

SPECIAL EDITION

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THE DATA
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DATA POINTS

Technology is giving rise to an unprecedented range of experiences for the sports fan but it is also creating new points of contact to give rights holders, and their partners, a better image of their supporters than ever before. The Sports Consultancy gathered a handful of its key clients in London in March to discuss how to gather and use data to deliver ever better relationships.

By Eoin Connolly. Photographs by Graham Fudger.

What's your data relationship with your fans? What are your key points of contact for gathering data?

GO: *We use data to drive client solutions. We come at it from a content intelligence perspective. I think there are other data-gathering sources that we are now getting more and more involved in – looking at tickets, building CRM, how rights holders use content and marketing for their partners and themselves. If you've got international expansion plans, and if you're looking at new events in new markets, how do you work with your partners? You obviously want to have access to the fanbase so we're starting to look at how purposed content can serve to help gather that data, create interventions and calls to action such as driving trial, subscriptions or transactions.*

We've built a data analytics tool within our business which is a content intelligence tool, which allows us to look at fan segmentation and, again, look at other inputs from rights holders to form a wider strategy. So I think we're only one part of the equation but an important part – video and content continues to be a really important part of how rights holders engage with fanbases not just domestically but internationally. So that's really where it sits in our business.

AB: *From our perspective, it's about data and analytics allowing our clients to optimise revenues by using data to make more intelligent, strategic business decisions. And we use that across every aspect of our business from our venue-planning business – which cumulatively has about 1,000 years' worth of trading*



The panel

- A** Gregg Oldfield (GO), Chief Executive, Engage Sports Media
- B** Robert Datnow (RD), Managing Director and Co-Founder, The Sports Consultancy
- C** Ali Russell (AR), Director of Media and New Business, Formula E Holdings
- D** Angus Buchanan (AB), Managing Director and Co-Founder, The Sports Consultancy
- E** Juliet Slot (JS), Chief Commercial Officer, Ascot Racecourse
- F** Tracey Greaves (TG), Chief Commercial Officer, The Goodwood Group

data for UK sports venues, which we then use to allow new clients to understand what sort of facilities to put in the mix to make sure that sports facilities are going to be successful in the long run – through to our economic impact and host city selections for major events, where we're using primary research and data to inform the host city and government clients on the sorts of events that they should be attracting to market.

Within the rights marketing business, it's about helping our clients on the

rights holder side understand who their audience is and what their consumer preferences are to allow us to then more effectively target sponsors, and make really good sponsorship propositions based on audiences and fan and consumer behaviour. So for us it's about taking the data and creating value-added insight from that data to inform our consultancy and our rights marketing services.

TG: *From a Goodwood perspective, as I'm sure for every business, data is the*

most valuable asset we've got. I think in terms of how we gather that data, we go through all the traditional routes: guests to the Estate, subscriptions, My Goodwood, Wi-Fi, etc. We have worked hard on building a digital audience of 150 million and we're now looking at how we drive those people back to our platforms so that we can own that data and obviously tailor the communications going to them.

JS: *Ascot is pretty similar to Goodwood in that respect. We only have a racecourse – we don't have a whole estate – so our customer focus is primarily around the racegoers. Our core data source is ticket information and we use it voraciously to examine and understand all the customers using campaign profiling, and that then informs our marketing. We use content marketing in terms of how we engage customers and encourage them to buy tickets and to come to our various events.*

As Tracey says, content is absolutely vital. We've just hired a head of content to really find that right balance between trying to engage and get people involved in your brand, and to feel a part of your journey and your narrative, but also to get them to buy – because ultimately that's what we want: it's not just about getting some really nice stories out there, we are a venue which needs customers.

In terms of how it works for our sponsors, it's absolutely vital. We share a lot of information per race day, per enclosure, who comes, what the dynamics are, what the demographics are, enabled by data from our customers. One of our main challenges, however, is that we only know the data from the ticket purchases. We have a large percentage of our audience as groups. About 30 per cent is the group market and we only have information from the ticket purchaser, so we're using a lot of social media and different channels to try and engage around the group to get them to share their data with us so that we can engage with them. We try and have an exchange with our consumers.

AR: *I think it's great because we're all in racing – they may be different formats but they're all racing – and I think what's so interesting is that data is king. I'm a true believer in that you've got to know your customer, and you've got your primary data sources which are ticketing, website*



subscribers, and I think that's fairly standard across all of the rights holders.

But as we develop, content is so important to all of our businesses, and content gives us an opportunity to cross the barrier between someone who comes to an event, feels an event, buys at an event, and somebody who is at home watching an event. Content allows us to have a 365, always-on strategy, and I think what makes it interesting is profiling the content.

AB: *It's about your ability to personalise the fan experience through the use of data and insight. We still often look to the States for really advanced data-driven marketing through insight – and the NHL franchise Tampa Bay Lightning were using some more advanced forms of AI and facial recognition. They have been doing some extraordinary things in the stadium. They were conducting some in-game polling on sponsor promotions to work out which was most popular, then they were looking at facial recognition to see which sponsor promotions in-game were working out to be most popular, fans were personalising the content that went on the replay screens, and then the really smart thing was the extent to which they were using that insight to inform and grow incremental revenue.*

They were allowing fans to express their music choices by accessing the captured music choices on their mobile phones. The fans were able to play music in the stadium, and they were then able to use that insight to programme their entertainment for the forthcoming season and also make ticket promotions to the fans for season ticket renewals. So you just think, it's such a virtuous circle: you're using your marketing to enhance

Both Tracey Greaves and Juliet Slot are encouraged by the possibilities data holds for creating better tailored fan experiences on behalf of partners

your incremental revenues, but also your sponsors are then attached to that data and that marketing to enhance their overall connection to the fans.

How do you set the ground rules in terms of your relationship with fans and how you use their data?

GO: *From our point of view, as an agency, we're advising clients that we work with to have an audit, where you look at how you are capturing data. With the changes coming in around opting in, it's about making sure that you are compliant in terms of how you manage that data, how you store that data and then ultimately how you use it. From our point of view, even from a content point of view, we have email lists and databases and UGCs, so there's a huge amount of content that sits outside of just the content that's communicated from the rights holder and from the brand out to the fans because the fans are effectively also creators. So in a way, it's an interesting exchange to look at – if they're starting to share data or content themselves, they have to have an engagement point for exchanging data.*

AR: *I think the point for all of our organisations is the ability to bespoke content and communication based on the needs of the customer. I think it's absolutely key and I think it's where sport is probably winning, because it does have that emotional attachment.*

The number of channels that you support now and the type of content that you bespoke for those channels is very specific. It's fragmented but what it allows you to do is build a much longer-lasting relationship, because what you do is you change content. It's not about ►

recutting; some of it is shot specifically for mobile platforms, in a tonality which is specific for that clientele and that customer demographic.

TG: *You're putting the power in the customers' hands. I'd like to think we've always done that and allowed people to tell us what they want to tell us, and we've posed the question. So an example would be: tell us the make and model of your car – and 85 per cent of all customers coming to a motorsport event have been doing that.*

Now, that is optional, but then in doing it, from a reward and recognition point of view, we're able to work with our partners to use that data in a way that allows the customer to receive an exclusive experience "just for me". And then for the partner, I'm delivering them an audience because I can actually tell you that this is the make and model of their car.

So I think we can use it in a really intelligent way. One of the biggest risks as rights holders is around social platforms and, actually, how you draw those people from those social platforms back to your own website or platform to enable you to really start to build a picture of the person that you're talking to. And with the changing dynamics, particularly around Facebook at the moment, we're all being held slightly to

ransom, so we've got to find our own way of incentivising those audiences to want to talk to Goodwood directly. Otherwise, potentially, you're shutting off a conversation that you just can't get through another way.

Another thing that could come from this is that fans and consumers more widely are going to become conscious of their data as a commodity that they can trade. How ready do you need to be to give them something tangible in exchange?

JS: *I welcome GDPR, because I only want to communicate with people who want to be communicated with. There's nothing worse for your brand than people getting a lot of emails and just deleting them. So, ironically, even though it's going to be a lot of work – and we're going through a voracious, detailed process at the moment to ensure that we will be compliant – where we will actually end up will be really positive.*

It's a value exchange. Those sorts of things where you're really understanding the consumer journey and how they want to relate to your brand, and how you can affect and improve that, I think are as important as offering deals on tickets.

RD: *I think GDPR will stimulate rights holders to make sure that the data they hold is relevant; kept up to date; and used for a legitimate purpose that is aligned to what the fan wants. Informed consent has a specific meaning, and if the data that is held is irrelevant or out of date, and fan preferences are changing, the rights holder ought to know about that and the fan can now influence that. I think it will promote a much more cohesive relationship between fan and rights holder. I think the benefits will be that rights holders will be required to understand their fans and their changing preferences over time much better. You can't guarantee that somebody who is 25 who drives a particular car or likes a particular event or wants their data used for a particular purpose will continue to like or want those things in five or ten years' time. It will shortly be incumbent on the data processor, to keep that particular type of information up to date.*

It will mean that for the brands, the hosts, the F&B sellers, the merchandisers – that whole ecosystem of stakeholders that interact with the fan – it will hopefully be a virtuous circle, because the content will become more bespoke, the merchandising will be more directed at particular segments of the fans. Maybe that's an intended or an unintended consequence of GDPR, but I think it's good news.

Datnow argues that by listening to what fans are sharing about their interests online, rights holders and sponsors can make surprising connections



AB: *With fairly stringent penalties if you're not getting it right we've found clients with a wide range of responses. One client's been emailing us – probably rightly, but with a strict interpretation of the legislation – to ask us whether we should remain on their mailing database. This is a client that we deal with on a daily basis. But we're also doing a secret shopper service for some of our clients where we're going through the ticket-buying journey, clicking all of the consents or opt-ins or opt-outs, and then seeing what comes by the way of marketing information afterwards.*

We are finding that some of our clients have quite a long way to go before they're ready, and that's just this juncture between the communication between them as the ticket seller and the marketing teams. And clearly, there is work to be done, which could and should be a little bit alarming unless that's resolved by May.

This obviously has implications for the work you're doing with partners, but how would you generally construct a relationship when it comes to data to serve that sponsor's need as well as your own?

TG: *As a rights holder, we're never in a situation where we are sharing customers' data. What they're buying is the profile of the customer that you have, both physical and digital, and our job as the rights holder is to give them creative solutions as to how they could activate their presence at an event in the best possible way that will draw that audience to them, and actually for the customer to see that there's an absolute fit about why that particular brand is there and why that's useful to them.*

I think that we, as luxury brands, have all built loyalty with our customer base, and I think that's really important. That trust is absolutely everything, and if you break that once then in this day and age that relationship is gone. So certainly, their data is secure – it's just how we use the essence of it to drive partnerships.

JS: *We've got one partner where we actually emailed a group of customers – not very many, about 2,000 – inviting them to experiences where we were only having 20 of those customers join their event. Customers had chosen to come because it was something that they were eager to learn and know about, wrapped up within the raceday itself. And it's worked brilliantly: the brands are really excited because they're saying, 'Well, I've had a high proportion of people out of that who are potentially going to be real customers for us in the long term.' Normally, finding new customers is much, much harder to do.*

We're trying to create case studies to show other potential brands that this is actually much more sophisticated and a better way for them to try and activate, rather than saying, 'Can we send an email out to your database?' We just say no, we don't do that.

GO: *It's about data and then creativity. It's really about finding the creative solutions. I don't think people call them sponsors anymore, it is partners, and people want long-term relationships. So how does a rights holder's brand fit with a partner's brand?*



Proper management and analysis of data can help better understand the movements of fans on matchdays, leading to improved experiences and partnerships

Ultimately, it's about understanding both the data and the KPIs: what are you trying to achieve and what assets can the rights holders use to package it as a digital content and integrated solution. And having it on-event and off-event, because most of the time if you have 30 to 40 days of on-event activity, the rest of the year you have still have to communicate with those fans. In fact, that's what brands want. They want to be able to communicate frequently and have that relationship all year round. Remember, having data and creativity also allows you to constantly adapt and evolve the relationship as it changes throughout the lifetime of the partnership.

TG: *That's right. I think the landscape of sponsorship has changed and it is partnership, but you're helping brands understand that they're no longer partnering with an event. Actually, they're having an opportunity to engage with that audience all year round; our job is to help them understand how they go about telling their story 12 months of the year, not for the event. So Goodwood now becomes a media house; it isn't an event that you're sponsoring.*

AR: *Which is a huge change, isn't it? I think that's the digital age. But when it comes to partner acquisition and making sure you've got the right partner, from a sponsorship point of view, traditionally – my background is rugby and football and multi-sport, and even sponsoring from the other side in terms of FMCG, and*

I think we've all had to be a lot more disciplined moving forward to make sure that we have the right brands involved, and that you are turning down certain brands that aren't appropriate, that don't fit.

JS: *I think the other thing that we've found more and more is that our family of partners have begun to work together, because they're not competing as they're in different categories. But they've just been able to do things together to create opportunities that are actually even better, with the combination of the two of them working together for our customers versus them all doing separate things on their own. We've really tried to encourage that: we have a sponsors' club meeting and lots of events with the sponsors together so that they can then start talking to each other and come up with ideas.*

We had an event yesterday where we launched our style guide; Cunard are sponsoring that and two of the other brands were there and they started talking about how they could do an activation together. I sit there just listening and thinking, this would be fantastic, because I know it would be a real value-add to our customers. That's ultimately what we really care about.

AB: *That's exactly what we're selling now. Logo impressions is probably a relatively crude tool for sponsorship and, especially in the digital age, it's much more a ticket to access engaging content and an audience and then using it in a really* ▶



agile way. Clearly, while to an extent this is changing, it actually goes back to the old best practice principles of sponsorship, which is that the brand should always be looking to enhance the spectator's experience of the sport and adding something, rather than simply riding the exposure.

And I think what we have now is a unique, game-changing opportunity to do that. Certainly, the way in which when we're going about structuring a sponsorship proposition for a rights holder, we're increasingly trying to work off the data and the content – hence the relationship with Engage – and then trying to bring brands' content and engagement as part of the sponsorship rather than simply logo impressions.

JS: One of the things that's really interesting is that back in the day, when we were selling sponsorship, it was really hard for sponsors to judge it so they used the media value of their brand and their logo to judge. I always used to say: 'We're not just badging. If that's the relationship that you want then we're never going to compete with football, but what we can do is give you a different opportunity.'

But now, with the onset of digital, we can genuinely give some really strong metrics, which is so useful and helpful for brands when they evaluate. We make commitments: if you do this, we will guarantee a minimum impression or engagement. That then is much more helpful to those brands in making that decision as to whether to invest or not.

Another thing to consider is that if you have a partnership that goes two years now – never mind three or five or six years – the points of contact in the digital space will change so dramatically. How do you build the right level of flexibility into a partnership to not just get through that change but exploit it to mutual benefit?

AR: The DNA of Formula E is about being transparent, so it's about behind the scenes coverage at all points. We try to give the consumer as much information as the teams have, so the teams' data in terms of speed, in terms of energy levels, the fan gets that at the same time as the teams get that. So what you have is teams making decisions based on the same information that the fans get themselves. So I think what we've created is something which is a far more immersive experience than you would get certainly at a motorsport event. Quite a lot of the events that I've been involved in, we try to take away any filter at all, and have an authentic, real experience that's aimed at a family audience. That's really where I think our digital experience is going at the event.

At home, we're using a variety of OTT solutions that complement our broadcast rights. For us in broadcast, because we're a new sport, it's very, very important that we get free-to-air and we give people an opportunity to see and view our product, but we also think that for those heavy users and those users that become fans, they need a more immersive

Oldfield and Buchanan suggest that data can be used to help derive creative solutions for partners and find further value

experience. They need to have more relevance. They need to have more data. And that's where OTT gives us a far richer viewing experience.

RD: I was thinking about the Olympic Channel in this context and about the gap that the channel was trying to fill that broadcasters weren't already filling, and content that fans couldn't already access. I think what is becoming clear from the one billion hits that the Olympic Channel has already had, I understand that 70 per cent of individuals using the Olympic Channel are under 35. There is a particular demographic that wants to access archive content, non-live content, and other particular types of content like the magazine content – behind the scenes, in the dressing room, the lifestyle; the segmented content that speaks to specific groups of hard-to-reach individuals. It's this data-driven segmented approach that resonates with the brands who want to reach those individuals. So I think the app technology, and the digital and OTT technology which is now coming, would again provoke positive behaviour. It's understood about budget constraints but I think, again, with the technology and the ability to interact, that the potential to enhance the sponsor value, the fan experience and then the hosting experience should be a virtuous circle.

I think that there are two other behaviours which are emerging from our observations. I think the quality and depth of data that we are now able to access, provided this is done legitimately, for proper purposes and with informed consent, to throw a net over an event and be able to hear virtually what people are talking about – are they talking about fashion, or diet or health, or travel – and then being able to extract that data and analyse it and just be smart about its application and ask the pertinent questions? Are there categories of sponsorship that we haven't really thought about? Is there particular content that we didn't quite realise the majority of our fans are actually interested in? That's one area I think is changing quite rapidly. People are pretty vocal and social.

The second thing which is changing is user-generated content. My sense is that there used to be quite an aversion from the rights holder's perspective to

breaching exclusivities with broadcasters, treading on toes, and the lack of control over the event messaging. All of that stuff used to be limited by ticketing terms and conditions, but now there seems to be a realisation that, actually, there's a significant net benefit all round in fans generating and posting their own complementary content, capturing authentic moments that the broadcaster can't capture, behind-the-scenes moments, and real life at the event, un-filtered.

AB: Well that's what a younger generation wants from its consumption of sports content, and that is the demographic timebomb for most sports. The average age of a Premier League fan is 41. Then you get into most of the major ball sports and you get into the late 40s and early 50s for the average age.

TG: But I think for brands, equally, if you can come up with a user-generated content experience that connects a brand to that, people love sharing. Going on Instagram and being able to set up an Instagram Story, being able to set up a gallery, people feeling like they're part of the event, and that is connected to someone like MasterCard in some way, that's fantastic for them. Connecting an audience to a brand that will traditionally find it quite difficult to get cut through, we call that "borrowing our cool". UGC is perfect for them to activate.

AR: It's all about participation now. Gone are the days when it was a passive experience watching sport, sitting in front of a screen and just watching it. Now everyone's got a screen on – we've got screens on in here – and it's that relationship.

We've created Fan Boost, where you vote for your favourite three drivers. It may not sound like a sporting context but the most popular drivers get a Fan Boost to allow them to overtake or defend on a motorsport manoeuvre. Now, that's very, very new to sport but it will change, that sort of involvement will change, and that is probably going to be more prevalent in sport than it's ever been.

We see the opportunity, particularly as a new sport, as to create a different type of sport experience, which is far more entertainment-based and far more participative. Esports, for us, is allowing

fans to drive against real drivers, and ultimately our vision is to have real-time gaming – so you'd be able to drive against real drivers, in real time, from the comfort of your home, from the bus that you're in, even from the plane that you're on using Wi-Fi. I think that digital age allows us to have far more of an immersive experience than sport has traditionally been able to provide outside of the live experience.

JS: In a slightly different context and not so much aimed at a young audience, but at a new audience, we're working with our Chinese broadcaster, Sina, and we've created a live screening event of Royal Ascot in Beijing. So for those people who can't come over, they go to an event and they wear Royal Enclosure dress code, they have a fashion show and dinner; betting's not allowed in China but they all get tokens for horses in a race and whoever wins gets prizes.

It's trying to use the OTT platform to create a live event in a different market, and it's something that we really want to build upon now because helping us to take our brand into new audiences – whether it's younger or new audiences – they won't come to you so it's bringing yourself to them. We're really excited by this concept of creating a Royal Ascot moment in other markets.

All of these ambitions will lead to bringing together a lot of big data sets. What's the work that's going to have to go into the next few years to get all of those things to talk to each other?

JS: I would say, from our point of view, we need to have the different capabilities within the business working incredibly closely together. IT, digital, marketing, broadcast and operational teams need to work very,

Russell argues that sport should encourage a more "participative" approach to content and data



closely together to see what best practice we can apply – within our budget constraints but within the opportunity for building and taking forward the customer experience and not falling behind. It's really, really hard to keep up now but you've got to pick a few things and do them well because that is more powerful for consumers.

Our customers come back one and a half times a year as an average attendance. So I have to remember that. I'm living it every day but they come back one and a half times a year, so they may come for two days of a royal meeting and then come back the next year. Incremental improvement in that experience year on year is absolutely noticed and we see that in our research, so we pick a few things to really do well and make an impact.

AR: I think the big point is that there's a huge amount of technology and it's about not being driven by technology. It's about being driven by customer need and customer opportunity, and it's keeping that customer at the core, and then working out from the customer. You're always focused on what you're trying to do as a business and to develop the business. When you get to utopia, utopia's changed.

I've been at Formula E since the start and we started five and a half years ago. We're in the middle of season four at the moment. And even if I look at platforms, Facebook wasn't even housing and streaming video, or certainly not streaming video live at that moment in time. The whole market has changed and it will continue to change. You've got Snapchat, what are they going to do next? You've got Instagram growing unbelievably. You've got the Chinese and Indian markets, both far more important than they've ever been because of the growing middle class, and they have their own platforms.

All I would say is that if you keep focused on the customer, and that customer journey and the customer relationship that you're trying to build, technology actually fits in and is an enabler, and it's dynamic. It's constantly changing. So I wouldn't say that any of us round the table would have the perfect solution because things are changing at such a rate of knots that you just have to be open to ensuring that you're doing it in such a way that you're focused not on the vanity of technology but actually on it being that enabler. ●



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