



BUILDING MOMENTUM

**How digital content
can drive growth
and awareness for
women's sport**

INTRODUCTION

Between 2020 and 2021, a report published by Leaders in **Sport** and **Sky Sports** found that **one-fifth of UK adults increased their following of women's sports**, with **68% citing increased coverage** and quality of coverage prompting them to do so.

The growth of women's sports is a global phenomenon. **In April 2022, the FC Barcelona women's team broke its own European record for women's football match attendance with 91,600 fans turning out to watch its 5-1 victory over Wolfsburg in the Women's Champions League.** Its previous attendance record of 91,553 was set just a month before.

However, there is still work to be done. There is a wealth of untapped opportunities to raise the visibility of female athletes and realize the commercial potential of women's sport through sponsorship and fan engagement.

This report contains insights from a **Grabyo webinar hosted in April 2022**, and explores various strategies for using digital content and authentic storytelling for rights holders, brands, federations, leagues, clubs and athletes across both men's and women's sport to support the growth of the entire women's sporting ecosystem.



FOLLOW

The knowledge in this report has been provided by three prominent figures across the sports, media and marketing industries:



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We hope you enjoy reading!





WOMEN'S SPORT: A UNIQUE OFFERING

Fans are typically more engaged in following **specific female athletes** and players rather than clubs, which is more commonplace in men's sport.

This presents **opportunities to leverage the voice and influence of female athletes to grow the visibility of women's sport**, while offering a vehicle for brands to tap into engaged communities.

Focusing on **athlete-led content provides a depth of more human, relatable stories that drives increased engagement on social media platforms**. Brand partners and rights holders can support female athletes in bringing these stories to life with content creation and delivery across multiple channels.

Brands can reap the rewards in women's sports by flipping the traditional rightsholder model. Instead of investing in high fees for media rights to reach a mass audience, invest in storytelling and unearth the depth of stories you can tell. You can tap into the really engaged audience you have there. **The key is having a credible and authentic role and voice, and defining what your role is in that partnership.**



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LEVERAGING SUPERSTARS

How are clubs leveraging the popularity of players to drive brand growth and awareness?

Angel City FC is an expansion team in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), an established league founded in 2012. **The club's investors include the likes of actresses Natalie Portman, Eva Longoria and singer Christina Aguilera.**

In October 2021, the club announced its ACFC Fan-Fueled Player Fund, in which one percent of the net ticketing revenue from all of Angel City's regular-season NWSL home games is divided equally amongst each participating player on the club's roster.

Each player's participation in the project includes supporting ticket sales for ACFC by marketing the club on their own social media channels using their platform and likeness.

As a brand new team, you need to jump on the stories of your players. Angel City FC created this entire business structure before they even played one game of football. They wanted to give back to their players as they don't have an unlimited amount of funds to pay huge wages, so they help and encourage those players. The club will support them with these campaigns and activations on social media, but the players can do it in a way that's more authentic to them.

So they not only get more fans at their games which is a huge positive, but they'll also be getting financial compensation which is huge in the women's game of football. We need to develop the game and this is an extra form of salary for them, which is an innovative idea that could be brought across Europe. A lot of female players have big followings and their voices are heard.



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THE ROLE OF DIGITAL CONTENT

Fans of women's sport are digitally-first in the way they consume content and media. Arguably, this was initially forced by the lack of women's sport served on traditional broadcast channels, so **fans had to turn to OTT and social media platforms to get the level of access they wanted.**

This paradigm has begun to shift with more broadcasters acquiring the media rights to top-tier competitions, **such as the success of The Hundred cricket tournament and the FA Women's Super League broadcast by the BBC in the UK, which brought in a combined 11 million new viewers to women's sport in 2021, according to the broadcaster.**

What can clubs, leagues and federations do to enhance their offering of women's sport on digital platforms?

There are simple things you can do - content from training, or from the locker room. We need to see what really happens leading up to athletes stepping out on the field. It's not just teams in lower leagues, but smaller clubs in top divisions - these women are working or going to school all day, then they come to train with a smile on their face and then leave late at night to start all over again the next day.

These are stories that a wider community can relate to, holding down multiple jobs and trying to support your family. These women are very relatable, perhaps more than their male counterparts - there are stories from these women who could be coming back from pregnancy, or recovering from injury, all of these are familiar circumstances. The world doesn't know who your players are and they want to connect with them on and off the field - so it's vital to tell the stories of who your athletes are.



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BUILDING AND SCALING A FANBASE

How do you drive continued engagement with new and existing fans of women's sport?

Women's football is building momentum and has developed through innovative ideas. Through social media, lots can be done. These smaller campaigns that the women create themselves, such as going live on Instagram, takes advantage of the fact they're on the pulse and in touch with their communities who are going to be consuming the same content as them. Clubs can discuss with the players what they would want to be seeing and how they can present themselves.

Through COVID we saw we don't need these huge multi-million dollar productions, people just want to be connected, and sometimes the more natural it seems, the more engagement will happen because people feel connected to that person. They feel this is a real person talking to me, not a major brand that has invested millions of dollars to force anything or engage me, it's just having a conversation.

The major brand activations are amazing and work really well. But now we're seeing this hybrid approach of major activations alongside an athlete grabbing a phone and saying 'hey this is practise, I'm interviewing my friend after the game and asking about how it went and how they feel'. These natural interactions are what the community want to see.



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRANDS: REPRESENTATION

During the **Grabyo webinar**, 66% of attendees stated that female representation make them trust a brand and product more. 16% stated a partial increase in trust.



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Having the right voice to be able to amplify your story is important. **It's about authenticity** - selecting a high value but somewhat irrelevant representative for your brand doesn't work. **It's about having a credible voice to champion your content**, whether it's male or female. **The impact of female voices is improving brand loyalty**, but there remains a crucial role for male allies in growing women's sport across content and broadcasting too. It's a collective responsibility that will help grow women's sport for years to come.

In my experience brands have hugely enjoyed working with female athletes, who are more engaged and motivated to work with brands long-term. It's slightly newer for female athletes who have an understanding that they need to market the women's game - **they're not just doing it for themselves or for their club, but it's for the visibility of all women. This has created a positive working environment for all involved and brands are starting to see and understand that.**

There's also the fact that women across multiple sports have their own social platform and voice and are willing to speak out and stand up for their beliefs, such as environmental issues, social responsibility or the charities they work with. This is enticing fans to move over to the women's game. We may not always be talking about a large population of people but it's connecting with people who care about the same things as your brand, and that's what's making the difference.



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRANDS: CONTENT CREATION

Attendees of the Grabyo webinar reported using YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok to engage fans with video roughly an equal amount - highlighting the importance of a comprehensive multi-platform strategy.

TikTok has surged in popularity over the past two years. Grabyo's 2021 Social Video Trends report found that the platform increased its user base by 366% from 2020. TikTok's USP is light-hearted, raw content that is driven by individual personalities, which aligns with the demand from fans of the women's game for this type of content.



How can brands create engaging content?

The work that Lucozade did around the 2019 World Cup and its partnership with the FA and the Lionesses stands out as a great example. They had various touchpoints to champion the women's team and create these superstars from content to above the line, social channels, TV, and everywhere else. **This really 'made the moment' around the Women's World Cup.** This was a brand playing the role of rallying fans who had been following the women's game for a long time and fans who had never experienced women's football before, to get behind the team and get excited for that pivotal tournament in the women's sport calendar.

This is a great example of brand partnerships, and content specifically, played a role in bringing the excitement and hype ahead of that tournament.



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SUCCESS STORIES

Has there been a particular stand-out strategy that has increased interest in women's sports?

It's hard to nail down a one size fits all strategy. It's about drilling down into what role a brand can play in women's sport, and it needs to be an authentic and credible role that brings value. It's not about investing lots of money and expecting big returns as a result, you need to invest in the depth of storytelling and maximizing its impact. Fans and consumers now expect more from brands - not just in women's sports but across the board. You have to stay true to your purpose and mission. It's about what you're bringing to women's sport - not just the money you're investing but creating a legacy piece to help drive the growth of women's sport on a broader level.

The work that The Hundred has done to level out the coverage and approach to men's and women's cricket by combining the two together has seen standout results. This is a great example of a rightsholder strategy that has elicited the same amount of excitement, visibility and ticket sales for both men's and women's cricket.



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For me, there's a couple of stand out examples in women's football. Firstly FIFA's separation of the women's football media rights so the money is directly invested into the women's game. This led to Visa investing a [reported] \$20 million which is huge. In the past, we were never able to show the value of women's football because the media rights weren't separate from the men's game.

We also have UEFA who restructured how the women's champions league works so more money trickles down into a greater number of clubs - this is allowing more clubs to do more advertising and attract more sponsorship.

ABOUT GRABYO

Grabyo is the leading cloud-based video production platform, equipping its partners with the tools to manage and scale video production and distribution across all major broadcast, digital and social platforms.

The company is trusted by major rights holders and sport media organizations across the globe, including The Premier League, UFC, FOX Sports, MotoGP and The English Football Association (FA).

The platform has strategic partnerships across OTT, social media and broadcast including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitch and Snap. In 2021, Grabyo partners created over 1 million clips and 25,000 live broadcasts, generating more than 19 billion video views.

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