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How Technology is Changing the Sports Fan Experience

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The manner in which sports fans experience games they love is continuously evolving. As these changes occur, it is critical for sports teams to recognize the value and importance of fan engagement by evolving alongside them.

In recent years, teams have dedicated more time and resources toward cultivating a strong relationship with their fans. Teams and the leagues are investing in creating a

personalized fan experience; allowing teams to better understand and better serve their fanbase.

Tapping into innovative digital technologies allows you to be at the forefront of strengthening fan engagement on social media, inside stadiums, and fans watching any number of devices. We will cover a number of exciting ways in which technology is helping to improve fan engagement in sports.

Statistics and Analytics

On September 1, 2018, the Jacksonville Jaguars faced the New York Giants in East Rutherford, New Jersey to begin their season. This was no normal game, however. This was the first NFL game in which fans could place in-game wagers online through a sanctioned mobile betting app. Online betting and the average fans demand for in-game information and data will only become more prominent.

Online betting, fantasy sports, and a genuine curiosity in the games they love have increased fans' demand for live statistics and analytics in real time. Teams should lean into this desire, using technology to provide the fans with more data while they watch games.

Leaderboards, up-to-the-minute statistical updates, data visualization, and the capability for in-stadium betting takes the entertainment experience to another level. Using technology to bring data closer to fans is critical to maintain and grow fan engagement.

Fan Relationship Management

Few demographic groups place as high a premium on loyalty as sports fans. They remain loyal to their teams and they like to have their loyalty rewarded. Hence, it is imperative to leverage technology to manage relationships with fans to maximize benefits.

Community tools like websites and apps make it easier for fans to receive and consume vital event information. This includes any kind of information about an upcoming game from start times to information on food and beverage options within the stadium. Chatbots and voice technology can also play a key role by guiding fans through the website or app and addressing their concerns quickly and efficiently.

GPS-powered devices are another key technology that can provide such features as geofencing to either offer rewards points or send targeted offers to fans within a

designated region. Loyalty programs provide great rewards for passionate fans who attend games and follow teams by other means in addition to enticing them to attend games more frequently. Loyalty programs are fairly simple to implement and can be deployed via web sites or mobile apps.

Leveraging technology helps make the fan experience convenient and generally more pleasant — which leads to increased fan engagement and a better relationship between fans and teams.

Content Curation

Social media has become a driving force in the sports industry. Teams and athletes invest in extending their online presence by developing and promoting team-based content to stay connected to fans while they are at an event and post event.

Social networks such as Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are great platforms to stream video highlights of your team's games — either following or during an event. For fans in the stadium, this deepens the connection to the game n. According to MVPIndex, since the start of 2017, posts published by entities from the "Big 5" U.S. sports leagues (MLB, MLS, NBA, NFL, and NHL) and NASCAR have generated 16.7 billion engagements. Posting video content isn't the only way to engage your fans via social networking, however. You can post polls, hold AMAs in which players directly interact with fans either through posts or livestreaming videos, and respond to in-game fan questions or concerns.

Livestreaming is an even better way to give your fans an all-access showcase of your team's games or event experiences. Creating compelling videos recorded from field level perspectives, unavailable to the television viewer, can improve engagement by making fans watching at home feel like they are at the game. 30% of fans stream games to their phones or tablets — it makes sense to appeal to this fairly sizable demographic.

You can also produce content highlighting the strengths and off the field interests of your players — humanizing them and increasing the likelihood your fans will want to spend their entertainment dollars to see them play.

The partnership between Snapchat and NHL is one of the most conspicuous examples of how teams and leagues take advantage of the technology to deliver the ultimate fan experience. NBA went a step further and became one of WarnerMedia's initial partners

in their Content Innovation Lab. Their goal is to "explore areas including utilizing AT&T's IoT infrastructure, connected car partners and connected environments across stadiums, airports and cities to re-imagine localized content and fan experiences, as well as utilizing a vast array of creative talent to bring the immersive game experience beyond the court."

Next Wave of Entertainment

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) are increasingly being used in the sports industry to create new experiences for audiences allowing fans sitting at home to feel like they have a front row seat. Interactive games within your team's arena or stadium can even put the fan in the middle of the action as a participant — albeit a virtual one. There are many great examples currently available, such as NBA AR Basketball, which enables users to designate an "AR Portal" and subsequently walk through it into a 3D video recorded from an earlier game. The MLB Ballparks app uses AR to allow fans to access live data while they watch a baseball game in a stadium, gaining the ability to interact with detailed stats and data visualizations. When it comes to VR, the Golden State Warriors are one of the first teams to jump into the "viewing vantage point" technology by placing virtual reality cameras in a courtside seat to provide a premium experience to dedicated fans.

The concept of the "smart stadium" is also gaining steam. These are stadiums that completely optimize the fan's user experience — they can offer directions to the stadium, live updates on stats, and other information vital to improving the in-game experience. One of the leaders in this space is Amsterdam Arena, home of the soccer team AFC Ajax. By the time the stadium hosts the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship, officials plan to transform the arena into a futuristic building. Amsterdam Arena will have self-driving cars parking themselves, facial recognition tools controlling entry to the stadium, an artificial intelligence solution guiding fans to their seats, and thousands of sensors attached to objects like chairs, gates, and stairs to monitor usage and optimize overall stadium management. Take Tokyo's plan for the 32nd Olympic Games in 2020 for example. They plan to roll out smart stadia that incorporate real-time data and artificial intelligence to give fans more information in a timely manner.

Conclusion

Gone are the days when engaging the fans meant offering them a program with all the players numbers as they walk in the door. Sports fans are passionate and inquisitive.

They want to learn more about their favorite team and they want to do it in the time it takes to snap their fingers.

That's why it makes sense for sports teams to engage these fans using mechanisms and platforms fans will use and understand. As the manner the modern fan engages with sports changes, so too must change the way teams engage with these fans.

To get the most out of this technological evolution, teams should partner with a trusted expert who understands both the game and the technologies needed to boost fan engagement. Innovative technology solutions will increase both the enjoyment and engagement your fans will experience whether they are watching at home or in the stadium.

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