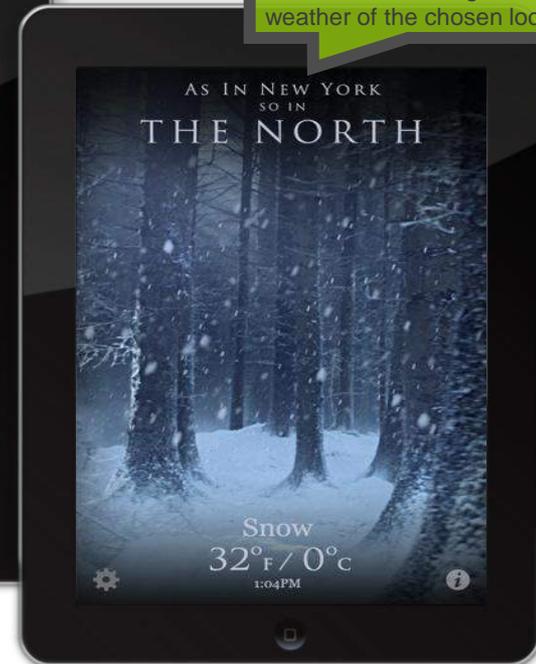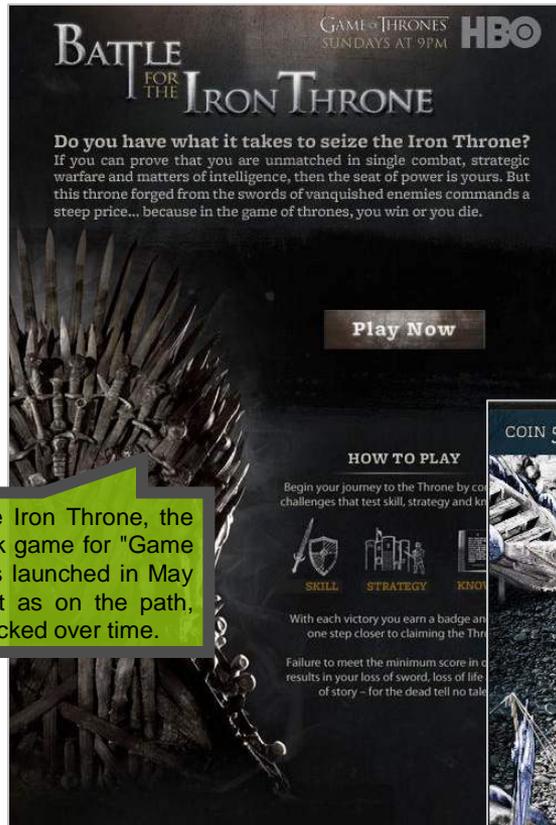
❶ Battle for the Iron Throne, the official Facebook game for "Game of Thrones" was launched in May 2011. Here, just as on the path, levels were unlocked over time.
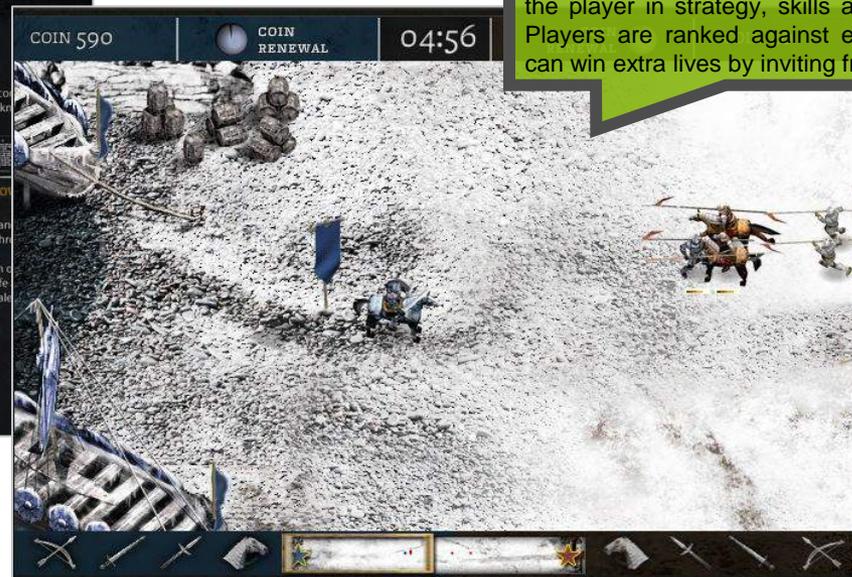
❷ Any player has to start with defending himself to earn a sword, which he then will be using throughout the entire game. Ten levels are unlocked one after the other, challenging the player in strategy, skills and knowledge. Players are ranked against each other and can win extra lives by inviting friends to play.

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❶ Leading up to the season 3 premiere of "Game of Thrones" on March 31, 2013, HBO and Disruptor Beam, a social network game developer, launched the game "Game of Thrones Ascent" on Facebook. It is a free role playing game (RPG) allowing players to slip into the role of a custom character and to immerse them into the political landscape of Westeros, one of the kingdoms in the series. When season 3 is broadcast, the game will be constantly updated to match the on-air storylines.

❸ As a Facebook game, players can visit their friends' territories and send them gifts. They can also enter alliances with their friends or send their armies on missions that affect them in either a good or bad way.

❷ The decisions players make affect the way the story unfolds and how the personality of users' characters develop. They can set up craft houses dedicated to producing goods and compete in quests in order to earn credits. The producers of this game monetize by selling premium items. These items improve the players army, so missions can be completed easier and faster.

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❶ HBO launched several promotional experiences for the release of "Game of Thrones" season 2 on DVD and Blu-ray in February 2013. This included a release night event which was held in New York at the Union Square Best Buy store. Fans attending the event 'Take the Black' had the chance to get some series-related food, see original costumes and marvel at a huge ice sculpture. The first 300 fans received a goodie bag with "Game of Thrones" related items.

❸ Fans were asked to share their thoughts and photos on Facebook and Twitter with the hashtag #TaketheBlack. The promotion campaigns were created in cooperation with agency Campfire.

❷ At the event, fans also had the chance to record their personal version of the Night's Watch oath on video and win a replica of a costume. The videos were uploaded to YouTube.

Steven R
@StevenR10

Direwolf ice sculpture! ...theBlack
@GameOfThrones
pic.twitter.com/PeqW1DQK

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❶ In March 2013, HBO launched an international exhibition tour for its drama series "Game of Thrones". The tour started in Toronto in March and ended in Belfast in June 2013. Other exhibition cities were e.g. New York and Amsterdam.

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MARCH 9TH - 16T...
themovienetwork.ca/exhibition...

❸ Using the official hashtag #GOTexhibition, visitors could post their personal experiences, photos and videos on Twitter or Instagram.

Amy
@mon_amy

You know nothing, Jon Snow.
@TheMovieNetwork #GOTExhibitionTO
pic.twitter.com/h8gzG2DFXx

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❷ The exhibition was free to the fans and presented more than 70 originals items of the series such as costumes, armor and weapons etc. A highlight of the exhibition was a replica of the iron throne of the king made of swords. Fans could take a seat on it and take photos to be shared afterwards.

❹ In another part of the exhibition, fans could join the epic battle of Blackwater Bay, which took place in the second season. In this interactive game installation, they could fight with bows and arrows against virtual enemies on big screens.

❶ A month before the new season of "Game of Thrones" returned on HBO in March 2013, the Pay-TV channel created a marketing campaign around a dragon shadow to promote the premiere date. HBO booked a full-page ad in the New York Times. A shadow - shaped like a flying dragon - stretched across the unfolded newspaper page. All articles related to the "Game of Thrones" universe - featuring headlines such as 'Lost Film Returns' or 'The Lion of the Desert'.

❷ Additionally, HBO plastered their LA corporate building with a giant poster displaying the same dragon shadow. Dragons are one of the key elements in the series. The ad and poster suggested that they would return in the upcoming season.

❶ The season 2 of "Game of Thrones" was released on DVD and Blu-ray on March 4, 2013 in UK. HBO and Sky Atlantic, which airs "Game of Thrones" a day after the U.S. premiere, launched a promotion event in UK on the release day.

❷ A food truck drove through London handing out series-related food such as baked apples, medieval porridge, wild boar cured sausage, Root soup with pumpkin bread and different cakes from the seven kingdoms of "Game of Thrones".

❸ Furthermore, fans had the chance to take a picture with a cast member who was accompanying the promotion tour through London. The event was also promoted on Twitter by Sky using the hashtag #WesterosWagon. A very similar campaign took place in April 2011 in the U.S. before the series premiere on HBO. Food trucks toured through major cities such as New York and Los Angeles and distributed series-related food, too.
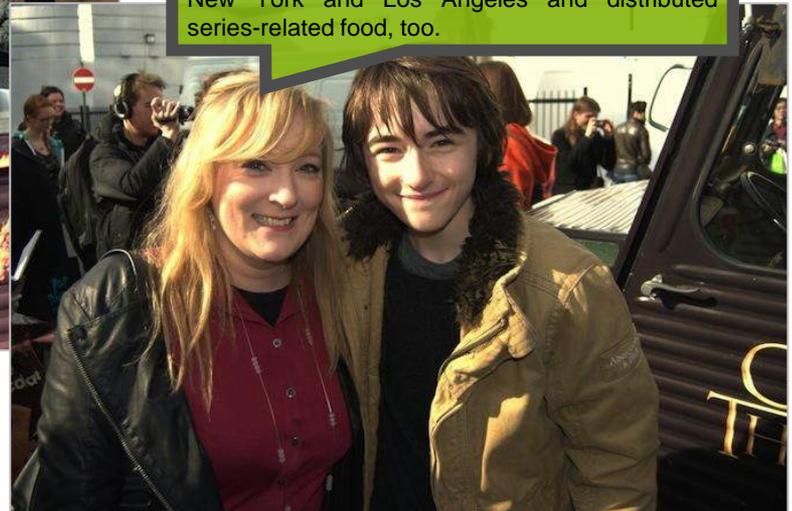
❶ Foursquare and HBO teamed up to determine the best ice cream shop in New York and San Francisco. The promotion campaign is inspired by the HBO series "Game of Thrones" and is therefore titled 'Game of Cones'. Users checking in to their most favorite participating ice cream shop via Foursquare can cast a vote for this shop by including the hashtag #GameOfCones into their post. The contest ran from June 7-21, 2013.

❷ The ice cream shop with the most check-ins won the 'Iron Cone', referring to the 'Iron Throne' of "Game of Thrones". The headline of this promotion campaign is called 'Summer is Coming', which refers to the slogan 'Winter is Coming' in "Game of Thrones". For this promotion campaign, a website was created which shows a map of New York and San Francisco. The map is divided into different neighborhoods such as Chinatown and Brooklyn in New York.

❸ For every ice cream shop, a different logo was created. This refers to the fact that all the noble houses of "Game of Thrones" are represented by different banners. The website featured the current shop ranking based on the check-ins of the ice cream loving Foursquare users.

❶ In December 2012, HBO announced a "Game of Throned"-branded beer in cooperation with brewery Ommegang. The brewery will launch a series of beers, based on the drama series.

❷ The beers will be tied to the characters and themes of the series. The first of its kind, the Iron Throne Blonde Ale, was made available in conjunction with the premiere of season 3 in March 2013.

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