

# Module 1. Digital strategy in sports

## Introduction: digital strategy as the new core of sports business

### Introduction

In today's highly connected world, a digital strategy can be defined as the intentional use of digital technologies, platforms and data to achieve core business goals and create competitive advantage. Unlike isolated marketing or IT initiatives, a digital strategy acts as an overarching blueprint that aligns technology investments with customer engagement, operational efficiency, and revenue growth targets (Westerman et al., 2014).

Within the sports business ecosystem, digital strategy has evolved from a peripheral support role to a central pillar of strategic planning. Historically, digital initiatives in sports—such as basic websites, ticketing systems, or email newsletters—were operational tools meant to supplement traditional marketing and fan outreach. However, the accelerating pace of technological innovation, combined with shifting consumer expectations for real-time, personalized, and interactive experiences, has pushed digital to the strategic forefront. Fans no longer passively consume information; they actively participate, engage, and demand seamless digital interactions across platforms.

As a result, sports organizations now recognize that their success increasingly depends on their ability to engage fans digitally across every touchpoint, from mobile apps and streaming platforms to loyalty programs, direct-to-consumer services, and immersive experiences powered by augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies (PwC, 2023). A strong digital strategy ensures that all these elements work cohesively to create a consistent and satisfying fan journey that drives loyalty and lifetime value.

This shift means that digital capabilities are no longer “add-ons” but essential engines driving fan loyalty, global reach, and commercial growth. Clubs like FC Barcelona have launched integrated digital ecosystems—including platforms such as Barça TV+ and Barça Studios—to reach millions of fans worldwide and generate new revenue streams through content monetization (FC Barcelona, 2022). These initiatives allow the club to reduce its reliance on traditional match-day revenue and sponsorships by building direct digital relationships with fans around the world.

Similarly, Manchester United's partnership with HCL Technologies focuses on building a digital-first fan experience through cloud technologies, CRM platforms, and data-driven personalization, aiming to strengthen fan engagement and operational agility in an



increasingly competitive entertainment market (HCL Technologies, 2022).

Ultimately, digital strategy is no longer just about technology—it is about redefining how sports organizations create value, differentiate themselves in global markets, and deliver memorable, fan-centered experiences. It is an organizational commitment that touches every department, from marketing and commercial operations to IT, ticketing, and content production. In the pages that follow, we will explore how digital strategies are fundamentally reshaping sports organizations' business models, strategic priorities, and execution practices in the age of digital-first competition.

## **Digital strategy vs. traditional business strategy**

### **Introduction**

Traditional business strategy focuses on defining an organization's vision, competitive advantage, market positioning, and operational priorities using established models and frameworks. Typically, these strategies are structured around classic dimensions such as product development, customer segmentation, market expansion, and operational efficiency. Digital activities, in this traditional model, have historically been viewed as support functions—often confined to marketing campaigns, basic IT systems, or online sales channels (Porter, 1996).

In contrast, digital strategy reimagines the business model itself. It is not simply about adding technology to existing operations; it involves a complete rethinking of how organizations create, deliver, and capture value. A digital strategy is customer-driven, insight-based, and future-oriented. It places technologies such as CRM platforms, e-commerce ecosystems, data analytics, mobile applications, social media, and personalized content delivery at the center of the business model (McKinsey and Company, 2018).

A critical distinction lies in the orientation of the strategy. Traditional strategies often emphasize stability, operational excellence, and incremental growth, while digital strategies are designed for continuous adaptation, disruption readiness, and exponential scaling. In a world where fan expectations, technological possibilities, and competitor moves evolve at a rapid pace, organizations must prioritize agility over long-term rigidity (Westerman et al., 2014).

### **Key differences**

To summarize these differences, the table below compares key dimensions of traditional and digital strategies.



**Table 1. Key differences of traditional and digital strategies**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Traditional strategy</b>	<b>Digital strategy</b>
Focus	Efficiency, predictability, control	Agility, innovation, customer-centricity
Approach	Long-term planning, slow cycles	Rapid iteration, experimentation
Customer interaction	Indirect, through intermediaries	Direct, personalized, real-time engagement
Technology role	Supportive (IT systems, websites)	Central (platforms, data, personalization)
Decision-making	Top-down, hierarchical	Decentralized, data-driven
Revenue generation	Product and service sales	Experiences, data monetization, ecosystems
Organizational structure	Departmental silos	Cross-functional collaboration

Source: own elaboration.

This shift in strategic mindset is particularly visible in the sports industry. Historically, a football club’s main revenue streams (ticket sales, broadcast rights, sponsorships) were managed through traditional channels with little direct fan interaction outside of match days. Today, leading clubs and leagues are investing heavily in direct-to-fan models, building digital platforms that offer live content, behind-the-scenes access, gamified loyalty programs, and merchandise sales directly through apps and websites. For example, Real Madrid’s digital platform strategy focuses on bringing personalized content and services to fans globally, beyond the limits of geographic location (Real Madrid, 2023).

However, embedding digital into every aspect of the business is not without major challenges. Sports organizations often face structural and cultural barriers.

- Siloed structures: traditional organizational models are segmented into departments (e.g., marketing, ticketing, operations) that work independently. True digital transformation requires dismantling these silos to create cross-functional collaboration, especially around data sharing and fan experience.



- Cultural resistance: long-established processes, hierarchical decision-making, and an attachment to “how things have always been done” often resist the flexible, experimental culture needed for digital success (Kane et al., 2015).
- Resource allocation conflicts: traditional budgeting cycles and resource planning methods are not designed for rapid prototyping, iterative testing, or dynamic reallocation of digital investments. As a result, digital initiatives may be underfunded or treated as secondary priorities.
- Skills and talent gaps: many sports organizations lack employees with the necessary digital skills—such as data science, UX design, agile project management, and omnichannel marketing—forcing them to either upskill internally or recruit externally.

Additionally, there is a mindset challenge: while traditional strategy often revolves around control and long-term certainty, digital strategy embraces uncertainty, experimentation, and learning through failure. Organizations must learn to operate in “test and learn” modes, applying agile methodologies and constantly recalibrating based on fan feedback, platform data, and new technological opportunities.

To succeed in the digital era, sports organizations must adopt an integrated strategic approach, where digital transformation is championed by top leadership and embedded across all operational levels. Digital must be seen not as a “department” but as a strategic thread woven throughout marketing, content, sponsorship, merchandising, fan engagement, ticketing, and even athlete management.

Ultimately, in the digital-first economy, organizations that fail to move beyond traditional strategies will struggle to maintain relevance, monetize their audiences, and compete globally. Those that embrace a digitally integrated strategic model will unlock new opportunities for sustainable growth, enhanced fan loyalty, and greater global reach.

## **Digital evolution in the sports industry: from add-ons to strategic core**

### **Introduction**

The role of digital strategy within sports organizations has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades. Originally seen as a marketing complement, digital initiatives have evolved into essential pillars of business operations, revenue generation, and global fan engagement. This digital journey can be clearly understood through the three phases of digital maturity: start-up phase, acceleration phase, and capitalize phase.

### **Start-up phase: digital as a marketing add-on**

In the early stages of digital maturity, sports organizations primarily used digital tools for



basic marketing purposes. Websites served as informational hubs where fans could find fixture lists, news updates, and ticketing information. Email newsletters were among the first digital outreach methods, offering standardized content to wide audiences without personalization (PwC, 2018).

Digital efforts were siloed within marketing departments and were largely disconnected from the core business model. The digital presence was seen as supportive rather than transformational. For example, football clubs like Aston Villa or smaller-market teams focused on maintaining functional websites but lacked broader digital engagement strategies at this phase. There was little understanding of the potential for digital technologies to impact revenue streams, brand expansion, or customer experience comprehensively.

### **Acceleration phase: expanding into fan engagement**

The acceleration phase marked the widespread adoption of social media platforms, mobile applications, and early CRM (customer relationship management) systems. Clubs began to recognize the potential of digital to directly engage fans and create loyalty beyond match days. Mobile apps offered real-time match updates, ticketing options, and promotional content, while CRM tools allowed basic segmentation of fan communications based on ticket purchase history or location (Deloitte, 2020).

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram became critical touchpoints, offering direct, interactive communication channels with fans around the world.

Organizations like Borussia Dortmund and the NBA expanded their social media strategies during this phase, realizing the importance of real-time engagement and content marketing as core parts of brand development.

While digital was no longer treated purely as a marketing tool, it still often operated in parallel with traditional business operations rather than being fully integrated into strategic planning.

### **Capitalize phase: digital as a strategic core**

Today, leading sports organizations are operating in the capitalize phase, where digital technologies are fully integrated into core business models. Digital initiatives drive fan experience, data monetization, and global expansion strategies.

Clubs and leagues are developing OTT (over-the-top) streaming platforms to reach fans directly without intermediary broadcasters. For instance, LaLiga's LaLigaSportsTV and Manchester City's City+ platform offer fans exclusive access to content beyond traditional television contracts (La Liga, 2022).



Data-driven decision-making is central at this phase, with CRM, behavioral analytics, and artificial intelligence enabling personalized marketing, dynamic ticket pricing, and customized fan experiences. Sports organizations are now able to build fan lifetime value models, optimize merchandising strategies, and create targeted campaigns with precision.

Additionally, innovations like NFTs (non-fungible tokens) and blockchain-based fan engagement platforms (e.g., Socios.com partnerships with FC Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain) have created entirely new digital revenue streams and engagement models, redefining how fans interact with clubs (Socios, 2023).

At this stage, digital is no longer seen as a function or project. It is treated as a strategic foundation critical to future growth, internationalization, and sustainability. Digital transformation now impacts ticketing, marketing, media rights, sponsorship models, and even on-field performance analytics.

Visual table: phases of digital maturity in sports industry

**Table 2. Phases of digital maturity in sports industry**

Phase	Key characteristics	Examples
Start-up phase	Basic marketing usage, websites, newsletters	Club websites; standardized monthly email newsletters
Acceleration phase	Fan engagement via social media, mobile apps, early CRM integration	Mobile ticketing apps, targeted marketing emails, fan contests
Capitalize phase	Fully integrated digital core, data-driven decision-making, new revenue streams	OTT platforms, personalized fan experiences, NFT fan tokens

Source: own elaboration.

Understanding this evolution highlights how critical it is for sports organizations to align digital strategy with overall business objectives, focusing on agility, fan-centricity and innovation in an increasingly competitive global market.

## Strategic objectives supported by digital transformation

### Introduction

The ultimate goal of digital transformation in sports organizations is not merely the



adoption of new technologies but the achievement of critical strategic business objectives. Leading sports clubs, leagues, and federations leverage digital strategies to support four primary pillars of long-term success: fan engagement and loyalty, global reach, commercial growth and data monetization.

### **Fan engagement and loyalty**

One of the central aims of digital transformation is to deepen the emotional bond between fans and the organization. Personalization is key — offering content, offers, and experiences that reflect individual preferences rather than generic mass communications. Technologies such as CRM systems, AI-driven personalization, and data analytics enable clubs to understand fans at a granular level and build lasting loyalty (PwC, 2023).

Additionally, innovations like gamification strategies (reward programs, fantasy leagues, prediction games) and immersive experiences through augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are helping fans feel more connected to teams, players, and events. For instance, the NBA has developed VR experiences that allow fans to feel like they are courtside from the comfort of their homes (NBA, 2022b).

### **Global reach**

Digital channels enable sports organizations to reach audiences well beyond their traditional local or national markets. Social media platforms, OTT streaming, and multilingual websites and apps allow clubs to build global fan bases. For example, Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) has significantly grown its international following by offering regionally tailored digital content in multiple languages (PSG, 2023).

Expanding global reach not only builds brand value but also opens up new revenue opportunities through international sponsorships, merchandise sales, and fan memberships.

### **Commercial growth**

Digital strategies also serve as major enablers of commercial growth. E-commerce platforms allow clubs to sell merchandise, memberships, and event tickets directly to fans worldwide. Digital memberships — offering exclusive content, discounts, and early ticket access — have become key revenue drivers for clubs like Manchester United and Real Madrid (Deloitte, 2023).

Furthermore, direct-to-consumer media platforms (e.g., Barça TV+, City+) offer subscription-based revenue models, reducing dependency on third-party broadcasters and creating new digital income streams.

## Data monetization

In today's sports business landscape, data is a critical asset. By collecting, analyzing, and leveraging fan data, organizations can:

- personalize marketing and offers,
- enhance sponsorship deals by offering valuable audience insights,
- build predictive models for ticket sales, merchandise purchases, and fan behaviors.

For example, major clubs now use data to sell more targeted sponsorship packages, showing brands not just global reach, but specific demographics, behaviors, and purchasing patterns (McKinsey and Company, 2021).

Proper data governance, compliance with privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR), and building trust with fans are essential prerequisites for sustainable data-driven monetization strategies.

Lastly, lack of alignment between digital strategy and overall business strategy remains a frequent pitfall. In some organizations, digital initiatives are pursued in isolation without being fully tied to broader business objectives such as revenue growth, global expansion, or brand building. When digital efforts are disconnected from core business priorities, they struggle to gain organizational traction or deliver measurable.

### Visual table: strategic objectives of digital transformation in sports

**Table 3. Strategic objectives of digital transformation in sports**

Strategic objective	Description	Examples
Fan engagement and loyalty	Personalization, gamification, AR/VR to deepen emotional connection with fans	NBA VR experiences, fan loyalty apps
Global reach	Expanding the fanbase beyond local markets using digital platforms	PSG multilingual digital content strategy
Commercial growth	Generating new revenue streams through e-commerce, digital memberships, OTT	Barça TV+, Real Madrid e-commerce sales

Data monetization	Leveraging fan data for marketing, sponsorships, and personalized experiences	CRM-driven sponsorships, personalized ticket sales
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Source: own elaboration.

## Key success factors for digital strategy in sports organizations

### Introduction

The success of digital transformation in sports organizations hinges not only on technological investments but also on leadership commitment, organizational culture, and a deep understanding of evolving fan expectations. Based on industry studies and examples from leading clubs and leagues, four key success factors consistently emerge: board-level ownership, cross-departmental alignment, investment in data and content capabilities, and a fan-centric mindset.

### Board-level ownership of digital transformation

Leadership commitment is a critical determinant of success. Digital transformation must be championed at the highest levels of the organization — the board, CEO, and senior executives must view digital as a strategic enabler rather than a support function (Kane et al., 2015).

Without top-level ownership, digital initiatives risk becoming siloed experiments, disconnected from the club’s core business strategy. Clubs like Bayern Munich have highlighted the importance of digital leadership by establishing dedicated Chief Digital Officer roles reporting directly to executive leadership (FC Bayern Munich, 2021).

### Cross-departmental alignment

Successful digital strategies require breaking down internal silos and promoting collaboration across marketing, technology, ticketing, fan engagement, sponsorships, and operations departments. A disjointed approach leads to fragmented fan experiences and lost opportunities for synergy.

Liverpool FC, for example, has implemented an integrated fan data strategy that connects marketing campaigns, ticketing communications, and loyalty programs across departments (Liverpool FC, 2023). Unified cross-functional teamwork ensures consistency in customer interactions and maximizes the value of data-driven initiatives.

### Investment in data platforms, CRM and content production



Technology platforms are foundational enablers of effective digital strategy execution. Leading organizations invest in the following.

- Customer relationship management (CRM) platforms to centralize fan data and enable personalization.
- Customer data platforms (CDPs) to unify fan data from multiple touchpoints (web, mobile, social media, ticketing) into a single, actionable view of the customer.
- Content production capabilities to create engaging, platform-specific digital assets.

For example, Real Madrid’s digital transformation included developing an integrated fan engagement platform that combines CRM and CDP capabilities, allowing them to segment fans intelligently, personalize experiences, and drive more targeted marketing campaigns (Real Madrid, 2022).

Without these foundational systems, efforts to deliver personalized journeys, monetize digital assets, and improve lifetime fan value are severely constrained.

### Focus on evolving customer (fan) needs and behaviors

The digital world — and the expectations of sports fans — are constantly evolving. Successful organizations continuously invest in understanding changing fan behaviors, adapting content, engagement strategies, and platforms accordingly.

For instance, the NBA has invested heavily in studying digital consumption trends among younger fans, leading to innovations such as bite-sized highlight packages for mobile viewers and interactive live streams (NBA, 2022a).

Organizations that proactively track and respond to shifts in consumption habits, technological adoption (such as AR/VR or blockchain applications), and social trends are better positioned to sustain loyalty and revenue growth in a highly competitive entertainment market.

### Visual table: key success factors for digital strategy in sports

Table 4. Key success factors for digital strategy in sports

Success factor	Description	Examples
Board-level ownership	Executive commitment to treat digital as a strategic growth driver	Bayern Munich’s appointment of a chief digital officer



Cross-departmental alignment	Unified collaboration across marketing, tech, ticketing, operations	Liverpool FC's integrated fan data strategy
Investment in data platforms and CRM	Building strong CRM and CDP capabilities; producing tailored content	Real Madrid's digital ecosystem
Focus on evolving fan needs	Continuous adaptation to changing fan behaviors and technological trends	NBA's mobile-optimized content innovations

Source: own elaboration.

## Challenges in integrating digital strategy into sports organizations

### Introduction

Even with a strong digital vision and ambitious objectives, many sports organizations encounter significant challenges when integrating digital strategies into their operational and business models. Understanding these hurdles is crucial for anticipating pitfalls and designing resilient transformation programs.

### Resistance to organizational change

One of the most common challenges is internal resistance to change. Departments and staff often cling to legacy processes and structures, perceiving digital transformation as a threat to established workflows and traditional expertise. Without a strong change management program, even well-funded digital initiatives can face inertia and underperformance (Westerman et al., 2014).

Successful clubs address this issue by involving employees early in the process, communicating clear visions of the benefits, and building digital competencies throughout the organization.

### Siloed data and technology systems

Legacy systems, disparate databases, and lack of standardized data practices create siloed environments where critical information remains fragmented. These silos prevent sports organizations from gaining a holistic view of their fans, operations, and commercial opportunities.

Organizations like Manchester City have overcome this challenge by developing integrated fan data platforms that centralize insights from ticketing, merchandising, app usage, and social media interactions (City Football Group, 2023).

### Underestimating the complexity of digital ecosystems



Digital transformation often demands a complete rethink of operational models, partnerships, technologies, and performance metrics. Some organizations underestimate the complexity of orchestrating CRM systems, CDPs, OTT platforms, e-commerce, mobile apps, loyalty programs, and content production ecosystems simultaneously.

Without proper governance, roadmaps, and phased execution plans, digital programs can become fragmented, inefficient, or fail to deliver meaningful returns.

### Skills gaps and talent shortages

Building a digitally mature sports organization requires new skill sets — including data science, UX/UI design, digital marketing analytics, agile project management, and CRM strategy. However, many clubs and leagues still lack access to specialized talent pools or have insufficient internal development programs.

Forward-thinking organizations are investing heavily in reskilling initiatives, strategic hiring, and external partnerships to bridge these digital skills gaps (PwC, 2022).

### Visual table: summary of key challenges in digital strategy integration

**Table 5. Summary of key challenges in digital strategy integration**

Challenge	Description	Example/impact
Resistance to organizational Change	Legacy structures resist digital transformation efforts	Change management required to shift culture
Siloed data and technology systems	Fragmented systems prevent unified fan and business insights	Manchester City's integrated fan data platform as solution
Underestimating complexity of ecosystem	Mismanaging CRM, CDP, OTT, e-commerce, and mobile apps simultaneously	Need for phased roadmaps and governance
Skills gaps and talent shortages	Lack of data, UX, agile project management and digital marketing skills	Reskilling and strategic hiring crucial

Source: own elaboration.

### Case examples: digital strategy in action – FC Barcelona and Manchester United



## Introduction

Theoretical frameworks about digital strategy become far more tangible when seen in real-world applications. Leading sports organizations such as FC Barcelona and Manchester United offer valuable examples of how digital strategies are not merely support functions but are embedded into their overall vision and core business operations.

### **FC Barcelona: building a global digital ecosystem**

FC Barcelona's digital transformation journey showcases how a club can use digital platforms not only to strengthen fan engagement but also to diversify revenue streams and globalize its brand. Recognizing the limitations of traditional matchday and broadcast revenue models, FC Barcelona has built a fully integrated digital ecosystem consisting of services such as Barça TV+, the club's own streaming service, and Barça Studios, a production hub for original content (FC Barcelona, 2022).

Barça TV+ provides fans worldwide with exclusive content, live matches (in selected regions), documentaries, and behind-the-scenes access, enabling the club to engage directly with its audience without intermediaries. This direct-to-consumer model exemplifies the shift toward owning the fan relationship through digital platforms, data collection, and personalized experiences.

Moreover, FC Barcelona has embraced fan data analytics to optimize marketing strategies, personalize communications, and drive e-commerce sales across its merchandise stores. The club's digital operations now contribute meaningfully to its overall commercial revenues, aligning with its strategy to become the most global and innovative sports brand.

By prioritizing digital as a core strategic pillar, FC Barcelona has moved beyond thinking of digital media as merely a communication tool. Instead, it has transformed digital capabilities into a critical engine for engagement, brand expansion, and commercial growth.

### **Manchester United: partnering for digital innovation**

Manchester United has approached digital transformation by forming strategic technology partnerships, most notably with HCL Technologies. Through this collaboration, Manchester United has focused on creating a unified, cloud-based digital platform that consolidates fan interactions across multiple channels (HCL Technologies, 2022).

The club has integrated mobile apps, e-commerce, content streaming, and CRM systems into a cohesive architecture designed to deliver personalized fan experiences. For



example, Manchester United’s official app offers live match content, real-time statistics, ticketing services, and personalized merchandise recommendations based on user behavior data.

This focus on data-driven personalization is a key differentiator. By collecting and analyzing fan interaction data across touchpoints, Manchester United is able to tailor marketing offers, improve fan engagement metrics, and ultimately drive higher lifetime value per fan.

Additionally, the club has invested in cybersecurity, digital payment technologies, and scalable IT infrastructure to ensure that its digital services are secure, stable, and capable of supporting global audiences. Manchester United’s digital-first approach reflects a broader understanding that technology is not merely a tactical tool, but a strategic asset critical to sustaining competitiveness and relevance in the global sports entertainment landscape.

**Visual table: comparison of FC Barcelona and Manchester United digital strategies**

**Table 6. Comparison of FC Barcelona and Manchester United digital strategies**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>FC Barcelona</b>	<b>Manchester United</b>
Main digital focus	Building a direct-to-fan digital ecosystem (Barça TV+, Barça Studios)	Unified cloud-based fan platform (via HCL Technologies)
Content strategy	Owned streaming content, documentaries, behind-the-scenes access	Integrated real-time match stats, content streaming, ticketing
Use of fan data	Marketing optimization and personalized merchandising	Tailored offers, lifetime value growth, behavior-based marketing
Technology investment	Content platforms, production studios, digital apps	Cloud architecture, CRM systems, cybersecurity
Revenue diversification	Streaming subscriptions, digital merchandise, direct Sales	E-commerce growth, personalized fan experiences
Strategic approach	In-house development and platform ownership	Strategic external partnerships for digital capability building

Source: own elaboration.



## Lessons from these cases

Both FC Barcelona and Manchester United demonstrate that successful digital strategies in sports:

- prioritize direct fan engagement through proprietary platforms,
- use data analytics to drive personalization and revenue optimization,
- integrate digital operations fully into the core business model, not as isolated project,
- invest in robust technology infrastructures to support growth and innovation.

These examples also highlight that digital transformation is not a one-time project but an ongoing journey requiring continuous investment, strategic partnerships, and cultural change.

## Conclusion

### The critical role of digital strategy in the future of sports

Digital transformation is no longer an optional trend for sports organizations, it is a defining factor for long-term success and competitive advantage. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the ability of clubs, leagues, and federations to strategically integrate digital initiatives into their core business models will determine their relevance and growth in a highly competitive entertainment market.

Throughout this reading, we have explored how digital strategy differs fundamentally from traditional business strategy, requiring not just operational support but full board-level ownership and cross-departmental collaboration (Kane et al., 2015). We also examined the evolution of digital maturity phases in sports, from basic digital add-ons in the start-up phase, to more integrated digital operations during the acceleration phase, and to today's capitalize phase where digital is a key driver of total fan experience, commercial growth, and global brand expansion.

Strategic objectives such as fan engagement, global reach, commercial monetization, and data-driven decision-making have emerged as central pillars supported by digital transformation (PwC, 2023). However, the journey is not without challenges. Organizational resistance, siloed systems, ecosystem complexity, and skills shortages continue to pose serious obstacles to seamless execution (Westerman et al., 2014).

Leading sports organizations such as FC Barcelona, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Manchester City demonstrate that success comes from clear strategic ownership, investment in customer data platforms (CDPs) and content capabilities, and a fan-first



approach to innovation (Real Madrid, 2022; City Football Group, 2023).

As fan expectations continue to rise and technology reshapes how audiences experience sports, those organizations that treat digital strategy as a core business function, embedded in leadership agendas and operational DNA, will be best positioned to win the digital game.

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