

The quest for higher engagement: How Reach PLC boosted sports fan engagement 150% over 3 months

THE CHALLENGE

Kristian Walsh is the Head of Sports Audience Engagement Strategy at Reach PLC, the largest regional and national news publisher in the UK. He had a highly engaged audience but faced three challenges that prevented him from driving increased loyalty and improving engagement metrics.

One-Way Content Limited Engagement

Like many digital publishers, Reach's sports content was primarily articles written by journalists with in-depth knowledge of the teams. While the content was informative and generated traffic, it failed to keep fans engaged once they finished reading. This one-way content style lacked a clear incentive for readers to become registered users or spend more time on the Reach PLC sites and left all the engagement on platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

Kristian and his team wanted a way to create organic, interactive fan experiences on their own properties.

The Comments Section Was Falling Short

Kristian's team at Reach was spending countless hours trying to foster productive discourse across its sports properties and leave a positive impression on new visitors. However, without automatic moderation rules, comments were a free-for-all, where a few hotheads dominated the conversation with arguing and name-calling. Kristian knew his commenting system needed to be adjusted to provide a safe space for civil conversations and maintain the hard-earned trust and loyalty Reach had built with devoted fans.

Maintaining Engagement During COVID-19

COVID-19 brought new and complicated challenges: How do you keep football fans excited and engaged when there's no football being played? Transfer windows were closed, no news was coming out of the clubs, and nobody knew when or if football would resume for the season. But just because football (and most of the world) had stopped didn't mean that fans disappeared. Kristian and his team needed to get creative with content to keep audiences engaged.

Reach

“Viafoura has helped us tap into new and better ways to keep our audiences engaged and build more loyalty. With Community Chat, we're delivering more value to the fans, while also increasing engagement by 150%.”

— Kristian Walsh

Head of Sports Audience
Engagement Strategy

THE SOLUTION

To enhance Reach's long-standing audience-centric approach to community building and engagement, Kristian turned to Viafoura's Community Chat, Conversations, and moderation services to help strengthen audience relationships, build more loyalty and boost key metrics.

Levelling Up The Value Exchange

Reach wanted to provide direct access to the experts on football clubs and players: the journalists. Kristian implemented Viafoura's Community Chat to give fans an active role in directly interacting with journalists around specific topics. This provides a forum for the fans to drive the content by asking reporters their most burning questions about transfers, club financials or staffing changes - directly on Reach PLC sites. Registration is required to participate, so it delivers the dual benefit of providing fans with high-value, interactive content, while converting passive site visitors into registered users, an important KPI for Kristian's team.

Viafoura's Community Chat was easy to install on Reach's sites, has a seamless user interface and requires few internal resources to run, which frees up time for Kristian's team to work on other initiatives.

Creating Civil Conversations With Moderation Services

Kristian replaced his underperforming commenting system with Viafoura's Conversations tool backed by an Automatic Moderation Engine, which uses a sophisticated algorithm to instantly flag and remove spam and offensive content. Before launch, Kristian worked with Viafoura to define the nuances of football vocabulary so that the algorithm could work as accurately as possible for the intended audience. Now, conversations among users are both productive and civil, providing enhanced value and making it a place where new and returning users want to spend time.

Think Outside The Penalty Box For Content Ideas

No football? No problem. When COVID-19 hit, Viafoura's Community Chat and Conversations tools was how Reach continued to support and engage audiences. Going beyond the pitch, they hosted chats with pundits and journalists on topics ranging from anniversaries of significant games to team tactics and predictions about when football would resume. During a time of unprecedented uncertainty and isolation, loyal readers were looking for comfort in the familiar. And Kristian's team delivered, holding a captive audience with help from Viafoura even when football wasn't being played.

RESULTS

120 HOURS

Per month saved across the sports journalists in moderating fans since introducing Viafoura.



Increase in engagement across sports pages over three months



Increase in sports engagement contributed to 117% increase in total comment volume across Reach PLC domains.