

The First 500 Mistakes You Will Make While Streaming on Twitch.tv

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INTRODUCTION

Three librarians at the Palo Alto City Library embarked on an epic virtual event journey in 2020. This is our story. Twitch.tv is the most popular video game streaming platform on the internet right now, but that does not mean it is the easiest to use or navigate as content creators. While the mistakes were many, you do not have to repeat them. In short, lessons learned over the past two years fell under four distinct categories, many of them interrelated or compounding one another:

- Physical space limitations and challenges migrating studio setups during various phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Complex decisions making audio and video equipment purchases.
- Our own familiarity with videogame streaming platforms and specialized software.
- Converting our in-person event policies and codes of conduct for virtual events.

MISTAKES 001–135: PICKING THE RIGHT TIME, PLACE, AND SOFTWARE

We can say confidently that mistake #1 in your 500-mistake journey is pretending the library will strike gold with its first ever stream and achieve instant online success. We chose Minecraft as our first videogame featured on Twitch.tv. The cold reality is that real-world streamers who host *thousands* of viewers at one time are not building the interpersonal connections you are likely aiming for as a librarian.

The second biggest mistake you're likely to make while setting up a stream is in picking the right location. Over the course of two years, in response to different levels of building access, we ended up moving our ad-hoc studio location a total of four times. Each location posed its own challenges, and we learned more about what worked with every move. Your streaming space should not only be distraction free, but also easy to adjust as needed, because your setup will change over time.

Picking the right AV equipment for your stream is a gigantic topic, and the subject of infinite support forum threads and online discussions. The correct answer also largely depends on if you plan to stick with console game streaming, or PC, or some mixture of both. We can summarize by saying that to start off, you do not need the very best studio gear, and in fact, this thinking can lead to an artificial barrier that might result in more "tech debt" than necessary. You will end up spending a considerable amount of time troubleshooting strange quirks that were not there the last time you streamed, or with each new equipment purchase/upgrade.

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MISTAKES 136–223: MODERATION TOOLS AND VOLUNTEERS

We have had to block a few bots, as well as tactfully defuse some loose-cannon stream-surfers by maintaining aggressive kindness in answer to their sarcastic questioning.

Overall, our moderating world has not been rocked in a way we weren't prepared for, due to our thoughtfully crafted and transparent policy that was adapted from our [Patron Code of Conduct](#), trained teen volunteer moderators, and clear communication as a team.

MISTAKES 224–301: THE FINER POINTS OF TWITCH.TV

In addition to having had little experience playing video games in general, our stream host also had no experience with streaming. By design, Kasper went into our first stream with only two guidelines for interacting with Twitch viewers: don't stop talking and be friendly. No one wants to watch someone silently play a game badly; it's not engaging and it's not fun.

Another part of using Twitch that we did not account for until we were in the middle of the first stream is that the chat runs on a delay. This makes sense from a moderating point of view; you want to be able to catch inappropriate or spam comments. However, in terms of holding a conversation *with* the chat, it became a mental challenge to hold multiple threads of conversation at a time—all while playing—and all while narrating what's happening on screen, *and* as people were typing to respond to what was just said or done. This process can be very overwhelming for Twitch.tv hosts.¹ Imagine driving a car on the highway while also watching a movie of yourself, and then simultaneously holding a conversation with ten or more people in the back seat of this car at the same time. They're not commenting on what you're currently doing though, instead they're making jokes about the on-ramp or stop light two miles back. It's not impossible to juggle these tasks simultaneously, but as the host, it does require practice.

MISTAKES 302–389: ART IS A PROCESS, JUST LIKE THE INEVITABLE BUGS YOU WILL FIND IN YOUR SETUP EVERY TIME YOU CHANGE ANYTHING

Heed our warning! You can find a mountain of well-meaning online advice and tutorials about the best possible streaming setup and content strategy: much of this is outdated or aimed at a very specific subset of gamers. There is a cottage industry of media consultants and YouTuber personalities that review hardware and share tips and tricks advice. Your information literacy skills should not go to waste here! Always consider the source.

Stream Decks and Keyboard Shortcuts: What the Twitch.tv Pros Get Right

If we could go back in time, there is one element to our stream setup that could have been integrated sooner, and that's the Stream Deck by Elgato (<https://www.elgato.com/en/stream-deck>). This extra desktop keypad is literally a game changer for usability—it is the peanut butter that smooths over all the UX cracks created by Open Broadcast Studio (OBS) and the chaos of chat interactions already discussed. This small hardware upgrade also makes onboarding new stream hosts much easier because there is no need to memorize keyboard shortcuts: the buttons on the Stream Deck can be customized to do exactly what they say they do (like mute audio, change screen layouts, or stop and start streaming).

MISTAKES 390–499: DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC ANIMAL CROSSING DREAM CODES? WHAT DOES TWITCH.TV OUTREACH LOOK LIKE?

We used social media to connect with other organizations doing similar work, such as the [LGBTQ+ Youth Space](#) in San Jose. We had worked with this group before the pandemic on some

Pride programs for teens at the library, and so in 2020, when we saw on their Instagram that they had a *Minecraft* server open to the local community, our team eagerly jumped on this opportunity to collaborate with them. We had a *Minecraft* stream; they had a *Minecraft* server—could the stars be any more aligned? After some planning, one of the server mods joined us for a Stream and gave us a tour of their server, which ended up being one of our most popular streams to date.

CONCLUSION: AND WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM ALL THIS?

The Final Mistake (#500) is Giving Up. Over the past two years we have hosted over 50 streams at <https://www.twitch.tv/paloaltolibrary> and can say confidently that not only was each virtual event unique, but also improved over time.

We encourage more librarians to test out this mode of online outreach and practice your iterative design skills. Video game streaming is not only fun for both the audience and hosts, but also a great way to connect with “Extremely Online” patrons of all ages.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ To illustrate this problem in more detail: consider the events of our first very first stream, in which Kasper’s dog saw a postal employee through the window while live on camera and reacted accordingly. This was one of the many reasons why moving our center of operations from the living room to the library was an upgrade.