

# 'Pokemon Go' Will Make America Great Again

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Twenty-four hours after learning about *Pokemon Go*, Bill Wyatt is calculating how much real money he should spend on in-game currency to buy "lures," a digital item that attracts digital animals to a real-world location.

It's a business expense.

"I need to figure out if there's a way to make it cost-effective," he explained, consulting the piece of scratch paper he'd been scribbling on behind the counter at his store, Y-Que Trading Post, a T-shirt and gift shop in the walkable Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles. "If I sell a T-shirt every four hours, I think it'd be worth it. But just because I can get a lot of people to come over here doesn't mean I can get a lot of sales."

In case you're just coming out of a week-long coma, *Pokemon Go* is the extremely popular, newly released smartphone game that sends its players out into the physical world, wandering around the real geography that surrounds them. The game has gone from being successful to being a massive phenomenon. On Monday, just days after the game was released, Nintendo's stock jumped 36 percent to the tune of \$7.5 billion. It's been downloaded over 15 million times in less than a week, and is already more popular in the U.S. than Twitter. And as with any phenomena, there are offshoot opportunities surrounding the game—a fact compounded by how *Pokemon Go* forces you out into the real world, into stores and restaurants. We may never be able to actually make America great again, but at least the economy will get a boost.

The goal of the game is to find and capture Pokémon, the little creatures from Nintendo and The Pokémon Company's popular video games, cartoon series, movies and card game. The game's developer, Niantic Laboratories, has also dotted the maps with other virtual features: There are "PokéStops," which are usually landmarks like murals, churches, restaurants and other places people might gather and where players can pick up useful in-game items, and "Gyms," where players can battle each other for the good of one of three teams. Beat the Pokémon in a gym and you can take it over for your side, earning bonuses to buy more virtual stuff that'll help you get more Pokémon.

It's the PokéStops that concern Wyatt—more specifically, the one located two doors down from Y-Que, in front of The Dresden Restaurant, a well-known neighborhood bar and eatery. (Its claim to fame, besides being a fixture of the East Hollywood area for half a century, is featuring heavily in the 1996 cult comedy *Swingers*), PokéStops let you attach "Lure Modules" to them, or in-game items that make Pokémon appear at that spot for 30 minutes.

Only one person needs to place a lure for it to appear in *Pokemon Go* for everyone in the area. So players naturally congregate to lures. Wyatt hopes that when they do, they'll head into his store.

Trouble is, there's no way to be sure they will. *Pokemon Go* encourages players to move around, but it's lax with distances. A lure has an effective radius of about 50 feet. So anybody who wants to catch Pokémon can just hang out across the street, or a few doors down, and never make it to Y-Que.

And there are plenty of options on the often-bustling block of Vermont Avenue where Y-Que and The Dresden are located. The stretch is filled with restaurants, boutique shops, and wall murals. It sports a post office and a movie theater, as well as two coffee shops. It's littered with PokéStops—eight in total on just this stretch, including one near a parking lot behind the businesses. Every night since *Pokemon Go* launched, Vermont Ave. has been littered with players and their own lures.

Wyatt said he sees potential in utilizing *Pokemon Go*, despite it being only a few days old at this point. Customers have wandered into his store more or less for no reason, he said, as they pursue the local desert Pokémon wildlife of Geodudes, Sandshrews and Ekanses. It hasn't greatly impacted his business yet, but he's been experimenting with lures since Sunday when he first learned about the game, seeing when they're effective, how effective they are, and how much they'll cost him. The more in-game currency you buy at once, the more value you get out of it, and Wyatt said he'd talked to the owners of The Dresden about possibly pooling lure resources—and in so doing, he said, clued them into *Pokemon Go*'s existence.

Wyatt, like other savvy business owners across the country, is trying to take advantage of the huge *Pokemon Go* trend. Images are cropping up on Internet forums and websites like Reddit and the gaming-centric NeoGAF, showing places where business owners have offered discounts to *Pokemon Go* players, hoping to turn all that extra walking players are doing into extra sales.

"I've been looking for a new way to market the store, like going down to Hollywood Boulevard in a fuzzy costume," Wyatt said. "Maybe *Pokemon Go* will burn out as fast as it started, but I think it could get bigger."



Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom, a Pennsylvania amusement park and waterpark, is embracing the sudden additional interest on social media as *Pokemon Go* players discover the various virtual creatures that can be captured in its parks. On social media, the company has noticed players excited about the prospect of hunting Pokémon in the park, and is encouraging them to share photos of what they've found under the hashtag #DorneyPokemon.

"We just started posting about it yesterday afternoon," said Caitlin Stibitz, Dorney Park's manager of public relations and communications. "We've seen an increase in people tagging us on social media. We're embracing it as a park."

Dorney Park is definitely looking for ways to further encourage people to head out to the park and go Pokémon hunting, Stibitz said. It posted a series of tips on its blog on Monday to help players find Pokémon in the park in locations they might not expect, while gently reminding *Pokemon Go* players about "Pokémon etiquette." Stibitz said—like avoiding accidentally bumping into other guests while playing, and staying out of the park's restricted areas.

Stibitz said the two parks together sport 36 PokéStops and three gyms, all created by players of Niantic's previous game, Ingress, and none of which were the result of the company asking for locations to be placed on its properties.

Nothing's conclusive, Stibitz said, but Dorney Park staff are considering promotions that play off the popularity of the game. "We have a season pass that includes ride nights and movie nights after park hours," she explained. "We are looking at options for Pokémon meetups—we're always looking at ways to add value to the season pass."

However, though Los Feliz and Dorney Park is bustling with Pokémon activity, other businesses have yet to really notice whether the game is affecting them. At the corner of Vermont and Franklin Avenue in Los Angeles, at the far end of the block from Y-Que, sits the original House of Pies, a diner-esque restaurant that opened in 1969. It sports many of its titular desserts, but aside from that, it's a restaurant open until 2 a.m.—and it sits on top of a PokéStop. Most nights since *Pokemon Go* launched last Thursday, House of Pies gleams with lures well into the evening, when it seems most players in the area are out, about, and catching 'em all.

But while people who eat at House of Pies might be playing *Pokemon Go*, manager Noi Pajia said she hasn't noticed more people eating at House of Pies because of *Pokemon Go*.

"I know about it because of my servers," Pajia said. "All my servers have been talking about it. I've seen people playing here at night, but I haven't noticed a change in business."

Down the street is Fred 62, which sits across the street from two PokéStops, and well within the lure radius for both. Management there said the same as Pajia: they were aware of the game, but it wasn't necessarily driving people in, as far as they could tell.

But at the very least, *Pokemon Go* is forcing people to explore places they've never been. Businesses owners who have noticed increased interest and traffic aren't imagining it, although actually predicting or capturing that traffic might be difficult to do. Carlos Guillen, 24, and Bianca Fonseca, 21, were sitting near a lure on street over from Vermont, on New Hampshire Avenue, on Monday night in front of an apartment building. The pair said *Pokemon Go* hadn't led them into a new business—instead, they'd made plans on where they wanted to go to hunting, and the businesses in that area profited.

"We went to The Morrison (a Los Feliz-area pub) because we wanted to go to the LA river," Guillen said. The mission: catch the local Pokémon, which change based on the area in which they're found. Much of LA is littered with Pokémon suited to desert conditions, but nearer to bodies of water, players can discover Pokémon like Squirtle, Magikarp and Tentacool.

"We took a trip to the beach with intent [to catch Pokémon]," Guillen said, laughing. "I haven't been to the beach all summer."

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