

Sports Geek Nation AMA with Geoff Wilson

Geoff Wilson is a sports strategist and sports marketing expert who owns the Geoff Wilson Consultancy.

Previously Head of Marketing and Communications (Irish FA), Geoff was responsible for public relations, commercial programmes, brand development and communication to fans. He works with the likes of FIFA, UEFA, AFC, FIBA, the Ulster Grand Prix and other global sports organisations in a wide range of areas from strategic planning, marketing and communications, digital, fans engagement, public affairs and knowledge sharing/exchange programmes.

In addition, Geoff is a part-time lecturer in marketing at Queen's University Belfast and is Chair of Netball Northern Ireland and a board member at Tourism Northern Ireland.

Connect with Geoff Wilson on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Slack [@Geoff Wilson](#)

Visit [Geoff Wilson Consultancy website](#) for more info.

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

Q. [seancallanan](#): I'll start with the opening question as I have heard your case study from Ulster Grand Prix at SEAT a few years back, what have been some of the lessons you've learned from that event? Additionally what have been projects you've been working on recently with them?

A. [Geoff Wilson](#): Great question Sean. Some of the key areas are as follows:

1. In 2009 the Ulster Grand Prix (UGP) was at an all time low in terms of revenue, number of spectators, awareness etc. So, we sat down with all the stakeholders to find out the issues (conducted research), then created a strategic plan to move the event forward. This sounds so simple yet research and creating your tailored strategic plan can sometimes be overlooked.
2. Widen out your income streams. Pre 2009 we focused solely on ticket sales with a bit of merchandise. Now we have 6 or 7 income streams from a variety of different areas
3. Have a single, unique brand message. For 10 years we used 'The World's Fastest Road Race'. This gave us a unique brand position to the point even our media partner used it many times during broadcast
4. Improve the fan experience. This for me is key. Pre 2009 we didn't engage greatly with our fans. Post 2009 we now hold 'meet the rider event', we have several big

screens positioned around the 7 mile course which streams a live feed from a helicopter, we have motorcycle ride outs, trial bike displays and more

5. Create a festival. This is maybe linked to point 4 above, but we quickly identified the need to develop the product. From a 2 day race to 7 day week festival - Bike Week. During each day, we have a wide range of events all linked to motorsport
6. Be Creative. Sometimes organising a major event can be very expensive. But if you are creative you can add other events to your product that may not cost a great deal

For those who don't know, this is the UGP

UGP14 Behind the Scenes EP5



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph2Rd_vV1jI



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEZ1d-HhhB4>

What projects have we been working on?

Well, the key project has been the establishment of a Motorcycle Awareness Programme.

The MAP identifies kids from the community who are using motorbikes for anti social behavior. We take these kids and run a 12 week programme with them. This programme educates them on how to strip an engine, how to change oil, how to ride a bike properly, how to behave, and other key life skills

The MAP is funded by our Dept of Justice (not sport), who take the money seized from crime and reinvests it into community programmes like the MAP

We brought on board several government departments including the police and the results have been amazing.

kids have received official training ie in first aid and marshalling, their behavior has changed, many are volunteering at other motorbike events and even some have obtained jobs on the back of our work with them

This project has been so successful that our NI government has invested further - they love the idea how sport can help (not solve) to tackle crime and anti social behavior. Check out:



<https://ulstergrandprix.net/motorcycle-education-project-for-young-people-launched-by-mce-ulster-grand-prix-with-department-of-justice-funding/>

The work at the UGP has helped greatly when I am working with FIFA, UEFA and AFC in the football and FIBA in the Basketball. Many of the activity is transferable knowledge.

Q. Rick: Hi @Geoff Wilson #ama great work with UGP - it is amazing that something as simple as researching your market and putting together a tailored strategy, can produce the right results and open up the opportunities to leverage your new found position.

My question is really to do with the work you have done with the other global sports orgs like FIBA, UEFA and AFC. They are all deemed to be quite traditional and maybe not so modern in their strategic thinking. Innovation in sports is abound, how do you go about convincing the boards of those orgs, that innovative fan-centric models are the future?

A. Geoff Wilson: Hi Rick. Great to hear from you. And thanks for your lovely comments re UGP. much appreciated. Good question ref the other sports organisations I work alongside, yes, some can be quite traditional but some are also progressing in the areas of digital, fan engagement, commercial.

For example, UEFA GROW has been working with their Member associations in terms of strategy, branding, CRM, digital. check out

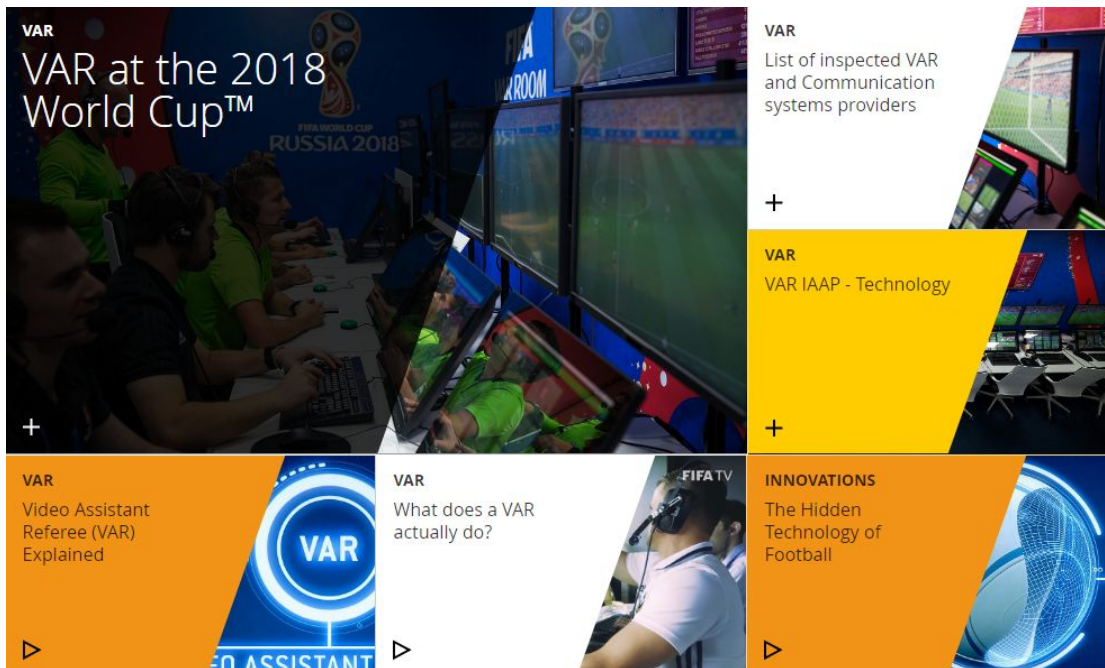


<https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/newsid=2538647.html>

Both UEFA and FIFA have created innovation hubs recently. Check out



<https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/newsid=2591135.html> and



<https://football-technology.fifa.com/en/innovations/>

A number of federations are doing some great work in terms of innovation such as the Norway Football Federation

For me, it's key for sports organisations to learn from each other and to drive forward on areas such as innovation. Learning from sports orgs such as NBA, La Liga is important.

Once the sports industry sees the progress, in time others will follow. That's where sports conferences, platforms like Sports Geek all help to exchange the knowledge and learning to keep us at the cutting edge.

When it comes to convincing the boards, for me you have to...

1. outline the advantages (cost savings, income generation etc)
2. demonstrate how others are making it a success
3. putting in place clear measurements so you can evaluate the success then
4. sharing that success with others in our industry

Rick:Hi @Geoff Wilson thanks for the detailed reply. Interesting to see the development of those hubs within UEFA and the implementation of some of those innovative ideas.

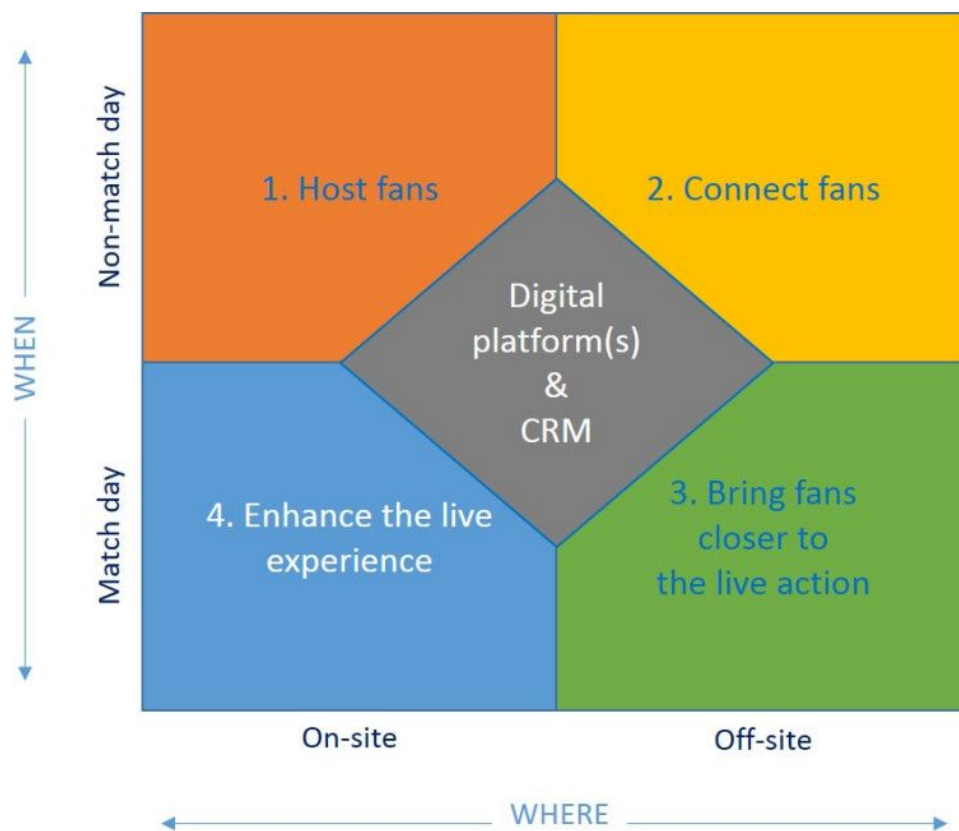
Indeed it is imperative that we learn from each other: invariably all sports leagues have similar problems that collectively we can overcome and find better solutions to.

The exchange of ideas at conferences is important, it's just tough to get a lot of them - just look at the story of the NSF and why Ron Seaver developed the event: leagues in the US never shared knowledge within the different leagues.

You are also right that the big boards will never be the 1st movers on innovation but can be convinced when they see other leagues succeeding in it.

Geoff Wilson: Rick meant to say, I recently co-created a fan engagement model (along with @davidgfowler) on where we show the need to engage fans in 4 simple quadrants. Keen to get your thoughts on the model?

<https://geoffwnjwilson.wordpress.com/2016/08/25/254/>



©Fowler/Wilson August 2016

Rick: Thanks for sharing @Geoff Wilson loved the model and the whole article especially some of the ideas to really drive fan engagement.

It's interesting to see that sport leagues are moving towards the 'every day' now & more so 'all year' & not confined by a season. Of course the NBA pushes this with

their off-season concepts: summer league, fee-agency deadlines, the draft, pre-season and off-season international tours. Locally here in :flag-au: the AFL extends their season, with the draft, women's AFL, a new hybrid AFL game tournament called AFLX and even cross-international games with Irish sport: Gaelic football.

There is opportunity abound and the smartest leagues/sports globally, now seek to really extend their fan engagement year round & especially in the 'off-season'

Q. [joliegee](#): what are some of the things you learned from football and basketball leagues that you think also work effectively for UGP

A. Geoff Wilson: Hi Joli

Thanks for your question. See below some key learnings if have gleaned over the years from football and other sports:

- Clear strategic plan in place (clear vision, mission, goals, objectives, etc)
- Ensure your Strategic plan that is actionable, implemented and monitored
- Strong brand message /brand position in place - what is your brand essence?
- Ensure you have a High performing team off the pitch/court as well as on the court/pitch - hire the right people, invest in them etc
- Strong competency based board in place
- Focus on Several income streams - don't put all your eggs in one basket

Biggest one for me - embed your sports org in the community. Not just roll out a CSR programme but totally embed the organisation in the community.

What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

You can join Sports Geek Nation by going to SportsGeekNation.com