

YouTube Works For Brands 2017

WEARESOCIAL - ADIDAS

GAMEDAY PLUS - A NEW WAY TO BUILD AN AUDIENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Campaign run dates: Sept 2015 - May 2016

Media budget: €395,174

This case study shows how adidas Football used the power of episodic YouTube content to not only strengthen its associations with the UEFA Champions League, but to also build, engage and sustain a hard-to-reach, young football audience.

A case study that introduces the creation of the world's first brand-owned online football show: Gamedayplus. An innovative editorially-led content approach that helped adidas to create a non-intrusive advertising model that did not wear out, giving fans unrivalled access to unique football experiences.

In this paper we show how episodic YouTube content built a predominantly organic audience of millions and a strong community of engaged fans, with an ever-decreasing average cost-per-view of Gamedayplus activity. All this whilst increasing subscriber numbers, exposing fans to wider adidas Football content.

ENTRY

Background

adidas is an iconic brand that only sponsors the best football players, teams and competitions to establish itself as the leading global football brand. And the UEFA Champions League has long been a key asset for adidas to consolidate and extend its football credentials.

In 2014, adidas decided it was time to take this iconic partnership with UEFA to the next level, by seeking to strengthen its relationship with a younger, global audience of football fans: a key demographic when it comes to selling boots and other football kit. This activation was positioned to drive adidas' competitive brand advantage in a very crowded market.

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The adidas UEFA Champions League brief to us was clear:

- 1) Make adidas the hottest brand among young football fanatics.
- 2) Build brand love and advocacy.
- 3) Make the adidas UEFA Champions League sponsorship famous.

The challenge

Although the UEFA Champions League is one of the biggest global football competitions, reaching young football fans is now harder than ever. The reality is that young people are shifting their viewing habits, being 2.5x more likely to watch online rather than TV content. Also, the interruptive TV advertising model is becoming less effective among this audience, with 75% of millennials considering traditional advertising to be disruptive.

Moreover, the traditional TV campaign-based model is creating frustration among marketers. Campaign thinking can be short-termist and expensive. Once the mass media push is over, the audience disappears, its attention moving on rapidly. It doesn't matter how big your campaign is; based on this model, it wears out. Fast.

On top of this, football is becoming less accessible for fans, especially younger ones. Match tickets and TV sport subscriptions are often too expensive: they are on the outside looking in.

This has created a perfect storm, presenting us with significant challenges: how could we drive the UEFA Champions League sponsorship to reach, engage, retain and build younger viewers' online interest?

Social media: the new touchline

In order to overcome these challenges, we spent time getting under the skin of young football fans. Specifically, 14 to 19-year-olds. Football is much more than a 90-minute match for them. When a match is over, they rush online, mainly to YouTube, to look for related content: game highlights, Messi's signature moves, goals by rising stars and tricks and opinions from new influencers. For our target audience, social media is the new touchline, filled with original and engaging content.

It became clear that YouTube should be the football platform of choice for our audience. We had to harness YouTube's power to build and maintain our audience. And so, we developed a strategy to move away from the classic "here-is-another-viral" approach.

We wanted to do things differently to make the most of the platform, tailoring our activity to the audience in order to achieve our objectives. Our strategy had three sacred principles:

- 1) Be non-interruptive: We wanted to sustain and build young football fans' attention. We wanted them to desire our activity. And we wanted our content to become an integral part of the UEFA Champions League experience.
- 2) Be enduring: Content had to be ready to launch at specific times to create buzz. And it had to retain interest after matches had ended.

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3) Increase access: We needed to give the audience unrivalled access to great football stories, star players and the best football influencers to improve their football experience.

A successful new content idea

Gamedayplus was our creative solution. An editorially-led idea, executed across 15 episodes to become the first ever online brand-owned Champions League show. Each episode gave money-can't-buy access to clubs, star players and influencers. Each video was designed to entertain fans, reward them, teach them new footballing techniques and to smartly drop unique product stories.

Each of the 15 episodes was launched on the Monday of UEFA Champions League match weeks, to capitalise on the buzz created around individual matches, happening on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

To complement this publishing approach, we also re-cut existing footage to help us to tease, trigger and excite the audience, and to give more focus to specific players, influencers and stories.

The first season's results were spectacular. Gamedayplus gained 12.3m YouTube views and 138k new subscribers to the adidas Football channel during episode-publishing weeks. Also, adidas was the most talked about UEFA Champions League sponsor. In other words, in season one, we won the UEFA Champions League.

The tricky second season

When we analysed the first season's results with the client to plan for season two, we realised a cruel fact: no team has won the UEFA Champions League two years in a row. This provoked us: we wanted to have an even better second season with Gamedayplus. We knew we didn't need a revolution, but an evolution to allow us to build and maintain our audience. An evolution to help us prove that Gamedayplus wasn't just a one-hit-wonder.

And so, we planned to keep building and reinforcing our three strategic principles:

- 1) Be non-interruptive.
- 2) Be enduring.
- 3) Increase access.

To improve on these three areas, we applied a threefold evolution to our content's creative strategy.

1) Tweaking the format

Our ambition was to strip back our content to become an even more desirable part of the online football experience. We wanted to create content that fans would like more, comment on more and share more. To achieve this, we decided to evolve the episodic creative format, to shorten episodes, reduce the length of player interviews and create unique stunts and stories to bring fans closer to the players: all designed to dial up the drama. These changes helped us to increase 'likes' by 67%, 'comments' by 130% and 'shares' by 14%.

2) Being smarter with asset management

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Additionally, we aimed to create content that would reach more fans around the world for longer periods of time. However, we couldn't invest silly amounts of money in paid media in order to sustain content reach as we had to maintain a high level of creative quality throughout.

Our solution was simple: to be smarter with our content management, including improved content referral, syndication and translated subtitles in 19 different languages. These simple actions allowed us to widen global interest and reach, delivering incredible subscriber growth in markets such as Russia (+177%), Brazil (+45%) and Mexico (+38%).

3) Deeper and better access

Thirdly, we aimed to give our audience better access to the players and influencers they love. To achieve this, we evolved the way we managed the talent pool and sponsorship equities. We started using three millennial influencers to host the show, including at least two football stars every week in special cutdown segments, leveraging the talent in a better way.

All of this helped us to create a bigger halo of interest that translated into a growth of views from the browsing features within YouTube (+9%). Cumulatively, this resulted in organic views accounting for 65% of total views.

Season two's final results

Season two's evolution ensured our creative work performed stronger against the overall objectives with total watch time for season two equating to an incredible 95 years.

We made adidas the hottest football brand among football fanatics with the second season gaining an impressive rise in total video views: +32% increase from the previous season, growing from 12.3m to 16.2m.

We drove further increases in brand love and advocacy with the second season not only managing to sustain subscribers of the YouTube channel, but driving subscriber growth by 32%, increasing from 138k to 182k. More importantly, this engaged audience helped us to reduce average CPV (cost-per-view) by 42%, to €0.07.

Finally, we made the adidas UEFA Champions League sponsorship famous by standing head and shoulders above the other Champions League sponsors in terms of social share of voice (30.8k total mentions: 48% of the total). The next most talked-about brand, Nissan, gained 16.1k social mentions, followed by Heineken (10.2k), Gazprom (5.3k) and MasterCard (2.3k).

Conclusion

This case study has demonstrated that episodic content can help brands to build and sustain an audience of engaged fans over time. It proves that with an editorially-led approach to content, brand activity becomes less intrusive, content stays relevant and gives audiences a consistently improved experience.

This paper has shown that when it comes to content, sometimes, doing less can mean much, much more. In our second season, we achieved significantly improved results by both evolving the creative format and by being smarter with the way that we managed assets and their delivery.

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More importantly, we have demonstrated the benefits of building an engaged audience over time. By generating new subscribers, we have radically reduced the cost of reaching them. And we have created a halo effect around adidas Football, increasing viewer exposure to additional branded content.

Overall, this paper has shown that with an episodic approach to content we have gone beyond the mere activation of a sponsorship. We have proven that a well-planned editorial approach can have a greater brand effect.

ADDITIONAL INFO

We used several sources in our paper, which can be found in footnotes in this Google Docs version: https://docs.google.com/document/d/13v80MYS3s2vP08MD5_nmKUszIQ-cOjfqQA4QM6fWNmk/edit