



## Julian Tan

Head of Digital Business  
Initiatives & Esports

***“The lines between virtual and real are blurred when we talk about motorsports and Formula 1 as it relates to esports... it’s no coincidence that our Formula 1 drivers adapted so quickly to the virtual even though it’s such a different platform”***

*Julian Tan PhD. Head of Digital Business Initiatives & Esport*

Key points from Julian Tan’s conversation as a part of the 2020 Europe Virtual Sports Tech Conference. Julian covered F1’s approach to digital innovation, how esports has been a core pillar of their digital strategy, and how this approach enabled them to connect with their fans, teams, and sponsors throughout the current global pandemic.

- Esports was identified as a key pillar in the complete digital transformation of F1, and was first introduced in 2017
- F1 approached esports as a tool through which they could diversify and expand their existing audience, which they acknowledged as an ageing audience
- F1’s entry into esports has been considered a success by many, and great example of a ‘traditional sport’ entering the esports market. According to Formula 1, a key part of this success was a clear focus, and the defining of the purpose and goals of all esports and virtual initiatives
- It is also important to recognise that as a form of motorsport, F1 has a unique advantage over other ‘traditional sports’ that enter

the esports market. It is not a sport that can be experienced, or played at home e.g. you can kick a football in the backyard, but you can't race a car around a circuit. For this reason esports, and virtual experiences are one of the few ways a fan can emulate their heroes. In addition, it is also one of the few 'traditional sports' who can replicate some of technical skills involved within a gaming, or virtual arena e.g. you can race using realistic steering wheels, pedals etc.

- It is important that traditional sports take all of this into consideration when looking at entering the esports market. Where are you starting from? What are your broader goals as an organisation? Can esports help to achieve these goals, and if so how?
- Ultimately, F1's previous success in esports, and unique qualities as a sport is what enabled them to respond quickly to the restrictions of COVID-19. Leveraging their esports expertise to create experiences that engaged both fans and sponsors globally
- The Virtual Grand Prix series is an example of one of these experiences during COVID-19 restrictions. The first of these races achieved 3.2 million online viewers, and an estimated 1.2 million tv viewers
- F1 also took a positive approach to the COVID-19 restrictions viewing them as an opportunity to learn, and experiment more in the digital space. To create products, experiences, and initiatives that not only solved an immediate problem, but became part of long-term solutions beyond COVID-19
- This positive, forward-thinking focus is evident in the creation of the F1 Challenge, which was designed to not only connect fans with the sport, but also with drivers, teams, and associated sponsors.
- If the COVID-19 restrictions have taught F1 anything, it's that "a lot of our (F1's) activities, when you are forced to, can be done online, done remotely. That immediately helps you question, before there was a status quo on how to do an esports event... this has disrupted that a lot... this will inform our long-term strategy."