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## Digital content management more than Xs and Os

The NBA has launched a comprehensive digital content system that manages and distributes articles, photos, videos and tweets to league partners every game night. Part news service and part content manager, the NBA Content Network also functions as a customer service portal and a rights wrangler. It even keeps track of the most popular content.

The NBA Content Network launched in October and individual NBA teams are now able to download content to use at their venues on game nights. Described as a “cloud-based B2B portal,” the Content Network gives all 30 NBA teams and nearly 200 partners access to the NBA’s media products, including video, images, news and data and social media content, all of which can be quickly searched and downloaded.

The platform also lets the league track client requests to determine the most popular content, in order to improve content creation and distribution.

Chris Halton, the NBA’s vice president of media and distribution technology, called the network’s portal “the storefront of the NBA” in an interview with Sports Video Group, an industry organization for producers and distributors of sports content.

The NBA Content Network enables the league to reach fans in more than 215 countries and territories around the world, noted Halton.

To support the sprawling network, the NBA has built a digital content supply chain infrastructure. This includes wiring all game venues so that a variety of media content can be recorded, edited and transmitted to the league’s media hub in Secaucus, N.J. There, the content is made available to teams and league partners for distribution to fans around the world. Users get curated, “best of” NBA content every night.

But streamlining the distribution of a huge amount of digital content presented a few challenges for the Content Network’s developers.

The NBA worked with tech-

nology companies Cxense and AcquireMedia to consistently label and index every piece of content by categories including player names, teams and key plays to facilitate searchability and the production of content packages.

Managing the myriad rights deals of its partners is one of the key functions of the NBA Content Network. The network was designed to provide access to content according to each user’s rights deal.

The NBA inventoried every rights agreement to make sure partners have access to the correct packages. Users can access content for immediate download that matches their rights deal and can view short clips of content outside of their deal for purchase.

The NBA Content Network also addresses two nagging practical problems in content delivery — efficiency and storage. Self-service tools increase the autonomy of users and streamline communication so users don’t have to wait for a live person — sometimes located in a different time zone — to respond to a request for content.

The league also constructed additional in-house storage at the Secaucus media hub so the network can provide more requests for high-resolution content.

The NBA isn’t the only professional sports league that’s upping its content game.

Major League Baseball has teamed up with Hispanic digital network mitú to create content for Hispanic fans during baseball season, the website SportsBusiness Daily reported in January. The digital network already provides its own content on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat.

Part of a campaign called Always On, the content created by the MLB and mitú targets young, multicultural baseball fans using MLB highlights, comedic sketches and memes. The new content is shared with each team, which can then post it on its own social media accounts.

Although the campaign focuses on Hispanics in the U.S., the content is primarily in English and

### SPORTS MARKETING PLAYBOOK



**DOUGLAS N. MASTERS  
AND SETH A. ROSE**

*Douglas N. Masters is a partner at Loeb & Loeb LLP, where he litigates and counsels clients primarily in intellectual property, advertising and unfair competition. He is co-chair of the firm’s intellectual property protection group and he can be reached at dmasters@loeb.com. Seth A. Rose is a partner at the firm, where he counsels clients on programs and initiatives in advertising, marketing, promotions, media, sponsorships, entertainment, branded and integrated marketing, and social media. He can be reached at srose@loeb.com.*

will feature MLB players of all backgrounds, based on mitú’s discovery that, even though its target audience speaks Spanish, viewers prefer to consume content in English, according to SportsBusiness Daily.

The mitú partnership represents a new effort by the MLB to capitalize on pop culture trends by tailoring its content. The league launched MLB Network in 2009 to categorize and catalog its digital archive of game recordings, pre- and post-game footage, audio recordings and isolated camera feeds for future use.

MLB Network can record and archive more than 3,000 hours of content per week for the league to use in special programming, according to its data management company Dternity.

The National Football League has been taking a less conventional approach to content production since 2016. The NFL announced in October that it is using content produced by its 24/7 digital network, NFL Now, to show a new side of the sport in a bid to attract new fans, particularly more casual fans.

NFL Now is striving to inject more personality and pop culture into the content it produces for a fun and informative experience, with programming like “Celebration Station,” which takes a tongue-in-cheek look at the week’s best touchdown celebrations; “NFL Trendzone,” which breaks down the week in NFL social

media; and “WTF: What The Football,” which looks at the biggest football failures of the week. NFL Now also packages the week’s content highlights to air on Saturday nights on the NFL Network.

Getting fans more involved in creating content of their own appears to be another promising fan-engagement avenue the NBA is leading. The NBA is already opening up its content network to fans in order to build unique new communities.

In May 2016, the NBA and BroadbandTV (BBTV) launched NBA Playmakers, a community for videographers focused on basketball and basketball culture. Designed to appeal to millennials, the video network gives NBA fans the opportunity to produce their own basketball-related content and share it across the network, which includes YouTube, the NBA’s digital assets and other platforms.

Video makers get access to BBTV’s multiplatform network expertise and a variety of benefits, including access to selected NBA footage and the league’s production facilities as well as NBA games and special events and new merchandise.

Finding new ways to create, distribute and monetize digital content to inform and engage fans is an area that seems limited only by the producers’ creativity and technology and, at the moment, the NBA is leading the way.