



HOW TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF THE SPORTS AUDIENCE?

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1. To what extent can the new media increase audience size?
2. How can digital media ensure greater access to different events at the Games?
3. Should the International Olympic Committee (IOC) plan for new Games-related content to increase audiences?
4. Should the Olympic Movement develop new ways to ensure an optimal access to the Games via television/internet?

I will begin my remarks by noting two critical elements that are often overlooked when people talk about the new media or technological innovation. They are the content and the consumer.

If the programming content is not compelling – if it does not matter to the viewer – people are not going to watch or use it, no matter how many channels or streaming options are available.

Now, while the media actually produce the programming for audiences, the content first takes shape at the event. Mr Larfaoui, of the Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA), recognised this in his submission, when he wrote: “The FINA strongly believes the recipe for success in achieving the largest possible audience is to deliver events that bring out the best performances from the athletes.” He went on to say that “the consumer – in whatever medium – wants unforgettable moments, human stories and great champions.”

As I mentioned, the second critical part of the equation is the consumer and, more specifically, the consumer's expectations of the media. It is very important that the Olympic Movement keep in step with what is being offered to the consumer by other sports event organisations. The point I am making has less to do with production, in which we are leading the way in many ways, and more to do with user-generated content. This concept was articulated in the submissions by Mr Marcovici as: “Let the market do the marketing.”

As for the new media, advances in technology have, without question, resulted in more channels, more programming and, therefore, more sports coverage.

Streaming on the internet is not only cost-effective for the rights-holders, but also gives consumers more options as to when and where they tune in. Mobile phones further enhance the portability factor. This concept of “easier access” was well put in the submission by Mr Masegla, who wrote that the consumer now has access “quand je veux, où je veux et comme je veux” (when I want it, where I want it and how I want it).

Multiple TV platforms (freeview, cable, and pay television) and internet streaming have also been great news for sports that traditionally did not get a lot of coverage on free-to-air television.

The written submissions recommended several ways of exploiting the new media. The list included video games based on Olympic sports, accessing archival material for use between Games, and using social networks to attract younger audiences.

In terms of audience access to the Games, a key question for the future is what the Olympic Movement should do to ensure such access.

This question will certainly be part of the discussion regarding rights management. However, for the purpose of this session, I would suggest that there is no rights-holder that does not want to maximise its audience ratings.

However, there are places in the world where networks are unable to provide a complete broadcast package. This is due partly to financial constraints and partly to a lack of human resources. These issues are probably best addressed by geographical territory and language.

Olympic Broadcasting Services will be exploring this in Vancouver, where we will provide multi-channel feeds with commentary, via satellite, to countries not planning to send staff to the Games.

I will conclude my remarks with a recommendation that emanates from the submissions and discussions here at the Congress.

My proposal is that the IOC acts as catalyst by sponsoring an annual sports broadcasting conference that focuses on the craft of production and programming.

Every sport requires a unique, tailored approach to its video and audio production. Because the Summer and Winter Games involve so many different sports, the IOC is the organisation best placed to initiate such a conference.

There are several international symposia in our industry, but they are for news, documentaries and the arts. None of them focuses on sports programming.

If you are not already aware of it, there is so much innovative work being produced right now by rights-holders. An annual conference would ensure that they take some time out to exchange ideas. And it would be a pity if the ideas expressed in this Congress were not aired in such a public forum. Because, by sharing knowledge, broadcasters will in turn develop new, compelling programming.



As I mentioned at the beginning, if the content is compelling, and if it matters to the audience, they will tune in on the internet, television, on their mobile phones – or whatever medium is coming next.