

# Fandom in the Age of COVID-19

HOW TO PANDEMIC PROOF YOUR MARKETING



Prepared by

**FANTHREESIXTY** ▶

## The New Era of Fandom is Here to Stay



Ticket sales and gameday attendance used to be two of the primary concerns for sports teams. Season after season, sales and marketing teams developed strategies to motivate fans to buy, attend games and increase their in-venue spend. Upsell incentives, ticket transfer rewards, and last-minute discounted offers were just some of the tactics teams used to meet their seasonal goals while increasing the value of every fan.

But these are no longer causing the day-to-day headaches for teams, leagues, colleges and universities.

**There's an invisible threat that is significantly impacting the industry and revenue for every team at every level: COVID-19.**



This pandemic halted sports. It changed the world of fandom. And now, while live sports slowly make their return, the gameday experiences we knew pre-COVID will only live in the history books (or at least until a vaccine is widely available).

**Even when fans are welcomed back to the venue, will they return or will the fear keep them on their couch?**



Teams will now have to double-down on their efforts to not only motivate fans to attend live events, but also educate them about why the venue is just as safe and secure as their home. As part of our follow up to Fan Engagement from the Sidelines, we surveyed over four thousand fans across the U.S. to better understand their mindset about returning to the venue, expected safety precautions and more.

**72%**  
of survey  
respondents  
self-identify  
as casual  
fans.

Fanatics are not the totality of your fan base, nor your primary source of revenue.

Of those surveyed, 20 percent self-identify as fanatics—the season ticket members and repeat attendees. But this audience isn't the totality of your fan base, nor your primary source of revenue. Nearly 72 percent of respondents self-identify as casual fans. So while your fanatics are likely bought in to making their way back (someday), your casual fans will require more nurturing.

### **Casual fans have a higher lifetime spend than fanatics.**

Analysis shows the fanatics who replied to this survey have a total lifetime spend of \$89,084 and a median spend of \$162 per fan. Casual fans, however, have a lifetime spend of \$133,121 with a median spend of \$75 per fan. This can add up quickly as this group is significantly larger, and more reflective of fan bases across the country. And with the uncertainty of COVID-19, it's critical that teams start tapping into the power of digital marketing and mobile engagement strategies. These efforts will result in powerful fan insights that build new revenue streams beyond ticketing, helping teams maximize the value of every fan.



## Fear Exists

Fans have an inherent fear about returning to the stadium.



# 75%

of fans surveyed said they would only attend games depending on safety guidelines: either with extreme safety practices in place or with minor changes like more sanitizing stations.

### Money Matters, Too

Limited seating means limited supply of tickets, which means higher prices. While diehards and fanatics will likely look past this, your casual fans will see this as another barrier to returning to the venue. For them, the safety risk and the cost outweigh the in-venue experience.

**Without effectively engaging this group, you're going to miss out on significant ticketing revenue; anywhere from \$490,000-\$980,000 in one season.\***

This will clearly have waterfall effects, impacting revenue from in-venue purchases, merchandise, and more, having a larger impact than originally forecasted.

\*This number is based on our proprietary data science models for a team with a fan base of 100,000 fans with roughly 70% as known casual fans, with 10-20% in this audience buying tickets.

## Pandemic Proof Your Marketing Efforts



It's not all gloom and doom. Use data-driven marketing tactics backed by fan insights to deliver meaningful engagement to each fan type—from the diehards to the casual ones. By hyper-targeting these distinct audiences, you can deepen relationships while laying the foundation to make it easy for fans to return to the venue.

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### Six Types of Content To Win Off the Field

Capture your fans now with fun, sticky content in order to keep them engaged while they are at home. Blend this with specific information about social distancing and new venue policies so fans know what to expect in the new era of fandom.

Consistent and transparent communication will keep the team and gameday top-of-mind, giving your fans a reason to buy again. The result will be increased engagement, improved conversion rates and maximized value of every fan.

# Six Types of Content to Win Off the Field



## 1. Address Fan Fears and Anxieties

Over-communicate new, updated attendance policies that adhere to best practices and recommendations rolled out by the CDC and state and local officials. This will help them understand what to expect when returning to the stadium and can help ease any fears about returning to the venue.

Give fans a virtual tour of the stadium, showing what's changed and what will be new as a result of COVID-19. This will give fans a demonstration of gameday and what's to come in this new era.

## 2. Make ticket transfers, returns or credits easy for fans

Even if fans are allowed back to the stadium, they just may not be ready to return. Make it easy for fans to tell you what they prefer to do with their ticket(s).

Speedway Motorsports is just one example of how to do this. Each track has its own custom landing page where fans can enter their information, including if they plan to attend the upcoming event or not.

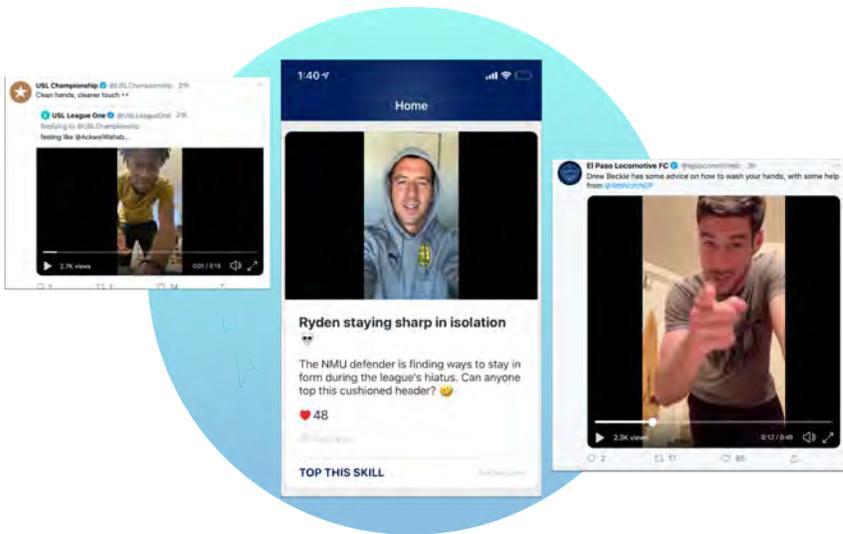
Plus, this makes it easy for sales reps to quickly know what each fan's preferences are, reducing the time it takes to implement accurate and effective sales programs.

**45%**  
of respondents purchased a ticket to an event that's either canceled or postponed



Bristol Motor Speedway's ticket exchange landing page. Sales reps are then notified of a fan's ticketing preferences, which makes it easy for them to act on this data.

## Six Types of Content to Win Off the Field



USL players posting their #StayAtHomeChallenge videos

### 3. Tap into Players and Coaches

Go beyond traditional hype videos to engage and capture fans. On game day, give fans access to behind-the-scenes videos of pre-game or halftime speeches. Record the tunnel runout, or capture some video footage of player warmups to hype your fans while they are at home.

When it's not game day, use athletes or coaches to send fun, engaging content to your fans at home. In fact, **50 percent of fans replied in our survey that they prefer to stream team content and videos.** So make it fresh and timely.

At the end of our survey, fans also replied they want to see more of what their favorite players are up to at home. Have athletes and coaches film quick videos, perhaps showing what they keep in their fridge, their favorite sports memorabilia they possess, highlight a hidden talent, or give a tour of their favorite room.

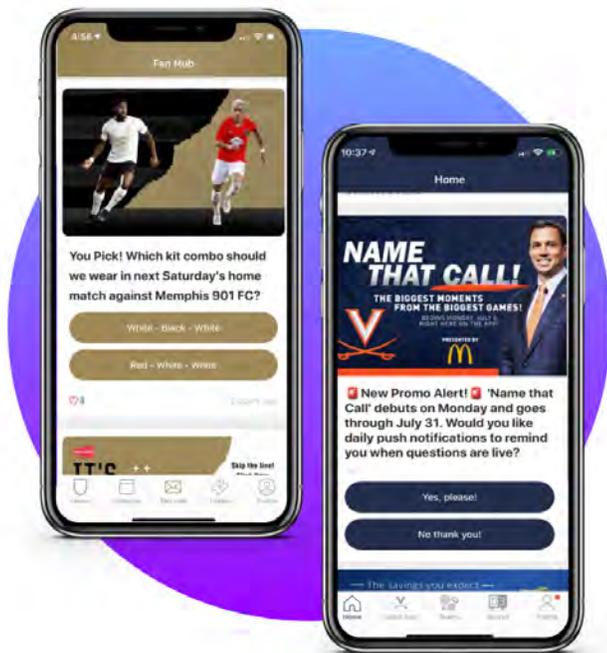
Remember when the #StayAtHomeChallenge launched in March? Several players from the United Soccer League competed in toilet paper juggling contests right from their living room or backyard. **This is the type of content that wins off the field.** It's fun. It's authentic. And most importantly, it deepens a connection between the team and fans, forming a sense of community without gathering in a crowded stadium.

### 4. Let Fans Relive the Past

This content is still relevant to send to fans today. Whether it's a link to watch a championship game or a clip of the top plays, buzzer-beaters or scores from past seasons, this content gives fans a sense of nostalgia to keep them engaged all season long and beyond.

**57%**  
of fans rewatched old  
games while live  
sports were on a hiatus

## Six Types of Content to Win Off the Field



### 5. Launch Interactive Polls, Trivia and More

Use the concept of sport to your own advantage. Leverage your team app or social channels to send interactive content that fans can engage with at any time. If it's during the season, have fans vote on which color combo players should wear in the upcoming game, like Birmingham Legion FC.

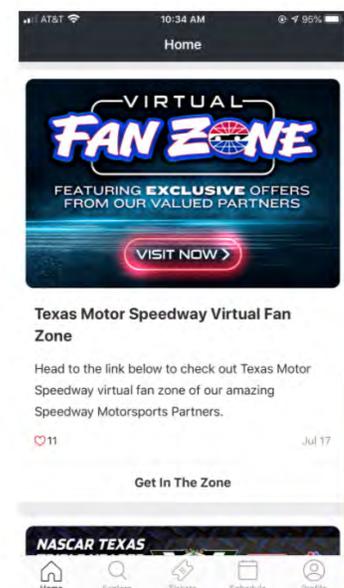
In the offseason, engage fans with interactive trivia, polls and games. For example, University of Virginia launched "Name That Call" during this summer while most sports were still paused. Fans could flex their Hoos knowledge during this month-long digital experience where they had to guess which game was associated with the radio clip played. Bonus: one lucky fan will get to join the UVA media team in the press box for one game this football season. This little surprise and delight makes the experience memorable and keeps the fans hooked.

### 6. Make Fandom Virtual

**74%** of all respondents miss attending games most

Nearly half of the casual fans who replied to our survey are thinking about sports all the time, and nearly 75 percent of all respondents miss attending games most. Bring the game to them virtually. Host virtual watch parties or tailgates on game day.

Let fans from all over the world "check-in," self-reporting from which city they are watching the game. Show fan locations by city on a map so your fans in the Midwest can see where in the East coast the game is viewed. Texas Motor Speedway hosted a virtual fan zone for those who couldn't attend the race. Fans who engaged in this virtual experience received exclusive offers from Speedway Motorsports partners and sponsors.



## The Way Back

There is no telling when fans will return to the venue at normal, or even some, capacity. This means the relationship between teams and fans is more important than ever. In fact, gameday is not the totality of fan engagement. For most teams, in-season is only a quarter of the year. This is what we mean when we use our favorite phrase—every day is game day, and why it's time to pandemic proof your marketing efforts with every fan.



### About FanThreeSixty

FanThreeSixty offers data-driven solutions for every fan touchpoint. Our customer data platform is tailored for sports, making it easy to understand and act on your fan data while helping you meet your revenue goals across your marketing, sales and sponsorship departments. Headquartered in Kansas City, we are a blend of data scientists, technologists, creatives and client success leads who are committed to helping our clients win the game of digital fan engagement on—and off—the field. [fanthreesixty.com](https://fanthreesixty.com)