

FROM DIGITAL TO SOCIAL

We live in a digital age, in a time when breathtaking solutions and inventions appear nearly every second and the whole world is **connected by a digital click**. That offers amazing opportunities in all areas.

Today we are talking about sports, about athletes, about fans, their stories and emotions, we are talking about humans. And we should use all available means, all existing technologies and the ones to come in order to connect real people with real passion, to tell real stories for real fans, to offer real sport to the world. In the end it will be a win-win situation if we get to the perfect mix of using digital state-of-the-art **technologies to create a social togetherness**.

PLAYERS, FANS, COACHES and MEDIA are our most valued human stakeholders and partners.

Building an even stronger connection with them is a driving factor to better promote our sport, increase its exposure and marketability, and make it a more attractive destination for investment and sponsorship.

Closer and better coordinated work with the media, enhanced marketing initiatives, combined with the effective use of technology are vital if we are to stay up to date with the latest trends and keep adapting to new realities:

- change of revenue income from TV to streaming
- shifting patterns of content consumption
- need for increased direct communication with fans, personalized content delivery focus
- shortened attention span of the younger generations and ageing fans
- exposure to a large amount of information streaming in from various sources and making today's consumers very selective
- big data required in sports business

IT IS OUR TASK TO FIGURE OUT WHAT RESONATES WITH FANS, WHILE PRESERVING AND DEMONSTRATING THE CORE VALUES AND ESSENCE OF OUR GAME



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We have talented staff who will develop and improve the quantity and quality of content, if given additional resources, tools and expertise. **Strengthening the in-house capabilities, engagement of media, enthusiastic fans and bloggers**, as well as partnerships with professional agencies and specialized companies will give us the right blend of resources to tell our amazing stories to the world!

And we have so many of them! On the elite level, e.g. the **50th anniversary of the 1972 Super Series** between Canada and the USSR next year. We should be partnering up with all interested parties in hockey and also beyond, including streaming giants, **in telling these incredible stories through a (docu)series and a whole range of possibilities. Heck, just let Phil Esposito speak and roll the camera. Priceless!** Those who were with me when he did exactly that during a development seminar I organized know exactly what I mean.

At the same time, we should focus attention on all stakeholders, small and big. Special campaigns around 'Ice Hockey. Passion. Everywhere'. After all, how more passionate can you be about hockey than sacrificing your vacation and money to be able to represent your country like many do? Many remarkable stories of pride and dedication I have encountered over the years. Korea's journey towards Pyeongchang is a whole blockbuster series. Unforgettable, the many tears of joy when Korea won promotion

to the top division on penalty shots. Or think about South African Women's National Team players fundraising their trip to represent their home country at World Championships, or the Hay family with five members playing ice hockey for New Zealand, or when Luxembourg National Team was invited by the Prime Minister to his office in honor of the team's Gold Medal at Division III of the IIHF Championship Program. *The legend goes that the Prime Minister first heard of the news while on an official business trip in Canada. "We became World Champions!" he expressed jubilantly. His Canadian colleagues, equally excited about the burst of joy, remarked: "In which sport?" – "Ice Hockey!"* 😊

Our first-hand access to a wide range of unique and interesting moments and stories created by the entire ice hockey community every day, let alone exclusive access to ice hockey stars and legends, should be used to its fullest for production of interviews, podcasts, clips, talk shows, documentaries, etc.

And while building up our own capabilities, we shall partner up. Much is about content creation today. The more the merrier. We could simply outsource it, cooperate, and give rights to up-and-coming bloggers and professionals. This is not rocket science, but successfully implemented ventures between fan-turned-professional-bloggers and leading leagues such as the NBA.



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IIHF TO BECOME THE CENTRALIZED CONTENT PRODUCER, COORDINATOR AND EDUCATOR

Content production for long-term engagement of different audience groups. The **IIHF needs to act as a Media house to ensure that our sport is visible, engaging and generates enough revenue for its own development**

- behind-the-scenes content to allow fans to experience the unique atmosphere, get to know more about their favorite players, and to give them a rink-side view of the game

It does not need much investment, as there are so many young talented guys out there, bloggers since school age and the likes, who would embrace the opportunity and be proud to become part of the IIHF family just like Stats crews, Medical Supervisors or Officiating Coaches

- content that meets the **interests of the modern audience** and corresponds to their way of consuming more and more from their portable devices, preferring highlights to watching full games on demand

Attention spans are growing smaller, today it is much more about quick hits, tweets, headlines and quick consumption, which we need to turn to our benefit

- **usage of archives – hidden treasure lying around – for production of more full feature documentaries** to satisfy the interest of ice hockey “scholars,” historians and traditional fans, protect our heritage and legacy, and help us educate young and upcoming generations on ice hockey history and its milestones.

Partnering with giants as Netflix, Amazon, DAZN, Disney, ESPN+ etc. and learning from them

- outsourcing, cooperating, giving rights to up-and-coming bloggers and professionals

Creation of a **network of ice hockey bloggers and enthusiasts in different markets under one umbrella** and giving them co-ordinated access to exclusive materials and personalities

- production of valuable content on a regular basis
- increased media coverage of ice hockey competitions and products
- exchange of followers leading to the increased number of subscribers, which is golden data for attracting sponsors and investors nowadays.

IIHF web-site and social media channels as a one-stop shop

- accumulation and publication of major news and results provided by each MNA
- acquainting the world with ice hockey in individual countries and consistent coverage on a global scale
- individual settings to choose which results and news to follow and in which form
- **content for internal family (e.g. one podcast/interview per week with and about an MNA)**
- newsletter service

In addition, access to major sports outlets will be negotiated to provide the dedicated section for the federations to globally share their local stories that are unique and interesting for traditional hockey audiences

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Education initiatives for increasing and improving the content produced by MNAs

- MNAs to be assisted and educated, where needed, to develop necessary skills and competence for content creation
- online and in-person education workshops and programs
- hands-on learning for responsible MNA representatives arranged by IIHF assigned supervisors during competitions

Launch of a streaming channel

- providing access for fans and family members to IIHF events regardless of their location
- cooperation with existing streaming services where good quality content is provided
- ultimately creation of a digital home for ice hockey, all in one place
- seek strong co-operations with the likes of IOC's Olympic Channel and future platforms as, for example, a potential (Infront) Winter Sports Streaming Hub

Fan engagement

- establishment and improvement of direct communication with our customers
- research their preferences, expectations, background and other interests
- this valuable input will help us understand how fans' experiences can be improved and their engagement with our sport strengthened
- activities such as quizzes, contests with prizes ranging from autographed merchandise items to meet-and-greet events to make our fans feel an integral part of the game
- **Big Data is real, complete databases and direct customer relations are required in today's sports business environment**

Creation of the **Alliance of ice hockey media** to give them a **say in voting** on best player, goal, team, etc. on a regular basis

- *For the sake of example:* European Sports Media is an association of football-related publications in Europe and presents a number of awards in cooperation with the UEFA



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Athletes are the backbone of our game, stars and role-models for local fans, regardless if they play on the elite level or in the 3rd division. How do we make their experience of playing ice hockey and participating in IIHF tournaments unique and unforgettable? What formats do they favor and what discourages them?

Let's ask them directly. The **IIHF Athletes Committee** can be considerably improved, among other things if there are active players on it in addition to those who retired, and if the committee members are elected by active players themselves. Nowadays, with numerous technologies online participation can be arranged easily and on a regular basis.

By listening to the voices of those for whom hockey is an actual daily on-ice life and job, and knowing their opinions and needs, we will not only make the game safer and enhance the players' experience, but will be able to **help our MNAs to ensure that players always "return the call" to represent the National Team, and thus secure the best-of-the-best on ice action.**

In addition, we should look into ways to assist players to prepare for post-athletic careers: by giving access to more educational possibilities

to eventually get a job outside ice hockey, or training them to stay in the game but in a different capacity.

Our players undoubtedly deserve to receive all recognition and encouragement for their achievements. As such, our work with players should also include more of "firsts", different souvenirs and awards for the first puck scored, 100th game played, etc., as well telling the world their stories of incredible commitment and determination, as mentioned above.

Another group of our most important human capital is **Coaches who deserve our utmost attention. The development of hockey on the grassroots as well as elite levels depends on them. To bring the game forward, I propose to create working groups, consisting of the smartest minds in coaching, that shall review games at the top events and produce a report on the trends of hockey.** We can learn from other federations such as the UEFA. I was fortunate to attend one of their events where all head coaches from European national teams came together to discuss the state of football. The amount of knowledge present and spirit of sharing was contagious. What we might not have been able to do in the past for financial reasons, we need to do better by using today's technologies and tools by even starting it in an online way.

