The Marketing Gamification Guide for **Sports**



playable

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Introduction

Sports audiences are the ideal focus for marketing gamification. Not only are they already emotionally engaged with brands, teams, and players, but they are naturally competitive! In such a saturated market, however, maintaining a high level of fan engagement beyond match days and boosting ticket and merchandise sales often requires marketers to use creative ideas to capture attention and support lasting loyalty.

Not only are you competing for attention from other brands, you're also competing for attention from the game itself. Sports fans have their full attention on the events themselves, the scores, the team decisions, or the players themselves. As a result, your marketing campaign has to be engaging, eye-catching, and prompt an active response from a consumer for it to have the right effect.

Another tricky issue facing sports clubs is ticket prices. 'Funflation' has risen dramatically over the past few years, with ticket prices rising by an average of 25.1% in 2023. With the price of just about everything rising at the same time, it means you need to work extra hard to win sales today.

Using strategic gamification is a multi-faceted approach to face these challenges. Your audience are already fans of the elements of play, and a gamified marketing campaign with a sports theme is a powerful way to capture their attention. Don't forget that non-sports brands can also capitalize on major sporting events for marketing purposes - make sure to scroll to the bottom for a selection of non-sports brand case studies.

In our YouGov study, we found that 36% said that fun and seamless branded games positively influence how they feel about a brand. So in this guide, you'll discover why a gamification strategy is effective for sports marketing and how to get started with your very own campaign.

The power of gamification: why it works

What the science says about play

There's a reason play makes us feel good. In fact, there are four hormones directly connected to it, dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins. These DOSE hormones are responsible for positive feelings of fun, satisfaction, and focus.

Here's what each hormone is responsible for:

Serotonin

Fun and positivity

Endorphins

Perseverance, focus and attention



Dopamine

Control, focus, attention, learning and memory.

Oxytocin

A sense of bonding and togetherness, finding bonding, joy in collaboration

These hormones are released when we enjoy playing games and sports but also when we're engaged as sports fans watching our favorite teams.

With a gamification strategy, you can trigger the same responses sports fans experience when doing what they love most.

Besides hormones, here are some ways that play benefits us and why it's effective in sports marketing.

Tapping into our nature

From the release of those feel-good hormones, it's clear that humans have play in our nature. We get satisfaction from achieving wins, competing, and receiving rewards.

The feeling of winning is something sports fans in particular are drawn to, and so gamification taps not just into our nature, but also an important part of what it means to be a sports fan.

Increased focus and attention

Playing a game requires active concentration and focus. By including that element in your marketing, you automatically boost the chances of consumers paying full attention to your campaign.

Could a TV ad played in the background or a paid social ad you scroll past achieve the same effect? In most cases, no. Increasing focus on your marketing efforts enhances your brand awareness, recognition, and memorability.

Memorable experiences

Not only do you want consumers to be aware of your brand, you also need them to remember you when they come to make a purchase.

By providing a fun and engaging marketing activity for them to do, you increase memorability and make it more likely that consumers will consider your brand for their next purchase.

How gamification works in sports marketing

By introducing game mechanics into marketing, it becomes a powerful tool for driving impactful behaviors like sharing data voluntarily, making purchases, and other conversions.

Let’s take a closer look at the game mechanics that are most effective at driving results.



Rewarding participation

Incentivize active participation in your marketing campaign by tapping into the human desire to be rewarded. Rewards can come in many forms including discount codes, prize draws entries, help with choosing products, or loyalty schemes.



Pro tip

For sports fans, a reward could be entrance into a loyalty scheme or exclusive club for dedicated fans to afan merchandise special offers, or prize draws to win game tickets.



Did you know?

A YouGov report found that more than half (51%) of respondents preferred winning a voucher over being given one.

Challenging participants

Part of the fun of playing a game is in the challenge. But there's a delicate balance you need to strike between making the game so easy it's boring vs. making it too hard that people quit.

The right balance makes game experiences more immersive and engaging and encourages people to continue interacting with your brand.

Encouraging mirroring

A sense of community and team loyalty are important parts of being a sports fan. You can encourage people to mirror others with gamified experiences that include leaderboards, shareable quiz results, or polls to let fans know how their experience or score compares with others.



Pro tip

Skill games and quizzes work well here. As a call-to-action at the end of a skill game, encourage people to share their score with friends or over social media to get more eyes on your campaign. A leaderboard is an easy way to let people see how they compare to other fans.

Creating fun experiences

Remember, sports are all about having fun and experiencing the thrill of a game, so creating a fun experience can encourage further brand interaction such as visiting your website, making a purchase, or sharing the game with others. By making a campaign fun, you build a positive association with your brand and an experience consumers want to repeat.



Did you know?

In our YouGov study, we found that 36% said that fun and seamless branded games positively influence how they feel about a brand.

Competing for wins

If there's one thing sports fans all understand it's the thrill of the competition. There's nothing quite as satisfying as watching your team win.

You can replicate that sense of friendly competition in gamified campaigns with leaderboards, encouraging participants to share or replay a game, or by using a game mechanic that's competitive in spirit such as a skill game.

Did you know?

Our research shows that games with leaderboards and scoring increased the number of times participants played a game by 184%?



How marketing gamification helps you reach your goals

Now you know why gamification is so effective and the impact of different game mechanics, we're going to look at how this can transform your marketing campaign. After all, a campaign needs to hit the right goals effectively for it to be worth it.

1 Drive ticket and merchandise sales

A key element that marketing gamification supports is increasing your revenue, whether that's from selling tickets or merchandise.

Increasing ticket sales:

By driving fan engagement, you can highlight upcoming games and spark excitement to encourage people to buy tickets for upcoming games or events.

Encouraging merchandise purchases:

During busy sports seasons, you may face high competition from retailers selling similar merchandise, so a gamified campaign can help you stand out. It's also a great opportunity to differentiate yourself as the go-to place to buy merchandise and sports-related goods with rewards like exclusive discounts, experiences, or loyalty rewards for frequent buyers.

Drive sponsorship engagement:

If you've partnered with some brand sponsors, a gamified campaign is a great way to encourage fans to engage with them as well as your own brand or team.

2 Attract & engage fans

The great thing about marketing to sports fans is you're tapping into an already engaged audience.
But if you want to encourage them to engage with you, share data, or make purchases, gamification can help you across the finish line.

So how can you do this?

Reach fans where they are:

Sports fans are often active on social media, sharing news and discussions among themselves. By promoting your campaign over social media, you get to reach them right where they are.

Another way to reach them is at live events or games with stands and flyers for those attending with QR codes directing them to your game or encouraging them to download the official app.

Create a community of engaged fans:

Gamified campaigns can help you foster connections within the fan community with contests, trivia quizzes, skill games with leaderboards, and loyalty schemes that encourage engagement – giving fans positive memories of their experience. You can implement these online via social media or at events using QR codes.

3 Deliver personalized & data-driven experiences

Today's customers increasingly expect personalized experiences when engaging with brands, and the same goes for the sports industry.
That's why collecting zero-party data from your audience is crucial and gamification can make this much easier.

Collect data for future marketing opportunities:

Include permissions and contact forms in gamified campaigns to gather insights on fan preferences, behaviors, and engagement patterns. Collecting contact details also means you can add fans to future marketing campaigns such as email newsletters or loyalty schemes for long-term engagement.

Deliver personalized experiences:

By collecting information on sports fan behavior, you can start to deliver more personalized content relevant to different segments of your audience. A popular marketing strategy is to use data collected on birthdays to send personalized birthday campaigns with special offers or discount codes to build brand loyalty.

4 Boost fan loyalty

Fans of the sport may be loyal to their teams already and gamified experiences can only enhance this. You can use gamification to draw new app users, sign up people to your loyalty program, or offer incentives to repeat buyers.

☑ Reward loyal fans:

Loyal fans will always appreciate being rewarded for their engagement. So utilize gamification strategies that reward repeat attendees and merchandise purchasers. You could add game participants to existing loyalty programs or an email list with exclusive fan discounts or offers.

☑ Encourage in-app engagement:

If you have an official app, you can encourage downloads through gamified campaigns to get fans to engage with you directly. Apps with built-in games, challenges, and rewards schemes can foster ongoing long-term engagement and loyalty.





Get started with marketing gamification for sports fans

Ready to start using gamification to engage sports fans? Here's a quick step-by-step guide:

1 Learn more about your audience

To deliver on fans' expectations and preferences, you need to know more about them. Utilize any existing fan demographics information you have and look at metrics for other campaigns such as social ads or email newsletters to build relevant gamified campaigns. Live events, such as sports games and concerts, are ideal for monitoring real-time engagement and finding ways to target fans with personalized gamified content.

Understanding the real-time analytics of a game allows marketers to pinpoint key moments of engagement, such as peak interaction points or popular in-game activities. For instance, if a particular in-game activity (such as a puzzle) is generating more interest, marketers can capitalize on that by including targeted promotions with the puzzle.

You can even use gamified surveys, quizzes, or polls to gather specific information about fans' preferences, interests, and engagement habits. These insights can help you create distinct segments, such as casual followers versus super fans, then target each accordingly with personalized gamified content.



Pro tip

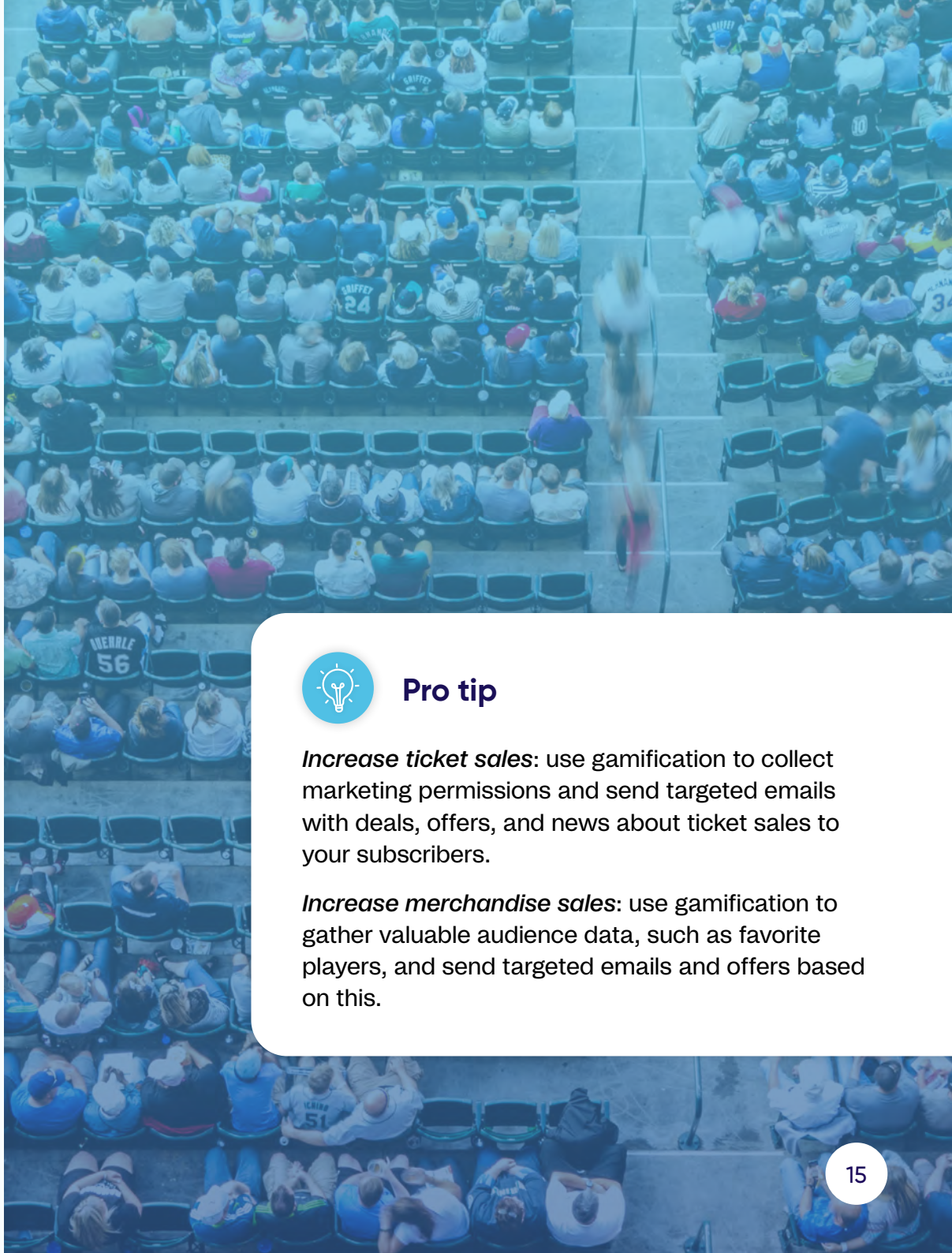
Consider collaborating with sports influencers or brand ambassadors who resonate with your fan base (they can promote the playable campaign on social media, helping to drive participation and reach more people)

2 Set your goals

The outcome of your gamified campaign will all depend on setting the right goals from the start. So, what's the main thing you're trying to drive? Ticket sales? Merchandise purchases? More app users? Make sure these goals align with your overall marketing strategy.

Different goals, whether that is lead generation, customer engagement, or customer retention, will influence the type of gamification strategies you choose.

For example, increasing fan engagement may focus on creating interactive, community-based challenges, while a sales-focused goal could prioritize games with rewards.



Pro tip

Increase ticket sales: use gamification to collect marketing permissions and send targeted emails with deals, offers, and news about ticket sales to your subscribers.

Increase merchandise sales: use gamification to gather valuable audience data, such as favorite players, and send targeted emails and offers based on this.

3 Choose a gamification platform

A platform like Playable makes building unique gamified campaigns seamless and easier to do. There's no need to try to code it all yourself or hire an expert, you can build it within the platform easily. This is much more cost-effective, especially if you want to make gamification a regular feature of your marketing.

When choosing which platform to use, prioritize one that's user-friendly, has built-in analytics, and customization.

4 Promote it

After you build your campaign, it's time to get it out there. Social media is a great option – both organic and paid – as this helps you reach sports fans where they are. Physical events and games are ideal ways to engage fans who are already willing to buy tickets or merchandise. Simply display QR codes linking to the campaign or app downloads to direct fans.



Did you know?

Playable online campaigns are easily displayed as an iFrame or a webview.
For offline promotion, use our integrated QR generator both for on-screen display or high-quality printing.

5 Measure results

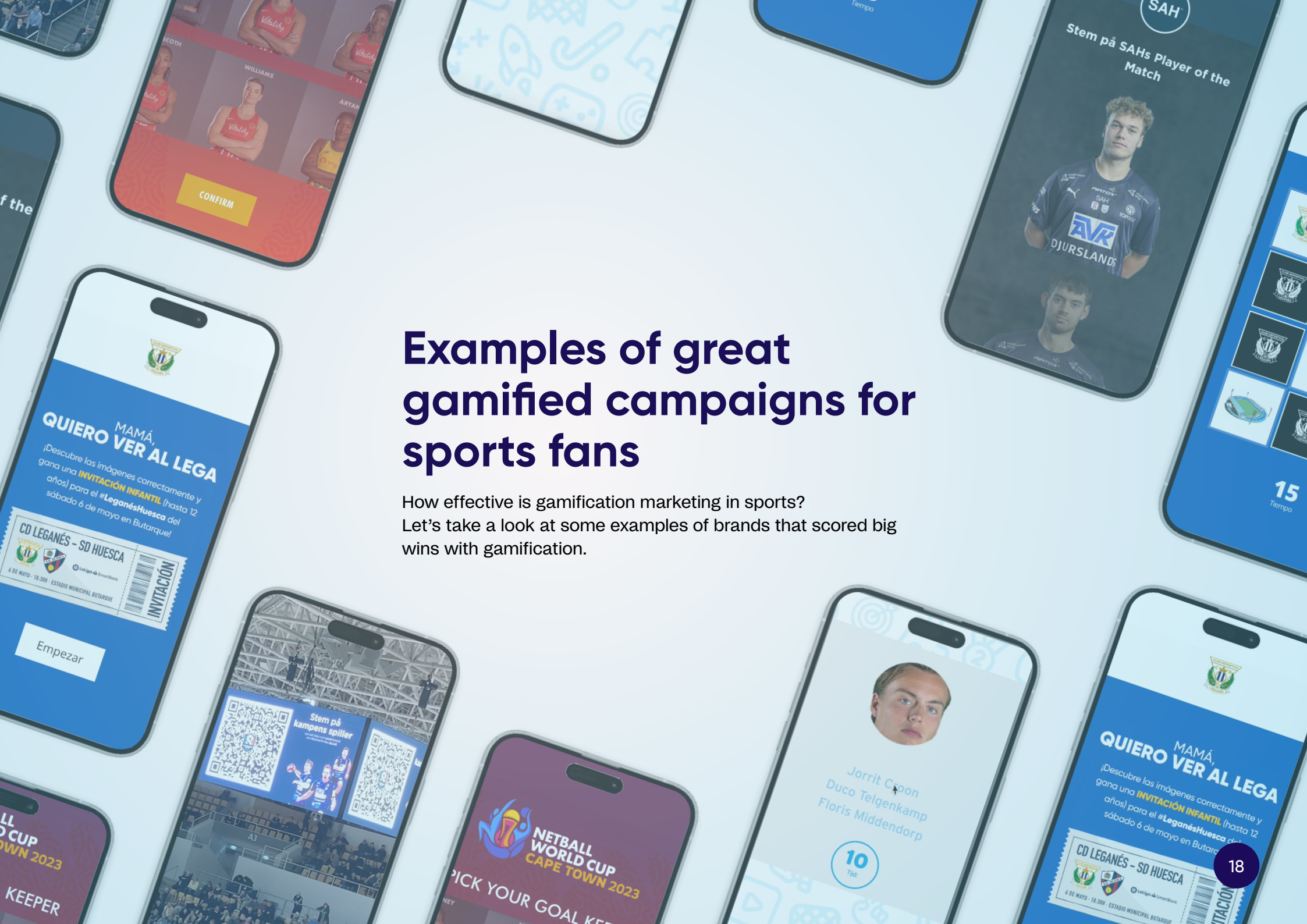
It’s always important to measure the results of any campaign, and gamified ones are particularly great for game metrics and user data. You can collect engagement data, conversions, number of times played, and sales to see if your campaign was successful.

With a platform like Playable, you can feed this data into your CRM or marketing systems to make it easier to draw insights for future marketing opportunities.



Did you know?

The Playable platform includes a real-time dashboard and analytics to enable you to monitor campaign visits, registrations, engagement insights, conversion rates, drop-offs by flow step or page, and more.



Examples of great gamified campaigns for sports fans

How effective is gamification marketing in sports? Let's take a look at some examples of brands that scored big wins with gamification.

Before A Sporting Event

Engaging sports fans before an event is a great way of building anticipation by making them feel part of the event itself. By creating interactive experiences, brands can also boost event attendance.

C.D. Leganés

For Mother's Day 2023, Spanish football team C.D. Leganés ran a memory game where mothers had the chance to win invitations for their children to attend the upcoming Leganés-Huesca match. Reaching out to potential attendees is a great way of attracting attention and driving ticket sales before a sporting event.





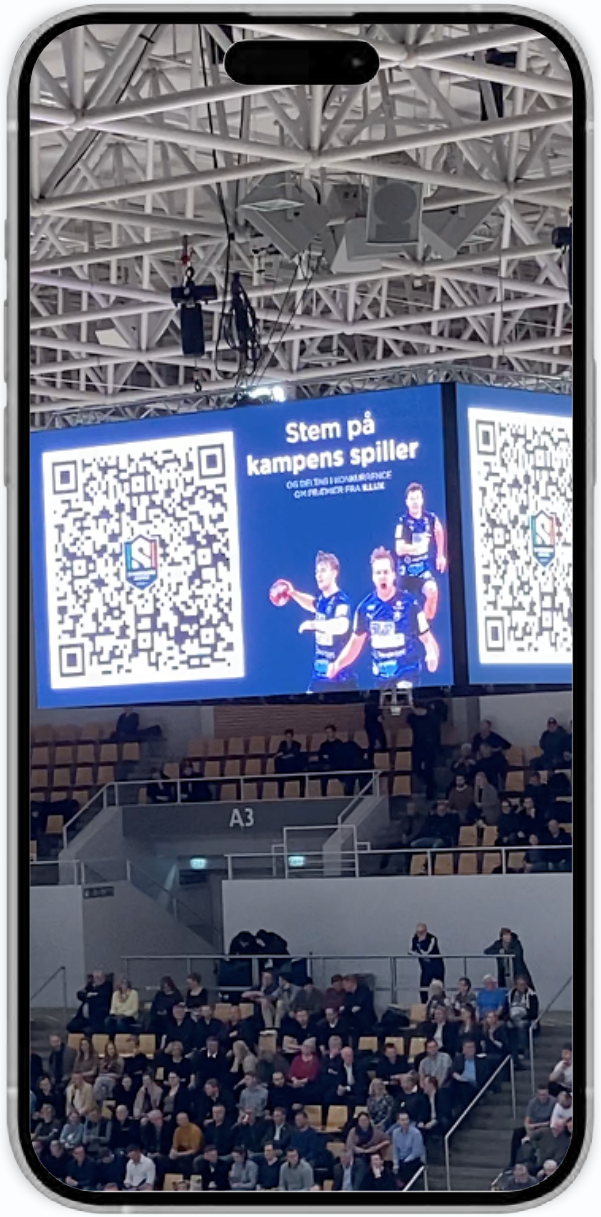
During a Sporting Event

Connecting with an audience during the event itself strengthens their connection to your brand, and creates memorable experiences. Passive viewing becomes active participation—and can generate shareable moments that expand the reach beyond the immediate audience.

Skanderborg Aarhus Handball

During home matches, Danish handball club Skanderborg Aarhus Handball has a “Man of the Match” game where people at the stadium can use their phones to vote on the best player; the result then flashes up on the jumbotron.

By running games during the event itself, brands and clubs can encourage real-time fan engagement and encourage an interactive experience.





After a Sporting Event

Don’t wait until the next sporting event to stay in touch with your fans. The event may have finished, but you can engage your fans by offering quizzes, games, and puzzles. This is a great way of developing an ongoing relationship that goes beyond a one-time interaction.

HIFK

Finnish ice hockey team HIFK conducted a poll after their match in February 2024 where fans could decide who was the best player of the match.

Netball world cup in Cape Town

After the 2023 Netball world cup in Cape Town, the Netball World Association created a game where participants could create their dream team by selecting seven players from the three teams that medalled. This approach not only engaged fans after the tournament, but sparked conversations about players and the sport.

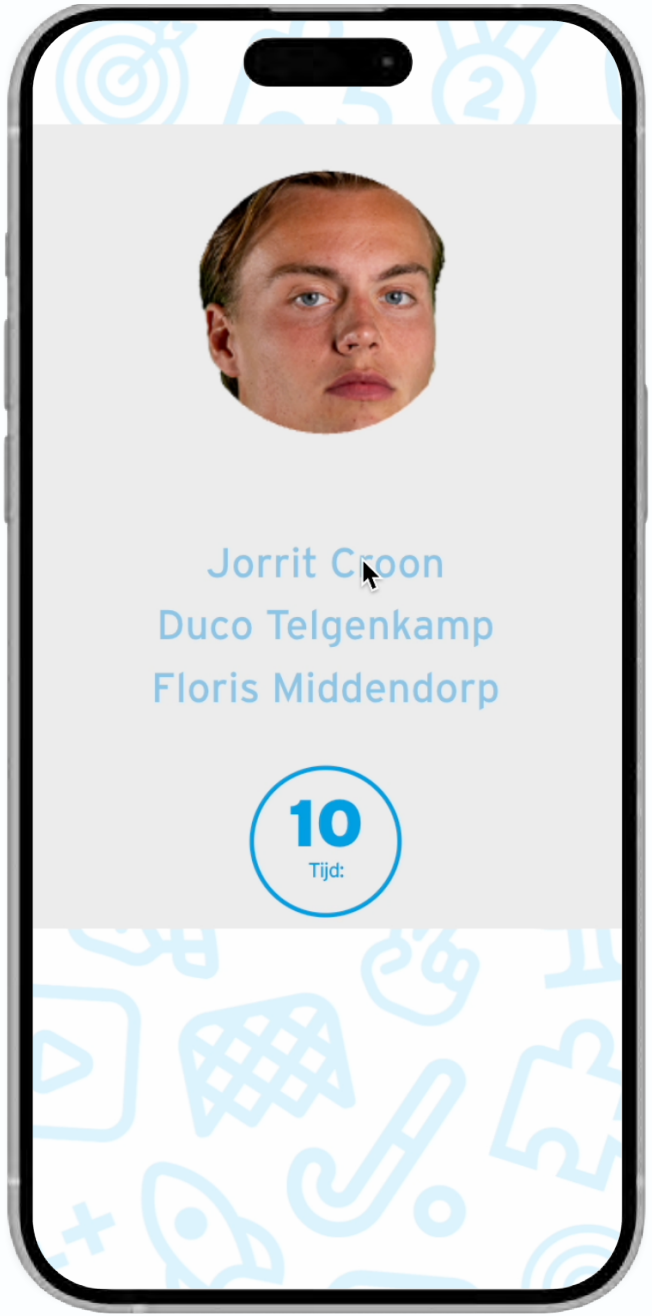


Always-on campaigns

Why wait for a sporting event to engage fans? Always-on campaigns remain available for an extended period of time, and are a good opportunity to maintain interest and build a community.

KNHB

KNHB (Royal Dutch Hockey Association) runs a guess the picture always-on campaign where players must guess which player they see as quickly as possible - for the opportunity to win tickets.



Non-Sports Brands

Even non-sports brands can take advantage of gamification.
They can use the excitement generated by sports events to achieve their marketing goals.
Let's explore a few examples of non-sports brands that used quizzes and games to boost their campaigns.

Lex.dk

Lex.dk, Denmark's national encyclopedia, ran a quiz for the Tour de France 2023 where they asked 10 questions about the history of the race.

County Broadband

County Broadband, a broadband network to connect rural communities in the UK, held an online drop game for the Rugby World Cup where players had to catch rugby balls while avoiding the other teams' players.

Ditur

Ditur, a Danish retailer specializing in watches, held a game where players had to catch green watches while avoiding red ones. Participants who achieved a high enough score could enter a draw to win a Tissot watch from the 2023 Tour de France.

Carlsberg

Carlsberg, sponsor of the Danish National team, ran a "Win with the Team" campaign during Euro 2020. Fans could buy limited edition Carlsberg cans and scan the QR code to win Danish fan merchandise

From pre-event anticipation to post-game interactions to round-the-clock engagement, these case studies demonstrate that gamification is a versatile and powerful tool in sports marketing.

Whether it's a memory game that helps increase ticket sales, or an in-game survey that drives real-time, shareable fan engagement, these campaigns show how brands can turn passive viewers into participants, and audiences into communities. It's proof that the right marketing game plan can lead to win after win after win...

Is gamification the right choice for sports marketing?

Sports fans are a unique audience that's already open to the concept of gamification and enjoys the competitiveness gamified campaigns can provide.

Gamified campaigns are a great way to stand out and gain attention from fans who are already engaged in the related sport. But gamification goes further than that. It encourages active participation from fans, fosters positive and memorable experiences and encourages tickets and merchandise sales.

If you've ever struggled to collect personal fan data from previous campaigns, gamification makes this much more seamless. By providing clear incentives like prizes and discounts, you can entice fans to not only engage but also share data that can help you in your overall marketing strategy.

For those reasons, gamified marketing is a highly strategic way to reach your fans and build a strong community. Ready to get started?

Get in touch today for a demo of the platform in action!



About Playable

The marketing gamification platform

Playable is the gamification platform for marketers. Combining the power of play with the fundamentals of gamification, we unlock playable marketing; using interactivity to engage for extraordinary results.

Our flexible Saas platform allows marketers to create, tailor and deploy marketing gamification campaigns that deliver results at every touchpoint. Powering the playable marketing of 650+ brands globally, 15 games are played every second from our platform.

Founded in 2017 in Denmark, our expert teams in Aarhus, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Helsinki and London inspire game-changing marketing every day.

playable

Get in touch

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