

Module 3. Storytelling

Introduction: content as a strategic lever in the experience economy

Introduction

In today's digital-first landscape, sports organizations are no longer just entertainment providers, they are global experience brands. Fans expect more than results and highlights; they seek immersive, emotionally resonant journeys that unfold across every touchpoint. This shift places content strategy at the heart of how sports clubs and leagues deliver value, grow global communities, and execute their digital ambitions.

The rise of the experience economy, where consumers prioritize memorable and meaningful interactions over transactional relationships, has transformed how organizations approach digital transformation. In this context, storytelling is not just a communication tool, it is a business strategy. It builds identity, activates engagement, and directly supports objectives such as loyalty, monetization, and market expansion (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; McKinsey and Company, 2020).

From marketing tactic to strategic asset

Traditionally, content was seen as a function of marketing, a means to promote, inform, or entertain. But in a digital environment where every click, share or scroll is a potential business outcome, content has become an engine of strategic value. It fuels engagement in apps, triggers personalized messaging via CRM systems, and drives conversion in digital stores. It is also how clubs establish voice, emotion, and brand distinctiveness in competitive global markets (KPMG, 2022).

Sports brands like FC Barcelona, Juventus and Formula 1 have elevated content into strategic programming, blending entertainment, data and culture to create fan-centric ecosystems that extend far beyond the 90-minute game. Whether through behind-the-scenes documentaries, fan-generated content, or multilingual regional storytelling, content has become the mechanism through which vision and values are brought to life (PwC, 2023).

The fan-centric imperative

Digital transformation in sports is ultimately about putting the fan at the center, and content is how that promise is delivered. Through personalized highlights, immersive AR/VR experiences, gamified campaigns, or editorial storytelling, content shapes the digital journey. This requires a structured, scalable strategy that connects business goals with creative expression, guided by data, automation, and cross-team collaboration (Deloitte, 2023).

As we explore in this reading, a modern content strategy is not just about producing more, it's about producing with purpose. It requires an operational framework, defined roles, clear KPIs, and above all, alignment with the broader digital strategy of the organization.

Building a modern content strategy

Introduction

In a sports ecosystem where fans consume content across dozens of digital platforms, having a structured and data-driven content strategy is critical. It is no longer enough to simply produce content, organizations must build purposeful, scalable systems that align with strategic goals, fan expectations, and technological capabilities. A modern content strategy is the connective tissue that links storytelling with business performance.

Content pillars aligned with business objectives

A successful content strategy begins by defining content pillars: thematic categories that reflect the organization's identity and objectives. For a football club, this might include match-related content, behind-the-scenes access, academy development, community initiatives, and commercial partnerships.

These pillars must align with broader business priorities, as shown below.

- **Fan engagement.** Emotional, shareable content (e.g., exclusive interviews, fan challenges).
- **Global reach.** Multilingual content tailored to different markets.
- **Commercial growth.** Branded content, sponsor integrations, e-commerce drivers.
- **Loyalty and retention.** Personalized content delivered through CRM and app ecosystems.

By anchoring content pillars in strategic intent, clubs avoid producing disconnected content and instead create cohesive narratives that move fans through the journey, from awareness to advocacy (KPMG, 2022).

Understanding fan personas and lifecycle stages

Modern content strategies rely on audience segmentation that goes far beyond demographics. Sports organizations must understand fan personas based on behaviors, motivations, and lifecycle stage. For example:

- A casual follower may prefer snackable highlights on Instagram.
- A season ticket holder may seek in-depth match analysis and loyalty benefits.

- An international fan may value multilingual content and behind-the-scenes storytelling.

Mapping content to these personas ensures relevance and improves performance across digital platforms. Tools like customer data platforms (CDPs) and CRM systems help personalize content delivery, increasing engagement and conversion rates (Salesforce, 2023).

Tone of voice and editorial consistency

Every brand has a tone, whether defined or accidental. In the crowded sports media landscape, having a distinct voice is key to cutting through noise. A strong content strategy includes editorial guidelines that define tone (e.g., playful, bold, inclusive), messaging architecture, and stylistic elements like headline formats or emoji usage.

This consistency reinforces brand identity and builds trust with fans, especially when content is distributed across multiple teams and regions. For global clubs like Paris Saint-Germain or Manchester City, brand consistency is essential to unify storytelling while allowing local flexibility.

Omnichannel distribution planning

Today's content must be multi-platform by design. Fans engage with clubs across social media, apps, websites, OTT platforms, newsletters, podcasts, and even voice interfaces. A modern content strategy outlines:

- which types of content work best on each platform (e.g., TikTok vs. YouTube),
- optimal timing and frequency,
- adaptation formats (e.g., short clips from long-form video).

This approach is often enabled by modular content models, where assets are created once and repurposed across channels in various formats, maximizing ROI and agility (Bynder, 2022).

Summary: content strategy structure



Table 1. Content strategy structure summary

Component	Purpose
Content Pillars	Align creative output with business objectives
Fan personas	Segment audience and match content to lifecycle stages
Tone of voice guidelines	Ensure brand consistency and emotional alignment
Channel strategy	Map content types to platform preferences
Editorial calendar	Coordinate publishing cadence and campaign timing
Performance metrics	Connect content with digital KPIs (e.g., engagement, CLTV)

Source: own elaboration.

Linking content strategy to digital strategy

Introduction

A strong digital strategy defines where a sports organization is going: the vision, goals, and competitive edge it aims to achieve through digital transformation. Content strategy defines how the organization will communicate, engage, and convert fans along that journey. When effectively integrated, these two elements drive a seamless, value-generating fan experience.

Translating digital objectives into content goals

Digital strategies in sports often revolve around key objectives such as:

- increasing fan engagement and loyalty,
- driving ticketing and merchandise sales,
- expanding international reach,
- collecting and activating first-party data,
- delivering value to sponsors through audience insights.

Each of these can and should be mapped to content outcomes. For example:



- **Goal: grow CRM database.** Content tactic: gated long-form video requiring sign-up.
- **Goal: boost e-commerce.** Content tactic: player-led product drops or flash sale teasers.
- **Goal: deepen fan loyalty.** Content tactic: personalized video shout-outs or exclusive interviews.

This structured alignment ensures that content production serves a strategic business purpose, rather than being reactive or channel-driven.

Performance metrics: from likes to lifetime value

Historically, content performance has been judged by vanity metrics: impressions, likes, views. While these are useful, they don't capture strategic value. A digitally mature organization measures content based on its contribution to customer journeys and business outcomes.

- Modern content KPIs should include the following.
- Conversion rate (e.g., to ticket sales, subscriptions).
- Click-through to owned platforms (e.g., app, e-commerce).
- Content-driven data capture (e.g., form completions).
- Engagement depth (e.g., dwell time, scroll depth).
- Fan lifetime value (FLV) linked to content touchpoints.

Connecting these metrics to digital dashboards (often powered by CDPs or advanced CRM systems) allows teams to optimize content production based on actual impact, not just aesthetic appeal (Salesforce, 2023).

Content as a tool for personalization and journey orchestration

Content becomes exponentially more valuable when it's personalized. By understanding a fan's preferences, behaviors, and location, clubs can deliver the right content at the right time, whether it is a jersey promotion after a big win, or a birthday video from a favorite player. This requires close collaboration between content and data teams. For instance:

- Marketing automation tools use behavioral data to trigger content workflows.
- Real-time analytics inform dynamic homepage content based on user segments.
- CDPs aggregate fan touchpoints across platforms and fuel predictive content delivery.



In this way, content strategy becomes executional infrastructure for digital strategy, not just storytelling but orchestrated interaction.

Modular content: fueling omnichannel digital execution

To support omnichannel delivery at scale, many sports organizations adopt modular content systems. This means creating core content units (text, visuals, video clips) that can be quickly repurposed for different platforms and campaigns.

For example:

- A behind-the-scenes training video can be split into a long-form YouTube post, Instagram Reels teaser, email newsletter embed, and CRM campaign incentive.
- Player interview quotes become carousel posts, press releases, and sponsor partner content.

This modular approach makes content agile, scalable, and cost-effective, all while ensuring alignment with broader digital goals (Bynder, 2022).

Summary: aligning content strategy with digital goals

Table 2. Aligning content strategy with digital goals

Digital objective	Content strategy tactic	Measurement KPI
Fan engagement	Interactive polls, live Q&As, exclusive matchday content	Time on site, video completion rate
Data acquisition	Gated long-form content, quizzes, contest entries	CRM sign-ups, consented data collected
Revenue growth	Product integration in content, player promotions	E-commerce click-through and conversion
Global reach	Multilingual storytelling, localized fan stories	Geo-targeted reach, social Shares
Sponsor value delivery	Branded content series, in-content product placement	Sponsor impressions, engagement lift



Source: own elaboration.

Content operations and governance

Introduction

As sports organizations evolve into full-fledged digital media houses, content production, distribution, and optimization must be managed like a strategic supply chain. This shift demands more than creativity, it requires a robust content operations model grounded in governance, workflows, and cross-functional collaboration. Without these structures, even the best content strategies risk underperforming in execution.

Cross-functional roles and collaboration models

Today, content is no longer confined to the marketing department. Instead, modern sports organizations adopt matrixed content teams that span departments, marketing, creative, commercial, data, and tech, to ensure cohesive delivery across platforms.

- Marketing and CRM teams define the messaging framework and campaign objectives.
- Media and creative units develop assets based on brand tone and visual identity.
- Data analysts track performance and feed insights back into content design.
- Commercial teams manage sponsorship activation through branded content.
- Digital and IT functions ensure content delivery via CMS, DAM, and automation tools.

These cross-functional teams require shared KPIs, editorial calendars, and governance protocols to stay aligned. According to a study by Altimeter (2020), organizations with formalized content operations report 3x greater content effectiveness than those without.

Content workflow and technology stack

To scale content production while maintaining consistency and speed, sports organizations rely on an integrated technology and workflow ecosystem. This includes the following.

- Digital asset management (DAM) systems to store, tag, and reuse media assets.
- Content calendars to align campaigns across departments and regions.
- Approval workflows with automated notifications and version control.
- Content management systems (CMS) that support omnichannel publishing and localization.

For example, global clubs like Real Madrid or Juventus manage hundreds of content pieces weekly across multiple languages and formats. Without workflow automation and centralized systems, such operations would be unmanageable (Bynder, 2022; Content Marketing Institute, 2022).

Governance and brand consistency at scale

Strong governance ensures that brand voice, values, and visual identity are consistently expressed, even when content is localized or produced by multiple teams. Governance models typically include the following.

- Tone-of-voice and editorial style guides.
- Defined approval roles and escalation paths.
- Legal and compliance reviews, especially for sponsored content.
- Rights and licensing management for assets and video content.

One effective structure is the hub-and-spoke model: the central team acts as a strategic content hub, while regional or departmental spokes adapt content for local contexts. This allows for strategic consistency with creative flexibility, key in global fan engagement (KPMG, 2022).

Challenges in scaling global content operations

Despite these tools and structures, challenges persist, especially as clubs expand their international reach. Common roadblocks include the following.

- Fragmented systems leading to duplication and delays.
- Difficulty localizing content in real time across time zones.
- Inconsistent quality control or brand voice.
- Inefficient measurement of content impact.

Overcoming these challenges requires clear ownership, executive sponsorship, and agile processes. According to McKinsey and Company (2020), organizations that embed agile governance and continuous improvement into their content operations can reduce production times by up to 40% and improve output quality.

Summary: content governance framework

Table 3. Content governance framework

Function	Responsibilities	Tools/supports
Content strategy	Define pillars, align with digital goals	Strategic roadmaps, editorial calendars
Creation and production	Develop assets, follow brand guidelines	DAM, creative tools (e.g. Adobe)
Localization and delivery	Adapt content for local markets and platforms	Translation workflows, CMS
Governance and compliance	Ensure consistency, manage rights and legal approvals	Brand guidelines, approval workflows
Analytics and optimization	Track performance, inform future content with data	Dashboards, analytics platforms

Source: own elaboration.

Storytelling in action – Sports industry examples

Introduction

While strategy and structure are crucial, the true power of content lies in its execution, in how stories are told, shared, and experienced. In the sports industry, storytelling has become a competitive differentiator, not just for brand identity, but also for fan growth, engagement and revenue generation.

Let’s explore how leading organizations are leveraging content to activate digital strategies through powerful storytelling.

Liverpool FC: global identity through content

Liverpool FC has built a global brand rooted in its history, community values, and emotional connection with fans. Its content strategy is centered around “This Means More”, a campaign and philosophy that underscores everything from social media posts to branded mini-documentaries.

Key tactics include:

- behind-the-scenes content (training, player features, academy updates),



- story-driven partnerships (e.g., sponsor-led documentaries),
- hyper-localized language content for international fans.

The club's in-house media operation, including LFCTV GO and its digital membership platform, ensures that content is both monetized and deeply integrated with its CRM system, providing tailored content based on fan behavior and preferences (Liverpool FC, 2023).

Formula 1: reviving a legacy through Netflix

Formula 1 experienced a transformative surge in popularity thanks to its partnership with Netflix on the Drive to Survive documentary series. Rather than focusing solely on the technical side of racing, the series spotlighted human drama, rivalries, and behind-the-scenes access, reaching a whole new audience that previously had little interest in motorsport.

This success showed the value of:

- storytelling that appeals beyond hardcore fans,
- cross-platform visibility (social media campaigns tied to episodes),
- expanding market reach (especially in the U.S., a historically weak market for F1).

Following the show's success, F1 saw a significant uptick in digital engagement, merchandise sales, and new broadcast deals, proving the business impact of narrative-driven content (The Drum, 2022).

Real Madrid: content as a digital revenue stream

Real Madrid's digital transformation strategy includes the development of its own OTT platform, RM Play, which offers exclusive content to fans worldwide. This includes match replays, interviews, historical archives, and interactive features.

Content is not just a marketing tool, it is a direct monetization channel, integrated with fan memberships and loyalty programs.

In parallel, Real Madrid tailors content across platforms:

- TikTok for quick entertainment and younger fans,
- YouTube for long-form storytelling,
- email and app for exclusive behind-the-scenes and sponsor content.

Their editorial tone maintains the club's premium image while allowing space for creative storytelling that connects emotionally across cultures (Real Madrid, 2023).



La Liga: localized and personalized content hubs

LaLiga has taken a platform-thinking approach to content by creating regionalized content hubs. These are tailored to fan behavior in different markets (e.g., Latin America, India, Southeast Asia) with content adapted in language, format, and theme.

Core tactics include:

- collaborations with local influencers and creators,
- interactive content like quizzes and polls tied to matches,
- data-driven content targeting through CRM and social platforms.

This localization strategy has helped La Liga grow digital engagement and sponsorship value across new markets, while maintaining brand coherence at the league level (La Liga, 2022).

Summary: comparing sports content strategies

Table 4. Comparing sports content strategies

Organization	Key storytelling approach	Strategic outcome
Liverpool FC	Emotional storytelling, heritage themes, behind-the-scenes content	Increased loyalty and CRM- based monetization
Formula 1	Human drama via Netflix documentary	Expanded audience reach and global brand revival
Real Madrid	Multi-platform branded content, premium OTT	Direct-to-consumer revenue and content control
La Liga	Localized, data-personalized content strategies	Regional growth and sponsor value optimization

Source: own elaboration.

Strategic takeaways and the content maturity path

Introduction

A compelling content strategy does not just enhance brand identity, it fuels measurable business outcomes. For sports organizations aiming to lead in digital transformation, content is no longer a cost center or a side function. It is a strategic growth engine,



enabling fan engagement, global expansion, data acquisition, sponsorship value, and direct monetization.

However, reaching this level of maturity requires time, structure, and cultural shifts. Organizations typically evolve through three phases of content maturity, closely tied to their digital evolution.

Start-up phase: content as promotion

In the early stages, content is created mainly for promotion, publishing match-day updates, announcements, and sponsor messages across social platforms. The focus is on visibility, not on storytelling, data integration, or strategy alignment.

Characteristics:

- Limited content planning, mostly reactive.
- Basic CMS use and social publishing.
- Few performance metrics beyond reach and likes.
- Content disconnected from CRM or sales goals.
- Clubs at this level often rely on small media teams and lack cross-functional processes or investment in content systems.

Acceleration phase: content as engagement

In this middle stage, clubs begin to treat content as a tool for engagement and loyalty. They implement editorial calendars, expand video production, localize content for international audiences, and start integrating with CRM or mobile apps.

Key features:

- Clearer content roles across departments.
- Increased personalization and segmentation.
- Emerging use of DAM, email marketing, and A/B testing.
- Content KPIs linked to engagement and conversion.

This is often the most challenging but transformational phase, requiring alignment between content creators, data analysts, marketers, and technologists.

Capitalize phase: content as strategic infrastructure

At maturity, content becomes infrastructure for the entire digital business model. It fuels omnichannel fan experiences, powers data-driven personalization, activates sponsor campaigns, and feeds into real-time analytics platforms.

Leading clubs:

- Operate modular content systems for scale.
- Leverage CDPs to orchestrate personalized content journeys.
- Integrate content across OTT, apps, ticketing, and e-commerce.
- Use content to support long-term fan lifetime value.

This is the level where content strategy drives business outcomes, and content operations are fully professionalized across people, processes, and platforms (McKinsey and Company, 2022).

Summary: content maturity path in sports organizations

Table 5. Content maturity path in sports organizations

Phase	Focus	Key characteristics
Start-Up	Promotion	Reactive posts, minimal integration, few metrics
Acceleration	Engagement and loyalty	Content planning, CRM/email integration, basic personalization
Capitalize	Strategic infrastructure	Modular content, CDP-powered personalization, omnichannel monetization

Source: own elaboration.

Strategic takeaways

- Content is not an isolated function, it is the execution layer of digital strategy.
- Aligning content with fan personas, lifecycle stages, and business objectives increases ROI.
- Investing in governance, workflows, and automation is crucial for scaling storytelling.



- Personalization and modular production are key enablers of performance and efficiency.
- Clubs that lead in content maturity also lead in digital revenue growth and global fan reach.

As sports organizations continue their digital transformation, the ability to tell the right story, to the right fan, at the right time, on the right platform, will be the difference between relevance and irrelevance in an increasingly noisy, competitive, and data-driven world.

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