



The evolution of sport in an increasingly digital and data-driven world presents new opportunities for businesses.

— By Holly Millward

The 2018 Football World Cup has kicked off in Russia. Whatever your allegiances, already the tournament has served up a veritable feast of human headlines. We've revelled as World Champions Germany were beaten by Mexico, we've roared as Ronaldo scored a hat-trick against 2010 winners Spain, and we've revered the Icelandic goalkeeper Halldorsson who made a stunning Lionel Messi penalty save. At the time of writing, England are yet to kick off their campaign so we shall all hold our breath, paint our faces and close our eyes a bit.

We love sport because it is a celebration of being human. A celebration of success and as often of failure. Of willing the invincible and witnessing frailty. It is one of life's true remaining passion points, an aggregator of people and the starting point to explain why businesses may use it as a platform – simply, to connect.

Connect they sure can. Because there is an irony here that all this humanity sits in the context of an increasingly technological, data-driven and connected

world. So, I'll aim to keep this simple by addressing three areas. What the changes are, what the changes mean for the experiences and finally a view on how such advances can be used to allow businesses to generate growth.

It all starts with the consumer, because sport has customers and potential customers like any other business. The media through which the customer consumes the product drives the revenue, so when that starts to change, so do the tactics. Younger consumers prefer to watch sport on their digital devices, therefore social networks are beginning to stream sport live. We're also seeing non-traditional media companies aggressively pursuing sports rights, with Amazon announcing earlier this month that it will stream 2019/2020 Premier League matches in a landmark move for the game of football. Other tech players will surely follow.

If that is a brief snapshot of the story of change outside the stadia, so what of the experience at the events themselves?

In less than a month from now, you'll know that the British summer has truly arrived when the picturesque greenery of Centre Court at Wimbledon beams on to our screens. Let's paint the picture of this event. Wimbledon is the oldest tennis tournament in the world and widely considered the most prestigious. Since 1877, every player has worn all-white uniform. Strawberries and cream has been a delicacy at the tournament since the 19th Century. This most traditional of British sporting



events seems like the last place on earth you'd find cutting edge technology. Yet both on and off the court, customer innovations abound.

For instance, fans can chat to virtual assistant 'Fred' on their iPhone app as they navigate the tournament. Fred, an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot named after the great Fred Perry, will be helping visitors find their nearest strawberry stand as well as alerting them to who's playing on Centre Court next.

As well as AI, the sports industry is ramping up its investment in Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies, acknowledging their potential to disrupt content consumption. At Wimbledon, those watching the practice matches can, through AR, simply point their phone at any player and gain insight into their past performances and why they might be the one to watch. Meanwhile in the VR space, installing 360-degree cameras in stadiums will mean the possibility of offering the experience of events in virtual distribution. Strawberries and cream in my back garden it is then.

We know that information is power and in the case of sport, it flows both ways. We might well know more about the performance of our stars on the field, but in return, more is known about our lives and our behaviours. Where GDPR allows it, the golden nuggets of information for businesses are there. From information around frequency of our attendance, to transaction data, to the pointier end in our demographics, life stage and purchase preferences.

What does this mean for the business of sport and those who choose to invest in it?

As we see it, these evolutions create huge opportunity for businesses. Like any compelling sporting drama, this is a race of sorts too. Those in the business of sport are seeking ways to better understand data from this wide array of sources and hone strategies and operations accordingly, whether event organiser or sponsor.

Sources of increased data through sport include significant fan bases, social media behaviour, and event transactions and engagements. As a sponsor with revenue targets, ultimately this data can be used to determine who might buy what and when, from an insurance product to a roof over one's head. Going forward, smart use of data will be fundamental to marketing efforts, allowing businesses to get ahead of the competition and demonstrate ROI.



We are already on the road to an ever more connected world and the platform sport is no different. To close where we started, the power of sport remains to connect with people through passion points. The drama that unfolds will continue to showcase everything that makes us human. But sport sits in the context of what we believe is an exciting new world, for us as consumers and those businesses that seek to drive value from it. If harnessed in the right way, information can be the force for better business and growth. 



Holly Millward
Managing
Director, Asia
CSM Sport &
Entertainment

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