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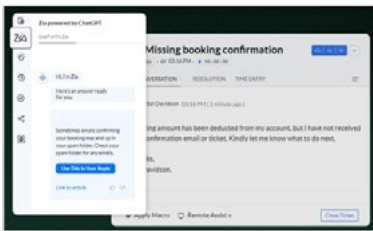
# HOW TO CATCH THE WAVE: FUELLING FAN GROWTH WITH AI



# LANGUAGE UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE UNDERST

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Machines programmed to mimic human intelligence, capable of learning, reasoning, and adapting.



## GENERATIVE AI

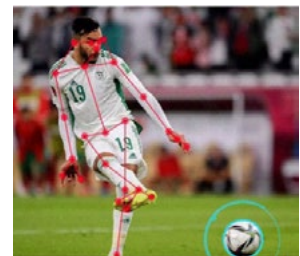
A type of artificial intelligence that can create new content, such as text, images, or music, based on learning from existing data.



Viral Harry Kane fluent German deepfake

## COMPUTER VISION

A field of AI that enables computers to interpret and understand visual information, converting images and videos into data.



Player limb tracking for automated offsides

## CUSTOMER DATA PLATFORM

Centralised system that unifies customer data from multiple sources to build a single view of each customer, supporting personalisation.

## MACHINE LEARNING

An area of AI focusing on algorithms that allow computers to learn from and make decisions based on data, improving their accuracy over time without being explicitly programmed for each task.

## HYPER SEGMENTATION

Dividing an audience into highly specific segments, or even individuals, for ultra-targeted recommendations or actions, based on detailed criteria.



CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING



DATA ANALYSIS



CUSTOMER SERVICE



IMAGE/VIDEO CONTENT CREATION

**Within three years, 88% of CMOs plan on using Generative AI for...**



TEXT CONTENT CREATION



PERSONALISED EXPERIENCE



CAMPAIGN CREATION

Source: Capgemini, 'Generative AI and the Evolving Role of Marketing: A CMO's Playbook'



# ASSESSING AI WITH A FAN-FIRST LENS



The true north for sports rights owners through the hype surrounding AI and its use should remain unerringly clear: delivering unparalleled value to fans at every turn. However, the dialogue surrounding AI in the sports industry is frequently too narrow. Often fixating on slashing production costs, indiscriminately producing reams of content aimlessly or creating uninspired experiences that misunderstand your fans and why they interact with you.

As sports rights owners look to join the majority of advertisers, content creators, retailers and other industries that are already implementing solutions in this space, sports must maintain an approach that finds solutions to fans' problems – not hammering an AI nail into every hole we see.

Now is the time for sports rights owners to widen their lens, take stock of what is already being created and build an AI/ML strategy that aims to forge more frequent and more meaningful connections with every segment of their fan base. All while maintaining cool heads to avoid the wrong path and make the right decisions for their fans and organisation.

The fan funnel represents the journey of discovering a sports property, engaging more consistently with it and eventually transacting with the brand. Expanding it at each point allows for broader capture of potential audience, increasing the pool from which conversions are drawn, directly impacting revenue growth.

Rights owners will find opportunities throughout the fan funnel. From slick and engaging content creation for rights owners' broadest platforms, through to hyper-personalised recommendations and messaging on rights owners own digital platforms.

## AI is already disrupting the funnel



# BROADENING TOP OF FUNNEL

Increasing discoverability on search, social and news



Global media consumption is projected to maintain its growth over the rest of the decade, growing by a further 20% between today and 2030. Sports is among the key drivers for growth, and the rightsowners taking advantage of this will be the ones using new technologies to serve a growing and hungrier audience.

**Creating and sharing video content at scale is one area where AI/ML has already been a gamechanger.** Platforms offer near-live highlights packages that are clipped using match data and computer vision to understand what is happening on screen. Rights owners making the most of these technologies are providing highlights packages to broadcasters and partners to leverage their followings and provide additional value. On the biggest stage, FIFA partnered with over 20 broadcasters and Google to push automated highlights packages into Google OneBox minutes after the final whistle.

**The speed and reach of these highlights give broadcasters the maximum opportunity to derive value from their rights,** earning 61 million views through Google Search that would have been lost to unofficial channels or prematurely ended fan journeys. Further, a third of this audience, with clear intent for watching highlights content via their search, went on to consume subsequent videos, **demonstrating the clear value in quickly and accurately putting the right content in the right channels.**

“ ”

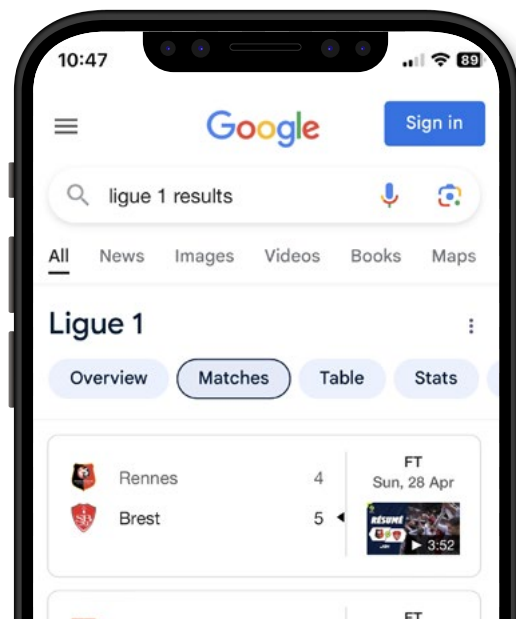
**GenAI allowed us to create more with our existing content formats - serving more fans in the best format to suit them.**

—

**SAOED HABIEB**  
Database Manager at Eredivisie

Written live play-by-play and post-match content is another area already increasingly enhanced by artificial intelligence .

In the pre-AI environment, cost and time have prohibited extensive written coverage for the long tail of sports events – leaving a large number of existing fans under-served, future fans untouched and great stories unwritten. A combination of computer vision and AI-enabled reformulation of commentary and data feeds is already being molded by international rights owners into content that would otherwise never find its way into text on apps and websites, providing premium content options across the breadth of rights owners’ events.



# OWNED-PLATFORM CONTENT

*Increasing content volume and accessibility*

Elsewhere, the evergreen sections of rights owners’ apps and websites – such as stats and player details - will engage fans on an entirely new level. A player bio page with just a picture, a handful of generic stats and no real content will be a thing of the past.

Currently, player and team biography pages typically represent 10-15% of a rights owner’s website page views. The majority of these sections currently provide sub-optimal experiences for their users.

Generative AI models fine-tuned on rights owners’ proprietary competition data and historical content give the scale to create engaging and up-to-date biographies and news for each player and team. The result is another area of your website that feels live, maintained and worth frequent visits by your fans.

Enhance this with a model that understands the reason a user is visiting and subsequently serves content accordingly to add longer, more engaging journeys on top of frequency.

“ **Widening the funnel doesn’t get much bigger than authentically recreating your content for a global audience.** ”

Compounding the gains that generative AI will deliver for early movers is localisation.

Machine learning has sharpened translation services for years, and AI will help rights owners to not just translate, but to maintain the rights owners’ tone and give more confidence that all versions authentically reflect the communication style of the rights owner. Widening the funnel doesn’t get much bigger than authentically recreating your content for a global audience.



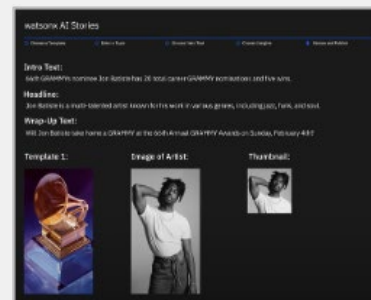
## GENERATIVE AI IN THE WILD: THE GRAMMYS

The Grammys provide a fantastic look at the potential future of sports content creation.

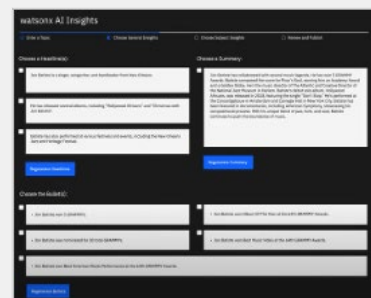
With thousands of artists nominated, each with compelling backstories and so many fans to cater for, a generative AI content engine trained on the rights owner’s archives accelerated the workflow for social and owned-platform text and video content.

Editorial prompts led to a selection of relevant imagery, content and attention-grabbing headlines to be chosen from for each story.

The end product is a supremely productive editorial pipeline that serves more fans than ever.



Producing content around the live event, the Grammys team choose a topic for the AI engine to generate a selection of headlines, copy and summaries.



Selected and edited content is then paired with recommended assets before publication on social channels and owned platforms.



# CHOOSING FANS' NEXT BEST ACTION

*Building better and more frequent on-platform experiences*



**HENRIETTA BROADWAY**  
Lead Consultant,  
MarTech

Relying solely on social media channels for fan engagement offers rights owners a limited view of their audience and hampers the development of deeper connections. The challenge lies in diverting fans from social platforms to owned sites and apps, which often fall short in matching the dynamic and personalised experiences offered by social media feeds.

Generative AI and other machine learning approaches are enabling the creation of live, scalable, personalised content. This cutting-edge experience not only attracts fans to owned platforms as a matter of routine but subsequently generates valuable user engagement data. This data is crucial for mass personalisation, ensuring fans receive content that resonates with them on an individual level, solidifying their platform loyalty and making your experience a habit.

Eventually, every fan visit to rights owners' platforms will be enhanced by a platform understanding the intent of a visit and planning its content accordingly. A fan visiting for the first time from a Google search looking for TV schedules should be treated entirely differently to a fan returning via email to watch their team's highlights for the fourth time this season. These 'next best action' recommendations will be fully automated, with decisions provided by models trained on user interactions and knowledge from other touchpoints.

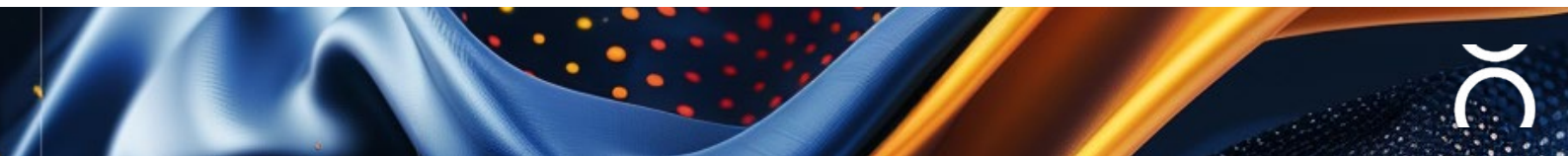
Customer Data Platforms (CDPs) are revolutionizing the way digital platforms engage with their audience, leading the charge in AI innovation. They enable a seamless orchestration

**It's really important to have a presence on social media and reach the biggest audiences. But as we have seen, those are not your customers until they arrive on your platforms – that's where you start to have a direct relationship with that fan, that's when it becomes your data.**

**WYNDHAM RICHARDSON**

*Group Executive Director, Two Circles  
Featured on Unofficial Partner podcast*

of customer journeys, leveraging "next best action" strategies to deliver personalised experiences that not only captivate users but also enhance loyalty and boost revenue. Customer Data Platforms and related technologies mean that rights owners do not need to establish expansive AI departments to reap these benefits. CDPs integrate on-platform behavioural data with fan data from each touchpoint, ensuring the delivery of the most effective content to each user. This approach moves away from traditional methods like the latest news, editorial selections, or manually tagged recommendations, in favour of creating unique and tailored experiences for every visitor.



# WHAT CUSTOMER DATA PLATFORMS ARE DELIVERING FOR RIGHTS OWNERS

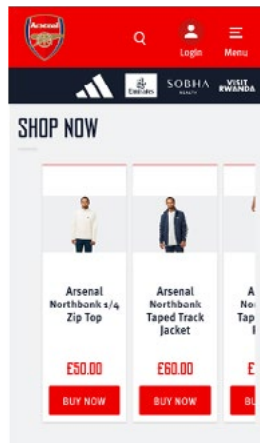


## Next best action

Capturing and feeding detailed behavioural and selected transactional data into recommendation engines (or acting as the recommendation engine) to output a suggested follow up action at an individual fan level, using the fan’s preferences but also broader trends.

As used by:

- Netflix recommendations carousels built from watch history.
- Amazon complementary product recommendations
- YouTube Shorts recommendations based on user-specific behaviour and wider audience virality.

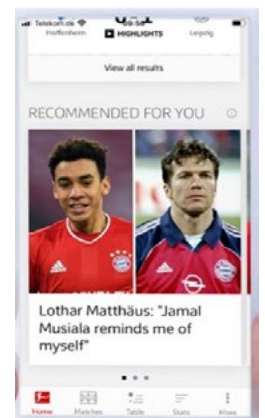


## Personalisation & experimentation

After selecting the product or content to promote to a fan, CDPs can decide the best delivery method and format for the promotion, refining its decision-making with constant testing.

Implementation Ideas:

- Personalised landing pages based on previous engagements, referral sources or marketing campaigns.
- Multivariate testing and generative AI driven personalisation of subject lines, CTA and copy in emails and push notification to drive campaign outcomes.

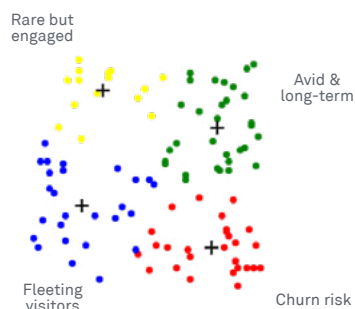


## Complex segmentation

Calculate key metrics including “customer lifetime value” and “lapse probability” for each fan in near real-time with live and historical data from digital platforms and real-world fan interactions. Machine learning models offer complexity, speed and scale that human-only approaches typically struggle to handle.

Use cases:

- Automated and tailored campaigns for ‘high-risk of churn’ users on direct-to-consumer platforms.
- Identify users likely to abandon basket on your team’s shop and adjust their messaging accordingly.



## Predictive analytics

Using behavioral data, fan transactions and contextual information like fixtures, results, transfers, or other news, we can predict trends in platform traffic and product sales. This information helps to inform marketing decisions and give advance warning to mitigate upcoming troughs in purchase funnels.

Use cases:

- Predictive demand forecasting around merchandise, ticketing or other products.
- Optimised campaign spend and budget allocation.





# BUILDING THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE

*Aligning digital behaviour with what you know about your audience*



**MARK  
MACUMBER**  
Technology Director,  
ANZ

**T**wo Circles are already implementing these concepts across rights owners’ platforms.

- Fan behaviour on rights owners’ platforms is coupled with fan records from other sources (such as ticketing or memberships) to create detailed segments on direct-to-consumer channels.
- Segments and fan data are factored into models that are trained to improve retention and acquisition outcomes.
- These models output personalised in-platform recommendations, trigger fan-centric email and notifications, and enable paid channel retargeting – each at the moment that best improves the chance of keeping fans as transacting members of your community.

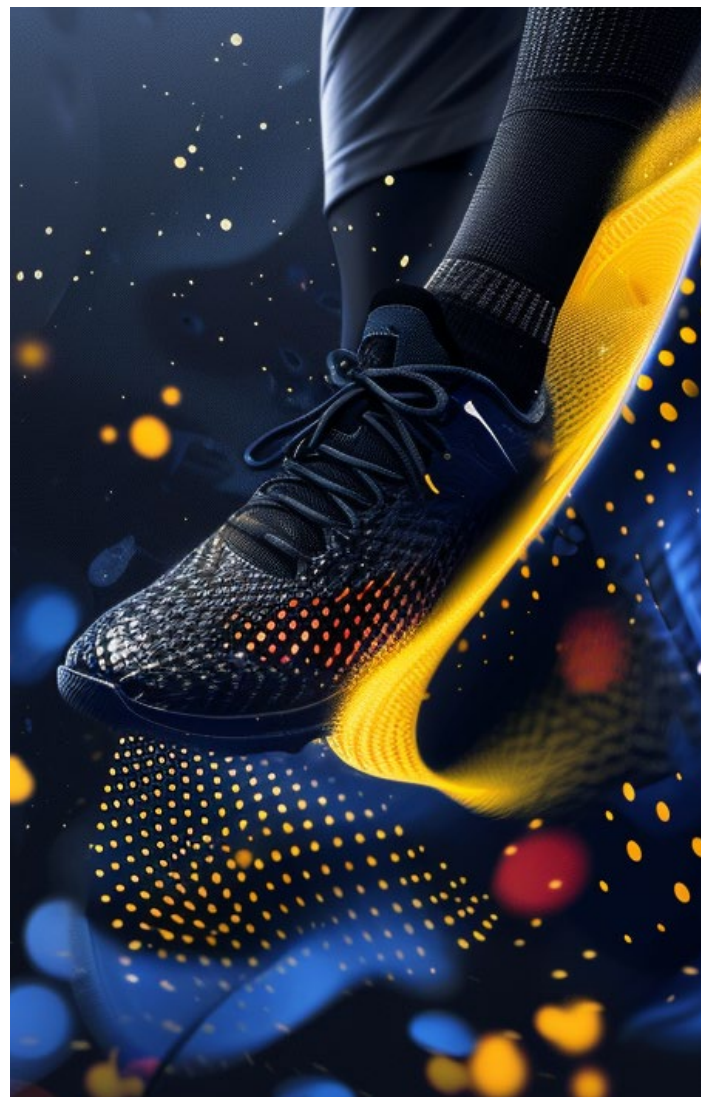
Such services are the essential bricks of future digital sports platforms, but every house needs its plumbing. Rights owners will only unlock significant return from AI with sophisticated data architecture and a robust commercial strategy to offer fans the services they need at the moment they want them.

One critical piece of the plumbing is the integration of fan data from existing revenue lines – ticketing, merchandise or memberships, for example, that may come from environments managed by different owned or third party services. The organisations with the strategy and infrastructure in place to collect and combine their data sources across digital platforms and other revenue streams will be best placed to serve fans in a personalised way.

Expensive and time-consuming building and re-building await those who do not have a holistic approach to their

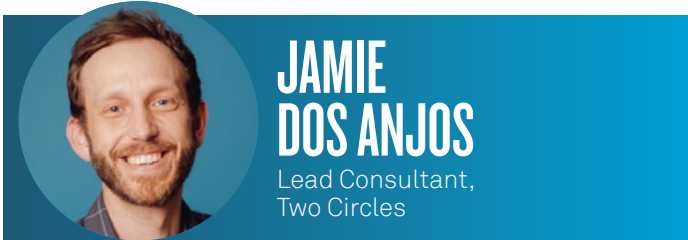
platforms. The proliferation of modern sports platforms has increasingly shown that sports platforms are increasingly finding that the 30% premium on top-tier services required in other industries does not provide ROI within rights holders’ monetisation models.

Implementing best-in-class and not ‘best-for-you’ is an expensive lesson you can avoid early with a laser focus on your community’s needs.



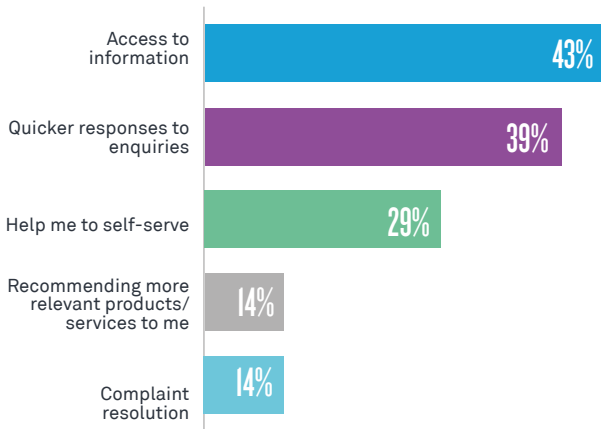
# THINKING ONE STEP FURTHER

*Serving event attendance and participation with Generative AI*



Hypothesising a level deeper than improving websites, default thinking and the technology available over the past two decades has meant that we see almost every on-platform fan interaction as happening through a website or app – a set of information and interactions selected by the rights owners for the fan to engage with. We may quickly learn that this isn't the best format for many ways that rights owners serve their fans. One C-suite survey put customer service as the most common upcoming use case for AI, with 90% seeing future implementation likely within the next three years. This is provisionally backed up on the demand-side as UK consumers quote 'access to information', 'quicker query response' and 'help to self-serve' as the three focal points for AI assistance in customer service.

## WHERE DO UK CONSUMERS ALREADY BELIEVE AI CAN ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?



Source: UK Institute of Customer Service Jan 2024 Survey



**The number one thing that drives loyalty is service. And that service experience needs to be personalised – what time do they want to be contacted? What information do they need?**

**TIA WHITE**

*General Manager AI & Machine Learning, AWS  
Featured on Unofficial Partner podcast*

Ticketing and the matchday experience, as one speculative example, is one key space where a personal chat interface could create better outcomes for rights owners and fans. AI chat generation helping a fan to purchase their tickets, find their seats and purchase their merch and half-time pie, answering their questions on each along the way is a markedly better and more fan-centric experience – replacing the personal touch to a process long-since handled in a sterile and processed manner.

Outside of serving fans, many rights owners also have a mission to encourage and improve participation and should be keeping an eye on how artificial intelligence can provide new tools.

Endurance training is in the midst of disruption from AI-aided trainers – tailoring traditional running or cycling plans based on previous performance and perceived fatigue from the user. An early-mover advantage awaits the rights owners in their respective sports that can produce the dominant coaching app, building sessions based on quick and intuitive input from a coach on the number of participants, available equipment and other environmental factors. Better-serving coaching will lead to longer participation, healthier outcomes and life-long involvement in your sport.



# WATCH-OUTS

*Without respecting the risks, many will fail*

Forums, social media, user-generated content and just about every other evolution of fan touchpoints has come with risks and pitfalls in its adoption – AI is no different.

First and foremost, rights owners need to pre-empt resistance when generative AI is used in a disingenuous or deceptive manner. In the nascent years of generative content, masquerading automation as human interaction is a high risk strategy. With your fans, AI honesty is the best policy.

The BBC offer one of the most thought-through AI policies. It centres on audience trust and transparency, with a prioritisation on human input and creativity. Every sports outlet would be well-advised to take inspiration from their guidelines and policies.

Beyond fan acceptance, rights owners have a duty to their fans and partners to protect their brand and use all enabling technologies responsibly. Falling back on ‘the AI made me do it’ is not just going to hinder progress, but will also break trust. Just as driving a car into a lake may well be blamed on the GPS, it is still your vehicle that is ultimately ruined. There are often no take-backs with dangerous AI implementation, and the responsibility is on us all to make sure we do not drive into the hypothetical pond.

Haphazard approaches that lack guardrails and do not truly understand that AI-implementation must be fan-centric will join a growing list of grating and visible failed attempts:

- Misuse of your systems, even for seemingly innocent questions, is reducing trust in the capabilities and outputs of AI implementations. In extreme cases, branded chatbots are creating negative reviews of their hosts!
- No oversight of automatically generated output is leading to products generated with entirely wrong names and details.
- Little understanding of sensitive and off-limits topics has led to harmful content appearing on news websites thanks to limited moderation.
- Sensitive user information mistakenly published through direct user interaction with a company’s language model.

The list will grow, and sports rights owners will join it, but with suitable protections in place and a clear strategy and use case on how to best serve fans through AI-backed services, smart organisations will limit and mitigate their risk while building game-changing services.



**Just as driving a car into a lake may well be blamed on the GPS, it is still your vehicle that is ultimately ruined. There are often no take-backs with dangerous AI implementation, and the responsibility is on us all to make sure we do not drive into the hypothetical pond.**



## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO TODAY?

In 2024, it is imperative for rights holders to maintain a deep sense of curiosity. The landscape of AI-enabled opportunities is expanding rapidly, necessitating a balanced blend of optimism and scepticism to discern which innovations are genuinely beneficial for their organisation. The pace of change will only increase and it is crucial for rights owners not to allow themselves to be left behind.

Key to leveraging these opportunities is digital platforms underpinned by comprehensive fan data. These platforms are essential for enriching online experiences, fostering fans' trust, and encouraging their return, information sharing, and transactions. Excelling in these areas positions rights owners at the forefront of AI integration within the industry.

Ultimately, in time, fans will win, benefiting from more engaging experiences and a personalised connection to the moments that they love.

**WHICH FANS WILL WIN BIGGEST? THAT IS UP TO THE RIGHTS OWNERS.**



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