

Presented by ONE Championship

Building a Sport Property's Global Digital Footprint

For years, sports were considered an in-person or TV experience. However, both live attendance, which is typically only available to local fans, and TV ratings, which are restricted by broadcast region, have been declining over the years. For example, in 2019, the NFL averaged 66,648 fans per game, it's lowest figure since 2004.

Conversely, sports that are focusing on digital platforms have experienced tremendous growth. For example, ONE Championship, a global martial arts organization based in Singapore and Asia's largest global sports media property, was ranked third by Nielsen for cumulative media reach with a 2020 mark of 403 million, a 59% increase from 2019. A 10-year-old organization born in the digital age, ONE Championship achieved this top five ranking by taking a social- and mobile-first approach to content.

Nielsen reports that close to half — 42% — of all sports fans use social media for news about sports, while another 36% use video streaming platforms or social messaging.

“This is perfect for the Millennial audience in terms of fast, short, edge-of-the-seat content that grabs your attention,” said Erica Kerner, Senior Vice President of Marketing Strategy and Partnerships at ONE Championship.

“We are where we are today because of the explosive growth of 3/4/5G networks, smart phones and social media, especially in the last five years,” added Hari Vijayarajan, ONE Championship's Group Chief Commercial Officer.

Developing a Far-Reaching Digital Strategy

To become a top-ranking global sports property, ONE Championship employs a broad strategy, reaching across multiple digital platforms, with deep content.

It utilizes all the major social media platforms — Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, Weibo and more, along with OTT services, the organization's app and traditional broadcast outlets. Rather than creating one piece of content and posting it to every platform, content is tailored for each specific platform in the way users consume their content. These decisions are based on fan engagement data that is analyzed by the social team.

However, the formula for the content remains the same: ONE Championship focuses on its heroes (athletes), values and stories.

“We leverage this formula across long-form, short-form, event, user-generated content and other content types, which, when combined together, creates a larger community,” said Vijayarajan.

Localizing the Content

Building a global digital footprint requires an active presence in countries with different languages and cultures. While fans in all countries may understand the sport, telling athlete stories requires local language — using a community manager and media partners who can deliver the content in that language are key.

“We help ensure their translations are in line with our brand messaging and we have a win-win situation,” said Kerner. “In specific markets, we launch our own social platforms in local languages so we can engage directly with fans in markets where we have a focus.”

Analyzing the Data

While each platform has a set of tools to determine how successful content is, ONE Championship uses a data warehouse to analyze metrics from every platform together to determine how performance is delivering against key indicators and then refine its content strategy. Data is analyzed by total views, viewership time, engagements and audience sentiment across platforms. It is narrowed further by athlete, region and type of content.

“We can quickly garner insights that give us a deep understanding of our fan base across markets and build an expertise in each platform, their algorithms and content consumption differences,” said Kerner.

Ultimately, ONE Championship’s digital platform is operated by a dynamic team of content creators, producers, community managers, analysts, specialists and platform partnership executives.

Identifying the Target Audience

Creating a successful global digital footprint requires an understanding of each platform’s community, where potential fans are, what the fans want, and engagement in ways that are authentic to each platform.

“We don’t launch on a platform without a holistic strategy and the necessary resources to make the right impact,” said Vijayarajan. “Otherwise, we come off as inauthentic.”

It’s also important to know where fans are in their journey. Some are diehard fans, some are casual fans and others will jump in and out of the experience based on which athletes are involved or personal, external factors.

“We ensure our content, across different touch points, from our events, social, digital and our app, have different formats,” said Kerner, “so no matter who it is, we have something for them.”

ONE Championship’s Global Reach

In 10 years, ONE Championship has emerged as Asia’s largest global sports media property and posts metrics equivalent to the NFL and NBA, which have many more decades of competition. The organization controls 90% of the market share in the Eastern hemisphere.

In October 2019, ONE Championship hosted ONE: Century, a two-part event that broke all viewership records as the most watched martial arts event in history. It attracted more than 85 million viewers worldwide across linear and digital channels, including 10 million from China alone.

Just 18 months later, in its first venture in the U.S. in April 2021, the organization hosted ONE on TNT. With four weeks of events during prime time, ONE Championship became the second most watched combat sports organization in the country, after UFC and ahead of Bellator and PFL. In the series’ first event, #ONEonTNT trended at #3 in the U.S. on Twitter and overtook UFC on Google Trends.

In March 2021, ONE Championship delivered 1.5 billion organic video views. The number increased 16% with 1.8 billion organic video views in April 2021.

For more information on ONE Championship's successful digital strategy and growth, visit www.onefc.com