

Esports: Geemax on streaming for South Africa

 By Iain Fenton

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George Smith AKA Geemax is a 28-year-old South African video game streamer hailing from Johannesburg. He is currently one of the most popular South African video game streamers around and is also a well-known shout caster (commentator) for one of the biggest esports tournament organisers in South Africa.

Geemax was labelled by Red Bull as one of the top five South African streamers to look out for last year and is hoping to take the streaming world by storm in 2019.



George Smith AKA Geemax

Chatting with Iain Fenton, Geemax discusses both the esports scene and the gaming scene in South Africa as well as the growth of the video game streaming segment within the country.

■ **First of all, how long have you been streaming for and how did you get into streaming?** I started streaming at the end of 2017 - the start of 2018. Prior to streaming, I had been living without internet for over a year but at the end of 2017, I got an opportunity to get a fibre optic internet connection and with my new internet connection I decided to give streaming a go and found that I loved the medium.

■ **Are South African gaming streamers common? Is there a large audience for it in South Africa?**Initially, at the start, there were very few streamers – but this was based mostly on our internet being very bad here, or simply not accessible to most. In 2018, we saw fibre optic providers rolling out more infrastructure and with that, more and more gamers began streaming.

I would say that our audience here isn't as large, or near the size of other regions in the world. However, it's still a very new space. Viewership numbers are a lot lower than our European or American streamer counterparts. Local viewership audiences would range from an average of around 20 to some of the guys/girls getting up to the 200/300 viewer mark.

■ **Do you expect that audience numbers in the country will continue to rise then?**Yes, I do! I don't see 2019 being a change from a few hundred to a few thousand, but I do think that there will still be a good growth year on year.

■ **Is your audience primarily a South African one?**Yes, like 80%-plus are South African.

■ **As you well know, on a streaming platform like Twitch, in order to gain more viewers and followers it is important that you are an entertaining streamer - what types of games do you stream? And what do you do in order to entertain your viewers? Could you describe a typical Geemax stream?**Oh boy, this is a great question! My viewers haven't seen me for the last four months, as I've had a tragic loss in the family so took some me time off - however, 1 February 2019 - is my return!

My viewers are not often treated to high skilled gameplay - but what they do get, is a snippet into my life. I spend hours creating overlays and finding playlists for the streams - if you type in the live chat, you will certainly get a response. However, if viewers happen to join for some drifting (a style of racing) - they will get a stream with me smiling from ear to ear, and tons of high skilled drifting.



■ **Do you have any special streaming plans for your return?** Yeah, I'm introducing Virtual Reality (VR) streams into my offering - and for February I would like to do some giveaways (share the love, in love month).



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■ **What is the gaming and esports community like in South Africa?**There are definitely two separate worlds around gaming and esports. I got into esports around the same time I got into streaming and was picked up as a shoutcaster/commentator for Mettlestate, one of the bigger tournament organisers in South Africa.

Esports is at a bit of a tough crossroad at the moment, as most of our players do it as a hobby and not a career.

❏ **And how is being a shoutcaster/commentator for Mettelsate? What game/s do you shoutcast on?** It has been a great adventure, personally, I've enjoyed it! CS:GO is my main one, but I've casted PUBG for them, and I have also done some Dota 2.

❏ **How popular is CS:GO in South Africa? Is it the most popular esports?** Certainly, [CSGO betting](#) is popular amongst esports fans. Yeah, CSGO in terms of viewers and player base is the biggest. It's the go-to esports here, I would say.

❏ **Do you think you would gain more viewers on Twitch if you primarily streamed CSGO then? Or would you rather cater to your current and loyal audience?** Most of my initial streams were either CSGO or PUBG. However, I realised I don't have the high skill level that a lot of people have, so I focused more on playing things that I enjoyed.

When I started streaming racing games, that's when I realised I'm more entertaining doing things I enjoy, rather than what is popular. For this reason, I didn't get on the Fortnite hype train because I didn't enjoy playing the game – I'd rather take half the viewers I could get and have an hour of fun rather than double the viewers but only playing for the numbers.



❏ **Do you see streaming and shout casting as a long term career for you? What do you do when you are not streaming?** I'll be honest, I've never left my career behind, and have always done these streams on the side. With that being said, I believe that life has many stations and you have to choose to stay on the train or get off and take a connecting train.

As it is right now, my career in IT and finance is what pays my bills, but the casting and streaming are what keep my sanity. However, I can't predict which trains will come along, but hopefully, when they do arrive, I'll be comfortable stepping onboard.

❏ **Do you think there are certain characteristics that are needed in order to be a good streamer?** I think that anyone can stream, but a stand-out streamer has to have the following:

- Either be highly skilled or understand that you need to be entertaining.
- Have a good ability to multitask.
- Be original.
- Be up to date with gaming culture, news and memes (haha)

❏ **Are there any South African esports bodies or governmental bodies that you think could help grow the esports scene and the gaming scene in South Africa? For example, the government in Argentina recently made Argentina**

the first South American country to recognise professional gamers as athletes by law.

I believe that gaming in South Africa is still a luxury. It's something that the privileged get to experience. I'd love a way for people from all walks of life in South Africa to be able to play and compete - but the reality is, a lot of our youth and poverty-stricken areas don't even have access to basic needs. So personally, I feel that there are other things our government needs to address before I throw out a naive suggestion promoting "grassroots gaming".

ABOUT IAIN FENTON

Iain Fenton is a British freelance journalist covering a variety of different niches from video gaming and esports news to current affairs and politics. He can usually be found reading, writing and travelling around the world.

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