

# Module 4. Other departments requirements - Social media benefits overall organization

## Introduction

### Fan engagement extends beyond the 90 minutes of the match

According to Rahul Thakkar (2018),

the sheer scale of football fans' engagement with their clubs has reached a new high in recent years. Passionate fans, armed with the developments in digital technology, consume football and related content way beyond the 90 minutes of the actual match. The newly formed demands of the digital native, coupled with relentless expectations of winning, have pushed football clubs to the edge in their efforts to innovate to survive in the digital age. (para 3-4)

### Social media is now an established hub for fan engagement. What comes next?

Fans no longer simply watch live matches. They routinely use digital channels, both mobile and social, to consume and share content, information and analysis, and to interact with sports leagues, clubs, and players. The use of the social space in sports to communicate with fans directly and enhance the relationship between them and their club is now hardly new. These days, every football club has embraced social media and its power to reach out to a large number of fans. On that score, their generated digital content constantly gets better, more "likeable", "shareable", and "tweetable". In fact, it's some of the most compelling, influential, and talked about content in popular culture. Undoubtedly, social media is a powerful tool, as it helps clubs to control the message and bring fans closer to the club by offering them the ability to become actively involved and engaged with the game.

Digital transformation in any industry is about using digital technology to transform the customer experience, operational processes, and business models. The sports industry is no different, and established models are being disrupted. Digital transformation in sport is driving both performance and engagement (performance for the team, property or federation, and engagement with fans for more powerful and immersive experiences).



Sports businesses such as rights holders, teams, and federations must adapt to the current trends to remain competitive.

The NBA was one of the first to recognise the need for change and has a well-developed digital strategy. For some time, they have been well aware that they are competing against every other possible form of entertainment, nice weather, or anything else people could be doing instead of watching their games.

Successful transformation depends as much on how businesses manage digital transformation as on solely implementing new technologies. Ultimately, digital is about growth and is more about aligning strategy and the organization to behaviours and expectations of modern fans than it is about the technology itself. This process of transformation has been likened to building the plane whilst flying, since the business needs to continue delivering on existing brand promises whilst also adjusting to new consumer realities.

Sport is about passion and competition. Being part of that journey through the good and bad times that makes you feel as if you're part of the same team as those on the pitch or track. And ultimately, we hope, success.

The drive for that success has fuelled a desire to find areas that will have an impact and make a difference. Helping to drive extra revenue that can then be spent on facilities and athletes, having the best stadium, the best training, the best atmosphere, these all play a part in what takes a team to the top and keeps them there.

Sports organizations are largely playing catch up, and their ability to harness the potential of their human capital –and listen to customers and fans– will determine their success or failure in the future. Sports organizations that are digitally mature have transformed their business so that all factors that go into delivering a seamless digital experience are personalised and relevant for fans. On the business side, digital is so much more than fan-facing touch points. Businesses in sport need the same robust enterprise grade platforms as any other business, and choosing the best delivery model is key, for it's opening up new opportunities for technology companies who are becoming a much greater part of the ecosystem.

With digital disruption accelerating across the board, pressure on traditional sports is increasing. Sporting is more aware than ever of the rising threats such as the shift away from traditional content consumption and access to new entertainment formats.

The writing is on the wall; sports organizations need to innovate in order to address changing consumer behaviour and compete against new forms of entertainment or other forms of leisure.



In the following pages, we'll be looking at how these advancements are driving change within the industry and how other departments are more and more involved in social media activities.

### **The distinction between content and communication will become irrelevant**

The value of social media lies in the dialogue it promotes, and a loyal followership on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram needs to be built on authentic, relevant, and entertaining content and communication. User-generated content is highly favoured among fans, and interactive content that asks fans to contribute and then prominently displays their input is especially sought after as suggested by recent data on the amount of time individual users spend on different parts of a web page or mobile app. Content is also more successful if it's of high quality (i.e., relevant and visually appealing) as well as platform-appropriate. One option for bringing both these requirements together on social media is to work around events in which content is produced by fans within a particular frame (e.g., asking fans to post videos explaining why they love their club in one sentence), using polls among fans, prize draws, or specifically looking for content that offers more editorial control. Digital and more specifically social media will become a common entry route into fandom. This, in turn, means that there will be more fans for whom communication about the match is more important than watching the match itself –and social-media communication should exploit this.

### **Tracking and monetisation are two sides of the same coin**

Gauging exactly how much revenue social media activity generates is about as difficult as measuring the effect of branding advertising campaigns. Within the next few years, more precise tracking systems that go beyond such classic social-media metrics as “likes” and reach will be developed, just as they are now being developed to measure the effectiveness of online brand marketing campaigns. This data will be leveraged to address fans more efficiently by offering them relevant content, products, and services. In a second step, social-media metrics will also be integrated into the –yet to be built– digital ecosystems of clubs, ensuring a holistic marketing view for the benefit of both fan and club. Direct monetisation in the context of social media is already a reality, as demonstrated by new features such as Facebook multiproduct ads or Google, making it possible to market merchandise and products to fans in the social-media context. Nevertheless, in the short term, we expect large clubs to continue treating social media as a tool for increasing the quality of their offering rather than for direct monetisation.

### **New opportunities for sponsors open up**

If a club or a player has built a loyal followership on social media, this reach offers an interesting audience for sponsors and advertisers. Native advertising in social media often shows conversion rates that far exceed the success achieved by conventional



banner advertising. Shaquille O’Neal promoting Oreo cookies on Twitter, “Wanna hang wit me? heres ur chance for us 2 chill n dunk some”, (O’Neal, 2011) is a great example of successful social-media native advertising. The main objective of these advertisements is to remain entertaining and authentic, thus allowing O’Neal to build up a Twitter following of 8.1 million fans by October 2014. Adding a viral component to advertising encourages people to share content, further compounding reach and impact. Eighty percent of fans use social media to communicate with their club, players and fellow fans, and many do so while watching sports on TV. This interaction will become more important in supporting traditional TV campaigns, by communicating sponsor brands on social media, while the TV ad or the match is on. Social-media platforms use new features to support this, such as Twitter Amplify, an advertising format that allows for real-time video content, including pre-roll advertising to be distributed via Twitter. For sponsors, social media has become an attractive way of talking to fans directly. One notable example is Sony’s engagement during the FIFA World Cup 2014. With 6.5 million likes on its Facebook channel, the interactive community page [football.sony.net](http://football.sony.net), and on a related YouTube channel, Sony undoubtedly gained significant visibility and engagement during the World Cup.

### **Leveraging the match day for audience engagement**

The overall match day experience and in-venue atmosphere are among the most valuable assets football clubs have at their disposal. The match day is a critical subject of social-media communication, but, once fans have reached the venue, little is then done to connect them with each other digitally, or indeed with fans following the match elsewhere. Curiously, today’s in-stadium experience is very similar to that on offer 20 years ago: almost no video replays of match scenes on large stadium screens, no commentary is available, social-media activity is not specifically directed towards fans in the stadium and connection to fans outside the stadium is rarely orchestrated. Twitter is used as a match-day reporting tool and – rarely – integrated in the LEDs in the bands on the pitch. Driven by the introduction of stadium WiFi, and in its wake, the advent of stadium apps that only work when connected to the venue WiFi, the in-venue experience will become both more digital and more social. One of today’s successful examples is Bayer Leverkusen’s Fan App, which uses social media to connect and engage with fans, and offers features such as live video streaming, match statistics, live information about the match and surveys whose results are communicated directly to those in the stadium. In time, applications that connect fans within or outside the club will be increasingly available, along the example of choreography apps Fanpictor, which is gaining increasing traction in the market. Yet the introduction of these apps and services doesn’t come without challenges. Indeed, fan groups who have been organising these activities may feel disintermediated and disempowered, demanding from clubs particular attention in the way they promote the introduction of these services. Technological innovation will also change the viewing experience itself. Wearable augmented-reality devices, Google



Glass being the most prominent, provide the possibility of using second-screen or stadium apps embedded into the match. Moreover, these devices may also bring the in-stadium experience to fans located elsewhere, or even let viewers see the match through the point of view of a player. Albeit technically still challenging, holographic projection techniques may also well develop to the point of providing a captivating virtual in-stadium experience, lifting the opportunities for public viewing to a whole new level.

### **How do sports organizations benefit from this?**

An enhanced stadium experience through digital will lead to increased ticket sales, attracting fans who would not usually attend the match. Moreover, a more aligned social-media experience will mean that more visitors will be happy to promote and “socialise” the match experience, broadcasting it to their wider network of friends. The introduction of WiFi and in-stadium apps will also offer the possibility of marketing premium content directly to visitors, as well as enable monetisation through targeted advertising.

### **The synergy between social media and game experience is important**

Fandom is all about emotions –emotions that fans want to communicate to their clubs, heroes, and fellow supporters. Social media has already established itself as the best way of fulfilling this desire for affiliation. With the increasing cultural importance of social media and the emergence of new platforms and features, clubs will benefit from digital in new and interesting ways. Helping fans to exchange their experiences in the stadium, either via social media or with the help of digital gadgets, is one of the most promising avenues for clubs’ marketing strategies to explore today.

To help guide us through this huge evolving landscape, we are going in deeper on the following five areas:

- Digital consumption
- Data
- Innovation
- Sponsorship
- Experiences

### **Digital consumption is ever evolving**

Go back 10 years, and the main ways in which fans would consume are still fairly traditional. Through newspapers, magazine, TV, DVD, and radio, with most having websites although they would be quite primitive and some early pilot phases on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.



That all changed when cloud computing arrived and, all of sudden, people could stream content when they wanted from Netflix and similar platforms, which started to change consumers' behaviours and, more importantly, expectations.

Combine that with the popularization of social media, even though Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube had all been around for a few years by that stage: the mass adoption by sport still hadn't happened, especially in the vast majority around the globe.

Football led the way as early adopters as they tested what had already become a phenomenon in the U.S. with UFC, NBA and players such as Shaq O'Neill showing the way.

Rio Ferdinand and Robbie Savage were two of the first footballers to take to Twitter and used it as a way to respond to the press and interact directly with fans. This closeness to those who are most passionate about the sport plus the ability to bypass traditional media led to the adoption of social media at a rate few people expected.

But it's not just the rise of social media that has led to disruption in digital consumption. Perhaps, more important has been the mass adoption of mobile phones, as part of our person as wearing clothes and driving cars. They are an integral part of everyday life, and, on average, people look at their phones a staggering 52 times per day (Deloitte's US edition of the 2018 Global Mobile Consumer Survey).

Previously, rights holders and broadcasters had been very reticent to let anyone view goals or key pieces of action anywhere outside their paywall. With the mass sharing of highlights on social media, however, it meant that people were getting what they wanted and when they wanted it via their phone. Nowadays, you have Sky posting highlights on YouTube, BT showing goals as they happen on Twitter and apps such as Manchester United's posting goal clips within a few minutes, all allowing fans to get what they want, when they want it, and, mostly importantly, where they want it.

Mobile technology has changed everything. With improvements in WiFi and 4G coverage, the imminent arrival of 5G and costs reducing, people can download or stream programmes with very little worry. This provides a challenge to broadcast incumbents as sports organizations have the opportunity to sell direct to consumer (D2C) via their own apps.

This shift will be one of the most closely watched changes in sport and presents both challenges and opportunities to those involved.

### **Democratisation of broadcast**

It isn't just about the way fans consume content. The very way in which broadcasters are producing the live events we treasured so much has been revolutionised over the past few years.



Competition in the space has heated up with new players in the game such as Disney and DAZN, not to mention Amazon, YouTube or Facebook. This has meant that traditional sports broadcasters have had to up their game by delivering greater in-depth analysis, better camera angles, and more impressive, immersive experiences.

Most studios now involve an element of mixed reality as they record in front of green screens and plays are brought to life with the presenters' part of that action too. Examples include The Cube from Eurosport, during the 2018 Winter Olympics, and SkySports Monday Night Football coverage.

But one of the biggest disruptions has been the opening up of opportunities for sports organizations to go direct to their fans with coverage. They have a relationship with the fans, which means they can now broadcast to them at low cost. A big driver has been the growing number of traditional TV providers, making their content available on digital platforms, along with a greater amount of sports content distributed digitally by rights owners and pure OTT providers. Ensuring a high-quality of service followed closely by challenges in creating sufficient content to generate long-term interest means the uptake of OTT has not been as smooth as expected. Rights holders face a big problem in keeping pace with huge content production and distribution machines such as Netflix, Amazon, or DAZN that are competing for the same entertainment budget.

It is now universally accepted that the future of sports consumption will be digital. While traditional linear TV will continue to play a fundamental role in the years to come, with older generations continuing to spend a significant amount of time watching the old way, the trend towards digital is clear, and so is its growth potential.

Consumers are generally willing to pay for premium content across most regions and most age groups. Growth is strong for millennials whilst older generation plateaued. There is a dilemma for older generation of choosing between their pay TV and adding new OTT services.

Broadcast is just at the start of this revolution, but we'll see more change taking place as new players come in, new technologies emerge, and more confident sports executives follow suit.

### **Data is powerful but tread carefully**

We have all seen the quotes saying things such as "data is the new oil" as we see the richest companies coming not from natural resources but those who have most successfully captured and manipulated data on us and our behaviour.

Facebook has developed one of the largest, most powerful and targeted advertising models the world has ever seen. Despite the rough ride the company has been given from the regulators and controversies around their use of data, for example, the Cambridge



Analytica scandal, they continue to be successful. It has proved to be too tempting for brands with the pros outweighing the cons, for the moment at least.

We've seen sports see this value as well, with more sporting organizations putting an emphasis on their own products such as apps and websites. The problem has been that, during the growth of social media, sports teams were especially good at building up huge numbers of followers and then spending large amounts of money developing content to keep those fans engaged.

Dominance of major tech firms as a gateway to content is a major threat to industry revenues with the main beneficiaries of this approach being the platforms themselves. As a result, sports organizations have woken up to this realisation. Social media is still important for those original reasons, but how they use it has changed significantly as they now work more like a hybrid of publishers and brands.

As a result, rights owners have been compelled to consider distributing content direct to consumer, thereby further developing direct fan relationships and the potential benefits this brings. This means that they ultimately want to drive people towards the website or app for full access to content. This could be a live event, in-depth article, or video series (the aim is to post a lot of content) as a publisher such as Sky or Unilad would do but with it directed towards their own space. This is where they can add paying subscribers, have their own advertising riding, and gain data from fan profiles and behaviours on that platform.

The top sports also act like a brand in terms of using 3rd party platforms to drive awareness of their brand and use paid advertising to sell products and services.

Using data for collecting is not enough: we also need to know what to do with data once we have it. CRM (customer relationship management) is a key tool in the modern age of digital marketing and an area where understanding people and behaviours is the basis for its success. Many sports organizations will have customer touchpoints that include ticket sales, stadium merchandise, food/drink purchase, social media, website, online shop –with some of these hosted on 3rd party sites and details kept on different systems according to what they are.

This leaves an unclear picture: the more you can understand about fans and their behaviours, building up personas and studying patterns, the more this opens up opportunities to develop services that best work for them and make the experience more personal.

This data is not only important at an internal lever, but also when working with sponsors. Brands have become much more sophisticated and expect any property with which they are considering a partnership to know who follows them, what they do, and what they



buy, data that helps them to match their own audience to that of the property. The better the overlap, the more value it has to them. Without any of this taking place, it will be hard to attract brands, and the full value of a sponsorship will not be extracted.

But there is also a flip side to this increased knowledge and access to data. The key is who has the data and what they do with it; this month's Amazon coverage of the Premier League is a prime example.

### **Innovating your way to the top**

If you're not innovating, you're standing still, and in a time when the speed of change is so fast, you will soon be overtaken. The top organizations recognise that they have to keep innovating to stay on top, and it's never been easier in this time of failing fast to be doing it yourself.

When we talk about innovation, we often think about technology, but it can be more fundamental than that. Innovation requires structure, but people are key to success. Success factors to enable innovation are structure and strategy: actionable strategy with clear KPIs, organizational structure, tools, and processes around innovation plus external collaborations and partnerships. On the people side, innovation requires a diverse, skilled, and talented staff, a corporate culture that incentivises innovation, as well as a top-down leadership approach and vision.

Formula One is constantly striving to keep up with the cars, as we've seen in the recent regulation changes for the 2021 season. Cricket has long been an advocate with first Twenty20 cricket and now The Hundred as they move with the times to try and engage with audiences who have grown up with different experiences and expectations.

Golf is another example of an organization open to change –testing new formats, from GolfSixes to the new end of season format for the FedEx Cup. They show an openness to change and ability to take it from an idea to public test.

A lot of innovation does originate from technology, though. We've seen the introduction of VAR (video assistant referee) in football –one of the slowest sports to change on the field–, new sports being formed such as the autonomous cars in Roborace, and newly developed piloting skills in drone racing.

Then, away from the pitch or track, we have advancements in fan engagement, as we've already discussed, and athlete performance. Cisco recently extended their partnership with City Football Group as Manchester City realise the benefits of the involvement of a large technology provider and the way they can assist in player tracking and implementing this into improving the team.



IBM's partnership with Wimbledon is well established, with involvement in 30 occurrences of the championships. They have helped redefine what technology can do within a traditional sports organization, evolving from basic branding to setting up the IT infrastructure, websites and apps that have developed over the years. They have added new layers each year to showcase their technology, including integrating Watson, their AI platform, to take huge amounts of data to enhance the fan experience of the event

An example is the use of AI to measure crowd and player reactions to determine crucial plays and then clip that piece of action into a video ready to be distributed to the world via social media. Having such a huge event in which to test and showcase products is one of the key reasons why technology companies are becoming more heavily involved in sports.

### **Sports sponsorship and technology**

In our previous reports on the power of sponsorship and sponsorship measurement, we have seen the benefits that a company can garner from their involvement in sport. Although relatively new, having only really taken off during the 1980s in a way we understand it today, the sponsorship market is thriving and evolving. Gone are the days of just eyeballs on a shirt logo; nowadays it is about co-creation of content for delivery over digital platforms, integrated campaigns to both the brand and property audiences, and shared storytelling.

Brands have more clear objectives in mind, and sports organizations have to be ready to meet that demand for results. Unlike any other marketing discipline, sponsorship can tap into so many different parts of a company and achieve so much if it's allowed to do so: from helping to attract and retain employees to driving sales. Money can't buy opportunities for entertaining key clients and prospects.

So, the challenge to agencies and brands is to understand what outcomes are to be achieved and what technology is available to help achieve that. New tools are being developed to help track brand mentions and logo exposure, which, alongside key event periods, can help to show how well the creative used can cut through and benchmark against your competitors.

There are many fundamentals that stay constant in this area, but having an awareness of technology and the way it can benefit your brand or client is key to success.

### **We live in an experience economy**

In a world where, in parts, there is so much that we own materially, there comes a point when it becomes quite meaningless. Thus, we've seen a shift in recent years towards experiences –those moments that live with you for the rest of your life and you can't wait to tell everyone about them.



The ability for a sport or brand to be part of that moment has become the holy grail for many. Why turn up as a fan to a basic stadium to pay too much for poor food and watch what is, in all probability, going to be an average game? For the hardcore fan, this is part and parcel of following your team or player through thick and thin, hoping for that amazing moment when it all comes right, and you can say that you were there.

### **Demand for a high-quality fan experience is snowballing**

Fans interact with their favourite club on multiple occasions, through different devices, applications and channels. They buy tickets, watch live matches, stream video clips, and consume all the news and views surrounding their club and its players. The sky is the limit, with more and more content being created, distributed and “socialised”. As demand for immersion in a seamless experience facilitated by a fully integrated and experience-rich digital ecosystem grows, football clubs will be pushed to the limit in terms of content and technology management.

### **Growing fan interactions leave a huge untapped data trail**

The growth and ubiquity of fan interaction and the related impact it is having on a club’s commercial strategy are complex and ambiguous to gauge. However, there is one constant aspect to this which applies regardless of the individual opportunities being captured: fans leave a significant trail of data as they pass by.

Do clubs really track and fully harness the potential of this data? Imagine a time when a club knows exactly what each of its fans likes to eat, where he wants to sit in the stadium, what video clips he enjoys watching or which of the club’s players’ jerseys he likes to flaunt. That, in our opinion, is the future of football and also what “digital native” fans will expect: when clubs are in a position to deliver a fully personalised experience to their fans. Pulling this off, however, will require more than just sourcing a good CRM system. Clubs will need to drive change throughout their business functions, emulating their players on the pitch and playing as a team.

### **Standalone business functions fail to project one truly unique brand to the fans**

The digital wave has already impacted every function within the club, with each developing its own digital solutions to optimise revenues and operations. Ticketing departments have introduced their own “white labelled” online platforms and are trying to optimise sell outs through queuing or secondary market systems. Some clubs, particularly in the UK, may soon be tempted to adopt dynamic pricing mechanisms. Merchandising is boosting operations, rolling out an integrated digital supply chain across physical points of sale and online, as well as boosting the ability to personalise products. Club websites and mobile applications are becoming ever more sophisticated in their distribution of text, data, video, and image content.



All of this, of course, needs to be shared across all mainstream social-media platforms to ensure maximum reach and fan engagement. So far, each of these distinct functions has generally worked apart from the others, as each evolved to meet very specific business requirements. As a result, one and the same fan is engaging with one and the same club across multiple, mostly disconnected functions that are generally not coordinated with one another. What is the way forward? How can a club make the transition to an integrated approach, enabling fans to truly experience the entire brand, rather than specific functions within that brand?

### **Social media is just the beginning**

While almost every aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has seen most major sporting competitions cancelled or suspended indefinitely, is unprecedented, national associations, federations, leagues, competitions, events and sport organizations are rapidly adjusting to new content scenarios and the general strategy.

The importance of digital media channels and especially the existing social media profiles

Social media is becoming more and more the focus point of fan communities to get the latest news, updates and clarity. Social media usage has seen an incredible uptake during the social distancing period in recent weeks.

But the pandemic doesn't only affect the sporting calendar, the national associations, leagues and clubs, it also heavily affects the partners and sponsors. Existing agreements during events and matches cannot be fulfilled, and the danger appears, the sponsors demand a return of funds due to unfulfilled contractual obligations.

### **The evolution and overall threat**

The calendar year 2020 started like business as usual, the football calendar was set with the highlight tournament of the Men's EURO2020 in June and July. The draw for the Nations League competitions were held in the beginning of March, which concluded the "match schedule" for the entire year. Everything was set! Existing long-term sponsorship agreements were in place, as usual, final assets for the events negotiated with domestic partners. But everything changed in the middle of March with the Covid-19 pandemic reaching Europe and locking / shutting down the entire continent, affecting all industries and, of course, the football schedule to its maximum. No games till, at least, June.

But what happens when those revenue streams that rely on in-stadium and physical matches cease to exist? How will sports entities replace this lost revenue? How will it affect not just teams, leagues and athletes, but the numerous companies and brands that align themselves with sport to promote their products to sports fans?



This uncertainty heavily affects existing sponsorship agreements, as jointly agreed marketing activations cannot be fulfilled as planned!

### **Not only a threat, but also an opportunity**

Through no fault of their own, sports entities can't deliver value to sponsors. To ensure a return of the sponsor investment and minimise the cuts, the NAs need more than just branding. Without their brand name on LEDs or their logo emblazoned on a jersey, how can these sponsors connect with the fans? The rights holders need to demonstrate how sports sponsorship can help customer acquisition and/or generate revenue. While it is something that most rights holders resist, now is the time to start connecting their partners and sponsors, incentivizing them to work together to grow exposure and increase ROI, which might (just might) go some way to prevent the mass abandonment of sports sponsorship.

### **Diversified fan engagement**

By and large, sport is an entertainment vertical. Across a broad majority, 99.9% of a national team's fanbase exists outside of the stadium —whether it's through TV, social media, or OTT content, fans get their sports fix through other means.

Whilst every single sports entity is currently focused on surviving this crisis, they must also prioritise their fan engagement plans in order to sustain their business for the future. And that means thinking outside of the box, making decisions outside of their comfort zone, and moving away from ticking the boxes of traditional sports marketing activation.

Sadly, no amount of "greatest goals" footage from any National Association is going to replace the euphoria of seeing a star player live scoring, the emotions and passion for the love of the game.

So, what's the answer? There is no doubt that the experience of social distancing is going to re-engineer how fans interact with the national associations, even once the virus has disappeared. In just a matter of weeks, we can already see how people are discovering new ways in which to socialise in a much more digital way.

Keeping operations going, while working from home, using tools such as Microsoft Teams, Skype or Zoom, just to name a few which appeared in our day-to-day routines over recent weeks, means that sports entities need to learn from these experiences, rethink how they can connect with their audiences for the benefit of both the fans and the sponsors, and start interacting and delivering digital experiences for fans that can, in part, replace the physical experience.

### **Shifting sponsors to digital offering and social platforms**



The modern sports fan is always connected, anywhere, anytime.

The rise of social media, OTT apps, and other mobile platforms have revolutionized the way fans want to watch and engage with sports. Expectations have shifted from traditional TV game viewing to fans demanding a deeper, more personal connection with teams and players across multiple platforms and devices.

We often talk about how technology is disrupting the sports industry, and yet, it is a human virus that has brought the industry—if not the world—to its knees. As the sports industry is forced to reinvent itself; as a result, innovative technology may just stand out as its saviour, and the real winners, will be the teams and rights-holders that are prepared to act differently.

The digital portfolio offers a strong path forward, from the website, a possible OTT or video offering, where pre-, mid- and post-rolls are assets and formats to be used or creating a series of new social media formats for sponsorship activation is a feasible solution to maintain a (high) level of satisfaction for sponsors and their brand visibility.

Offering premium content on digital platforms at no cost to the fan communities generates significant interest and views. Monetizing content directly across social media has probably never been easier. Dedicated formats, a series of assets, presented by sponsors or through video ads on Facebook or YouTube or any other form of advertising, allows algorithms to serve the audience with your content, maintaining sponsorship revenues.

The vast size of social audiences and the engaging nature of exclusive content from sport content makes it very attractive to sponsors.

### **Other departments needs**

Digital has impacted the football world and will continue to do so. Ticketing is very much a digital process. Merchandise sales online are a feature of the industry today and have been for some time. Social media intensifies the connection between fan and club and provides insights which clubs can learn from. Digital has driven down the cost of media creation to the point where most sport organizations now find they are able to produce and distribute more content, and of a higher quality, than was possible only a short time ago.

But digital natives will not settle for the status quo. They expect to be able to make as many clicks from the side lines as they see kicks on the pitch. The reality is that change will keep on coming, and faster than ever before. To succeed in engaging the new generation of fan, clubs will need to be flexible, agile, and not afraid to try on new, digital boots. Digital presents football with a set of powerful transformational opportunities to engage a new generation of fans and empower those already there. Having said that,



football clubs have one very significant attribute which clearly distinguishes them from other industries: as long as their financial health is basically secure, their oligopolistic control of the beautiful game is unlikely to be disrupted by any advances in technology. The passion and love of the fans will not wither away, provided performance on the pitch is maintained. We do not see digital as a disruption for the business of football clubs, rather, an enhancement with significant potential to improve both fan engagement and the bottom line.

## Ticketing

At this day and age, social media provides one of the most effective ways to spread the details about an upcoming event. And with several platforms to leverage (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter), you can get the word out about your conference or meeting to multiple audiences at one time, driving both awareness and ticketing sales.

In order to maximize your event's social media marketing efforts, you'll need some strategy behind your posting schedule. Potential attendees at your next meeting are hanging out on Facebook right now, but posting about your event over and over is not necessarily going to be effective in driving them to purchase a ticket. It's not enough for followers to just see your updates... you want to engage and convert them as well.

## Facebook

With more than 1.5 billion active users, Facebook provides an amazing avenue for awareness and exposure.

According to the social media giant, nearly 500 million people use Facebook Events each month. How can you design your event so that it will stand out from the crowd? When creating your event, be sure to do this:

- ✓ choose a branded cover photo;
- ✓ be specific about location, time, and category so Facebook can help promote your event;
- ✓ craft a compelling event description;
- ✓ place your ticket-purchasing link front and centre; and
- ✓ join in on group conversations

It doesn't matter which industry you're in, there's a community related to your event hanging out on social media. Be proactive about finding these groups on Facebook and building relationships with the people who manage them. The goal is to present yourself and your organization as a thought leader.



Becoming part of the online event community is making a long bet on Facebook. Don't expect instant results, but try to be an active community member and add value several times each week.

#### Use Facebook Live to your advantage

Live video streams are a great way to get your audience engaged from the get-go, and Facebook live makes it super simple to start a stream from your smartphone or laptop. Just set a date and time, and post about the stream ahead of time to create awareness among your followers.

When it comes to choosing which content to stream, this is a great opportunity to answer questions, promote players or athletes, and generate buzz by focusing on what makes your event enticing.

Keep in mind, too, that you can even stream your event alive, so people who aren't there can learn from the event (and see what they're missing out on).

#### Twitter

Compared with other social media outlets, Twitter provides the fastest way to see how people are reacting to news and events taking place in the world.

#### Create an event hashtag

Create an event hashtag that's short, unique and simple.

Whenever you post anything relevant to your upcoming event, include your hashtag in the messaging, add it to all of your social account bios, and don't stop there: promote your hashtag on all your other communication channels. These include your event website, promotional emails, print materials, and more.

#### Track event buzz with your hashtag

When interacting with event attendees and prospectives, encourage them to use your event hashtag in their relevant postings before, during and after the event. Then, use free tracking tools like TweetDeck or Hootsuite to determine the frequency of your hashtag's use and its popularity.

#### Host a pre-event Twitter chat

Twitter chats are conversations scheduled at a particular time and based around a topic defined by a hashtag. Consider hosting a one-off or a series of chats focussed on your event theme. Invite your guest speakers to host or co-host these chats.



A good Twitter chat moves fast. Tools like TweetChat will help you manage the conversations.

### Track Twitter lists

Did you know that you can organize your event prospects, attendees, exhibitors, and supporters in one feed through a Twitter list?

Here's how to use Twitter to search for the users that used your hashtag:

As you find users that attended your event, add them to a Twitter list. Here, you're creating a single space where you'll be able to keep an eye on what your target audience is saying and monitor their public conversations leading up to the next event.

When you're ready to promote an upcoming event, you'll have a ready-made list of past attendees to get started with.

### Instagram

Instagram has more than half a billion active users, but, in order to reach your audience, you'll need to think visually.

### Use Instagram stories

Instagram stories allow users to upload a series of connected clips and post those clips as a video story. For events, it's a great way to give followers on Instagram a "backstage pass" to event content and highlights.

You can also use Instagram stories as a way to provide daily teasers of what's to come along with the event. You can use the story feature to talk about pertinent topics and agenda items surrounding your event, and then link to the ticketing page so that followers can be turned into attendees easily.

### **An integrated approach to data analysis provides a holistic fan view which will personalise fan engagement**

Let me share with you a word by Borja Burguillos (2015):

Football clubs have one unique attribute that places them in a league of their own: they have fans, and fans are not just consumers. The degree of loyalty implicit in being a fan is a tremendous asset to a club, as it increases the number, frequency,



and intensity of interactions. By leveraging this relationship, clubs have a unique opportunity to gather information on each and every fan.

The potential depth and detail of the information they can gather is enormous. Top-flight clubs have incorporated centralised data-analysis solutions, consolidating data across their various platforms. They have already started generating a holistic view of their fan base. Leveraging the wealth of profile information they gather, they are in a position to analyse and cluster their fans in such a multifaceted way as to offer increasingly targeted content and increasingly relevant purchase offers and promotions. This significantly enhances the user experience as it enables fans to get what they want, when, and where they want it.

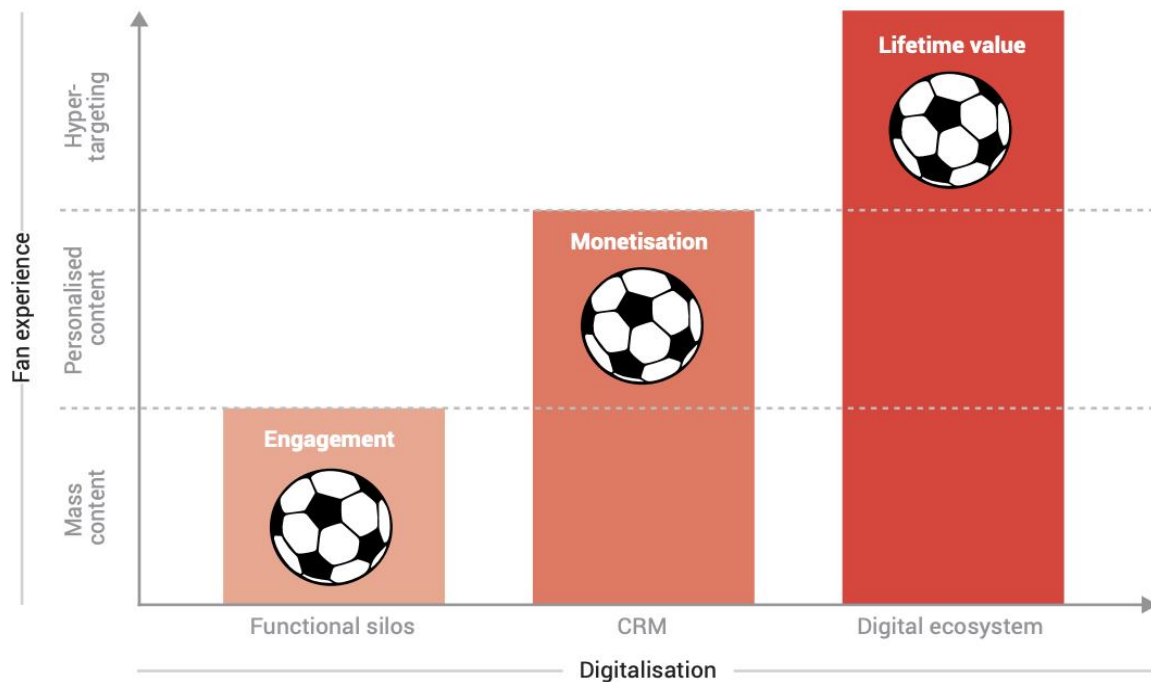
In the years ahead, we believe that, as the new generation of digital natives takes over, a completely personalised user experience will gradually become a natural expectation.

“Hyper-targeting” will become the new norm for fan engagement: fans will have customised access to the official club application with special content display on their favourite stars, merchandise wish-lists, and an interest-based, categorised news section. Looking beyond sports, Netflix –the online provider of movies and shows– provides a good example: the company adapts and tailors its web pages to each of its customers according to household characteristics, demographics, and interests.

For sports, too, we expect technology to converge across all club functions to a point where the content on clubs’ platforms will be intelligently and seamlessly tailored for every fan. Digital will become the “brain” that enables clubs to cut across the growing oceans of content and commerce opportunities by bringing in a wave of “context”, thus creating content that truly resonates with fans. (para 7-11)



**Figure 1: Hypertargeting in a digitally integrated ecosystem**



From *The waves of opportunity of digital and the impact on the Football ecosystem*, by B. Burguillos, 2015. PwC analysis. <https://borjaburguillos.wordpress.com/>

Now, let's read the words of five scholars (Mirković, Lukić, Lazarević & Vojinović) on this topic:

Changes in business environment toward digitalization significantly impact on all market participants, especially organizations. In order to operate efficiently, organizations are enforced to adopt new patterns of business and to adequately apply innovative organizational solutions inherent for modern digital age. Digital transformation is an imperative for organizations due to their necessity to stay competitive on the market, so organizations should experience significant structural changes. Some of the most common organizational barriers to digital transformation are: unclear vision and objective of digital transformation, lack of management understanding, knowledge and experience, lack of leadership skills, lack of organizational agility, rewards and incentives that are not aligned to digital transformation, unclear measurement and rewarding system, lack of employee involvement and engagement and employee resistance to change. Digital transformation should be considered as a journey and long run process which make organization more adaptable on requirements of modern business. It brings a lot of advantages to the company, but we also should take into account some



challenges that leaders and managers are faced with. One of those challenges is how to adequately prepare organizational structure that supports digital transformation. Speed and collaboration are the key factors that organizations need to achieve and master. That consequently means reducing the number of hierarchical levels, decentralization of decision making and greater collaboration among employees. As the traditional bureaucratic organizational models are rigid, without potential for further improvement in terms of new market conditions, it is obvious that new forms of organizational structure should be introduced. (2019, p. 1)

Four things will be very important in the future to succeed:

### **1. Behaviour change of your people**

Change will always encounter resistance in one form or another. Make sure you go through all stages of the behavioural change process when implementing projects and understand the drivers of different employees.

We always start with departments who are most open to change, and share their wins and positive experiences with other departments to influence behavioural change.

### **2. Processes definition and finetuning**

You cannot automate processes that don't exist. In order for automation to succeed, you'll have to thoroughly define what your processes are, which steps you want to automate, and where you want your team to intervene or get updates.

### **3. The right platforms and tools**

What works for one organization might not work for the other. Making the right choice should always start with looking to the future: what are you planning to achieve? Very often, organizations would just implement the cheapest or best tool without making a mapping of their digital ecosystem and the way each tool integrates with the other tools. If you're not happy about one tool, this one shouldn't impact your choice either. It also doesn't make sense to go for the best (and most expensive) option if you'll only be using 10% of the features. So, take a moment to analyse and create a future strategy before jumping into decisions.

### **Business operations**

Channelling fans' passion and energy through a structured crowdsourcing platform provides clubs with an efficient means in terms of cost and time of involving their fans worldwide in generating new ideas and finding better ways of carrying out certain



operations. Effectively, clubs benefit from their fans' insights, skills, and opinions. Crowdsourcing will enable clubs to strengthen trust and loyalty among fans, by allowing them to use the club's proprietary digital imprint, thus fostering their fans' sense of ownership. The greater the clubs are able to overcome existing inter-generational issues and to understand and adapt to the new dynamics and rules of the digital age, particularly in their dealing with digital natives, the better they will be at responding to changing circumstances in a timely fashion. Of course, what is hot for digital natives in one country may not necessarily appeal to fans in another country. Taking a cue from the younger, tech-savvy audience, who grew up with the Internet and social sites where information is freely available, is both a prerequisite for getting an effective crowdsourcing initiative launched and a good way of increasing the engagement of this particular demographic.

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