



360° Fan Engagement

Understanding fans; maximising opportunities.



Introduction

Fans are brand-loyal. In fact, Gensler's 2013 Brand Engagement Survey¹ found that sports fans are the most brand-loyal over and above cars, technology, clothing and food. This loyalty is something that, for many years, sports clubs have taken much for granted. In recent years, however, we have begun to see much more emphasis put on the fan, especially in North America, but increasingly also in the rest of the world.

For anyone still not sure how to approach their fan engagement strategy, or wanting to learn more, here we give you an insight into starting to understand sports fans and then into the 4 core areas that a 360° view of fan engagement should focus on.

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¹ <https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/gensler-research-institute/2013-brand-engagement-survey>

What makes a sports fan tick?

Firstly, a look into what is important to a sports fan. Understanding users is at the heart of any project that we undertake and so should be at the heart of any fan engagement strategy.

We started out by stating the loyalty of sports fans. The danger for sports organisations is taking this for granted.

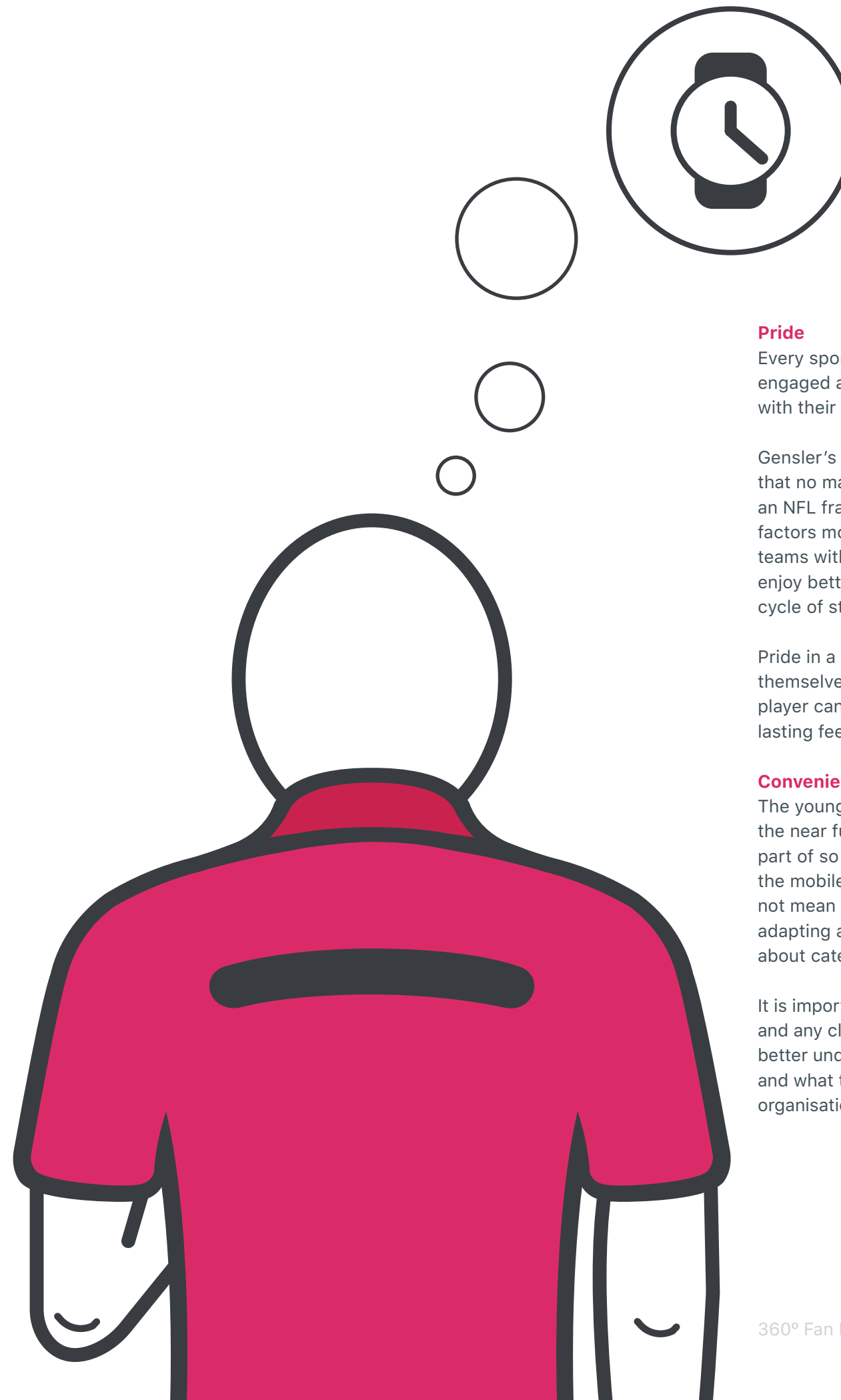
Tradition

There is a long tradition to many sports clubs, with fans often connected to their club by virtue of their place of birth, or a family history, the sports team that a fan follows is part of their identity and so the identity of that team is not to be messed with. Changing a logo, team colours, or moving location can alienate, and downright anger, loyal fans. Therefore the brand identity is extremely important and not to be underestimated. It should carry through everything the organisation does.

Intimacy

To engage is to become closer to something. In this case, fans want to get closer to the club, the action, the team. Anything that affords a more intimate access to any of these is going to keep a fan enthralled. Social media has a part to play here in that it can open up a behind-the-scenes view to many areas of all sports. OTT services also have been a real game-changer by opening up access to footage of gameplay as well as ancillary content, on demand.

² <https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/gensler-research-institute/win-or-lose>



Pride

Every sports fan wants their team to be winning but keeping fans engaged and bought into their team will support their desire to stick with their team in good times and bad.

Gensler's Survey of NFL teams and their fans ('Win or Lose'²), revealed that no matter whether a fan is a casual fan or a super fan, improving an NFL franchise's current stadium, or building a new one were the two factors most likely to make someone more of a fan. They found that teams with a highly ranked stadium have higher fan equity and also enjoy better winning percentages suggesting, as they put it, "a positive cycle of stadium experience, results and equity/engagement."

Pride in a team can also come from the way the club and the athletes themselves interact with the community. Getting an autograph from a player can make a fan feel truly appreciated and will engender a long-lasting feeling of positivity.

Convenience

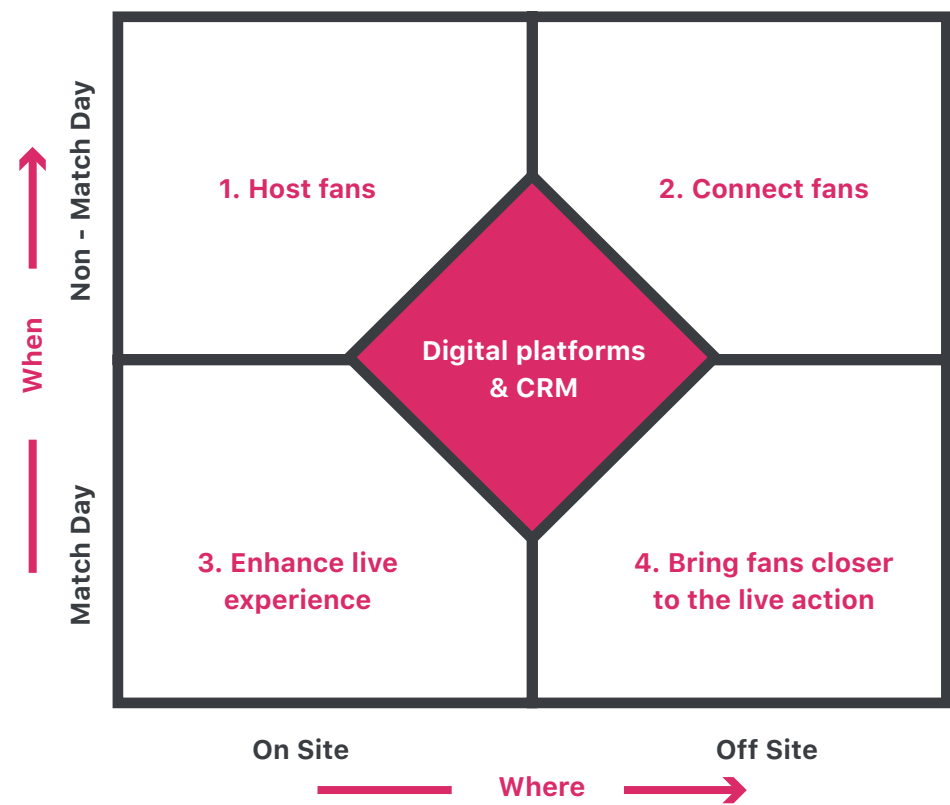
The young sports fans, the ones who will be filling stadia worldwide in the near future are a mobile generation. A mobile phone is an intrinsic part of so many people's lives now and so when engaging with fans, the mobile experience needs to be a core consideration. This does not mean simply having a mobile website, as that consists of merely adapting an existing piece of collateral. The approach needs to be about catering to the fans' needs in any place and at any time.

It is important to note at this point that not all sports fans are the same and any club/body seeking to better engage fans must first seek to better understand their fans. Understanding who they are, what they do and what they want is an exercise to be undertaken thoroughly by each organisation, before even thinking about how to cater to those fans.

A 360° view: location and timing

When considering how to approach improving fan engagement in any sport, it is helpful to think about the 4 areas in which a sports club or body can focus to take an all-encompassing view of the fans’ needs.

Sports brands must consider how to engage fans at the venue on game days, at the venue on non-game days, away from the venue on game days and away from the venue on non-game days:



1. Host fans (non-match, on-site)

This gets the least attention because the focus for the venue is hosting fans on match days. The venues are then used for corporate events, but these are not usually connected with the team or even the sport. There is potentially a great opportunity then to utilise the venue, that has likely been heavily invested in, to support fan engagement efforts of clubs, such as through:

- Stadium tours (incorporating augmented reality; location-based content)
- Retail deals and offers in the locality, and promotions for next game

2. Connect fans (non-match, off-site)

Again, this area doesn't always get a lot of attention because the focus is so much around the live action. With the focus on mobile devices that are so prevalent in the sports fan's life, this needn't be the case. Just because it's Monday lunch time doesn't mean you stop being a supporter of your team. If there is something to know or do that involves the sport you are passionate about, then why not access it at any convenient moment? Your fans could be engaging with:

- Ticket availability, offers and information
- Team news, press conferences (managers, coaches)
- Behind the scenes content (club, players)
- VR and AR remote tours
- Season ticket renewal
- Hospitality offers and bookings

3. Enhance the live experience (match, on-site)

Here is where most efforts are focused. It is the most obvious area to engage fans but also is important because of the changing landscape of sports content consumption. Competing with broadcast TV, OTT and other off-site match day experiences that can keep fans at home is increasingly necessary.

A great stadium that connects with the community gives fans something to be proud of and can also provide additional value over and above the game itself, to really draw fans in and present a more 'rounded' experience. A great game day-experience will get the buzz going before the game and keep it going long after; leaving a lasting sense of enjoyment. Utilising the stadium to the best of its potential on non-game days adds to the culture, tradition, experience, brand story-telling and immersion, as well as making their experience an all-round enjoyable one. Consider:

- Mobile ticketing
- Wayfinding and travel
- Food and beverage ordering
- Retail offers and tickets
- Post-game reaction and analysis

4. Bring fans closer to the live action (match, off-site)

This is where it can feel like you're trying to compete with yourself as naturally there is a buzz around the live action, that you're trying to augment with the efforts previously mentioned, but here you are trying to engage the fans who are not at the venue. These should be complementary elements - catering to both groups competing elements, but really they should be complementary - catering to both groups of fans equally well by fulfilling their different needs. Away from the venue on game days this can be:

- Live video and audio (inc. pre-game and half-time)
- Gameday live updates (scores, reactions, stats)
- Post-game analysis
- Tickets for upcoming games

Engaging with fans away from the stadium is crucial. No matter the capacity of your venue, be it a few thousand or over 100,000, there are always going to be a high proportion of fans remotely following the action. Therefore these fans must not be neglected. If left to watch the game on TV networks, they are losing everything that we have talked about- the brand identity - they are presented an unbiased view from someone who doesn't truly care about your team. Making all the action available to the fans and making it immersive, brought to them by their beloved club, is where the difference is.

Don't solely rely on a mobile-friendly website, but look to further enhance the fan experience through native apps, which boast far greater rates of engagement than a mobile website can hope to achieve. An app is your home on your fan's phone, providing a level of interactivity and personalisation that is available any time and anywhere. Using a single sign-on provides a seamless experience.





20 years of understanding our sports clients has led to the delivery of groundbreaking digital projects. From award-winning apps to immersive websites with complex data integrations and in-app ticketing, we're as ambitious as our forward-thinking and competitive clients. Give us a call and see how we can help you build digital relationships and deepen fan engagement.

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