

How Operators Can Tap Into The Revenue Power Of Esports

The world of professional video gaming shouldn't be ignored when looking for new big vehicle client groups. Learn why this is an opportunity you can't afford to miss. *By Lexi Tucker, LCT associate editor*

Video games. These words likely conjure up mixed feelings depending on the age of the person reading this article. While most tend to brush them off as a plaything that rots the brains of our youth, what they have yet to realize is professional gaming, also known as esports, is getting ready to explode.

Much like how the NFL, NBA, MBL, and other major sports organizations have cultivated groups of people who aspire to be athletes as well as those who enjoy watching them, esports tournaments are selling out arenas and giving skilled players a chance to make a career out of their incredible skills.

Esports is growing exponentially, according to Newzoo, the leading provider of market intelligence covering the global games, esports, and mobile markets. It's estimated by 2020, global esports market revenue will reach \$1.5 billion, while the total audience will encompass 589 million people. This audience includes not only people who will stream games from home on sites such as Twitch, the YouTube of video games owned by Amazon,

but also those who buy tickets to attend these games in person.

So what do esports athletes and fans have to do with luxury transportation companies? Think about it. Do traditional sports teams need rides to their games? Don't fans need to get to fields, rinks, and courts to cheer them on? There's no difference simply because the sport is played in a digital realm.

Getting To The Game

Mat Taylor, general manager of the Overwatch League team the Dallas Fuel, says his team and staff typically travel together in a luxury transit van to get to games at the Blizzard Arena in Burbank, Calif. Because they have nine to 10 players as well as coaches and Dallas Fuel staff they must transport daily, they also often order at least one ride-hail vehicle in addition to the team van.

"As the GM of the Dallas Fuel, making sure our players and coaches get where they need to be when they need to be there falls within my responsibilities,"

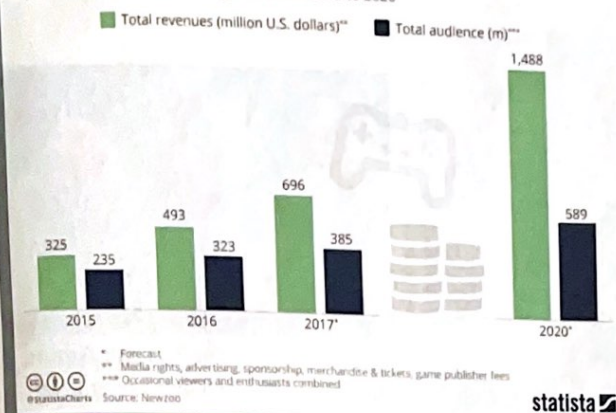
Taylor says. "Often, we have players who want to stay at the practice arena later than others or are coordinating different pick up or drop off times. We don't use a third-party service at this time, but as the Overwatch League grows and matches

Mat Taylor, general manager of the Overwatch League team the Dallas Fuel



eSports Is Ready to Explode

eSports revenues and audience growth from 2015 to 2020



CURRENT POPULAR ESPORTS GAMES

- League of Legends (na.leagueoflegends.com/en/)
- Dota 2 (dota2.com/play/)
- Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (blog.counter-strike.net/)
- Call of Duty (callofduty.com/)
- Hearthstone (playhearthstone.com/en-us/)
- Heroes of the Storm (us.battle.net/heroes/en/)
- Overwatch (playoverwatch.com/en-us/)
- Street Fighter (streetfighter.com/)
- Super Smash Bros. (smashbros.com/wiiu-3ds/us/)
- Smite (smitegame.com/play-for-free/)
- Starcraft II (starcraft2.com/en-us/)

This list will only continue to grow.

There's no denying esports is big. Don't miss out on the chance to tap into this source of group transportation revenue.

begin to be played in more teams' home markets outside of Los Angeles, outsourcing our travel logistics is certainly a natural step for this organization."

Kenny Sugishita, a coordinator for professional esports league ELEAGUE, says it uses buses and vans provided by a professional transportation company that takes teams from their hotels to the arenas and back. They also use them for airport roundtrips. Staff from IMG, a company that provides full-service team management, marketing, and representation for esports, organize the transportation and work with the chauffeurs and dispatchers.

This opens up an incredible opportunity for operators who specialize in group transportation with large vehicles like minicoaches or motorcoaches, which would have no issue fitting as many people as a team needed, thus eliminating the need for them to call a Lyft or Uber.

Jacob Wolf, an esports staff writer for ESPN, says to his knowledge teams normally take a shuttle paid for by the developer/tournament organizer from their team house to the arena.



Jacob Wolf, an esports staff writer for ESPN



Andriy Burkovskiy, event and logistics manager for StarLadder



Amir Ghorbani, co-founder of Swoop

As for amenities, he says extra frills like drinks, snacks, and charging stations are welcome, but "the ultimate test of a transportation company is whether they are on-time and flexible."

California operator **Amir Ghorbani** of Swoop says players will definitely need more tech-capable vehicles than traditional athletes. "They'll likely have laptops and other peripherals like headphones that'll need access to electrical outlets to charge," he says. "A lot of the operators in this industry already have things like in-vehicle Wi-Fi and TVs with streaming capabilities, so I think we are a perfect match for them."

Indeed, monitors with HDMI connectivity capabilities would also prove useful for playing, practicing, and strategizing. "I think the luxury transportation industry has a lot to offer both fans and players," Ghorbani says. Fans enjoy being able to engage with their favorite team by watching highlights and playing the games being featured at the events they are going to.

"Chances are if you're going to a match, you're going to be into video games. I've seen a lot of companies running bigger vehicles that have video game systems in them, but they never really caught on because they weren't marketing that fact to the audience who would care; now, it makes sense."

"Shuttle buses are pretty common, and they're often very nice, high-scale shuttles at that."

In-Demand Amenities

The name of the game in esports is teamwork. Bonds are developed not only through hours upon hours of practice, but also through spending time getting to know each other as people — whether during trips to get Korean Barbeque (a gamer favorite) or commuting to a game together.

"Honestly, traveling together is always a bonding experience — especially in Los Angeles," Taylor says. "You just never know what the traffic will be like. If it is a match day, the team is really locked and focused, usually watching game-play videos or highlights on their phones or tablets on the way to the arena."

The team is looking for vehicles with comfortable seats that provide adequate personal space, he says. "These are some of the best professional gamers in the world, competing in 40 matches a year. We want to make sure the ride to and from the arena is the least of their worries."

The best and most helpful amenities he mentions specifically are TVs or individual screens with streaming capabilities. "The ability to stream video content would be a huge benefit," he says. USB chargers are absolutely necessary, and a good sound system is always a plus.

Andriy Burkovskiy, event and logistics manager for StarLadder, a company that hosts esports tournaments, says he looks at a provider's pricing policy, loyalty, willingness to work 24/7, and a pleasant atmosphere. He also lists USB charging ports, the capability to charge laptops, and free or affordable Wi-Fi as pluses.

A company with a good reputation, reliable chauffeurs, and dispatchers they can trust are musts, Sugishita says. "The process of picking up players from the airport can be challenging with personnel arriving at various times and terminals. We are also at the mercy of customs. We have to be able to rely on our transportation to be flexible and accommodate late changes, whether it's at the airport, hotel, or ELEAGUE arena."

As for amenities, he says extra frills like drinks, snacks, and charging stations are welcome, but "the ultimate test of a transportation company is whether they are on-time and flexible."

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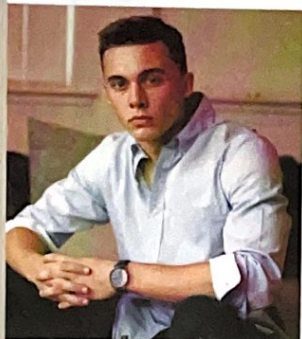
On the other hand, operators will be able to provide the space and amenities teams need to permit them more time to practice on their way to longer distance matches. "Regular athletes can't throw or kick balls around in a vehicle on the way to a game,"

■ MOTORCOACHES: NEW CLIENT MARKETS

he jokes.

Major Market Growth

Wolf says he already sees esports approaching MLB status in terms of viewership. "It's already bigger than the NHL, and football and basketball are next," he says. There are even talks of it becoming an Olympic sport by 2024.



Taylor Keating, a content writer for professional esports organization Echo Fox

"I think the Olympics need esports more than esports need the Olympics," Wolf says. "Esports are getting a lot of viewership without the Olympics, and a lot of the traditional Olympic sports are not as interesting as they used to be, especially to a younger audience."

Taylor Keating, a content writer for professional esports organization Echo Fox, says esports are definitely on an upward trajectory. "A lot of big names and sponsors are coming into the realm," he says. World-renowned brands like Coca-Cola, Audi, and Mobil 1 have all sponsored teams or competitions.

Intel, HP, and Toyota have sponsored The Overwatch League, a professional esports organization that follows the model of traditional North American professional sports, using a set of permanent teams and regular season play, rather than the use of promotion and relegation used commonly in other esports leagues. Each team franchise is backed by an owner, and players signed onto a team are given a minimum annual salary, benefits, and a portion of winnings and revenue-sharing based on how that team performs during the season.

Drop The Skepticism

There's no doubt skepticism may hinder the rate of esports growth; but it won't



Not Real Athletes? Think Again.

Since 2013, the U.S. has recognized esports players as professional athletes, and grants them athletic visas under that identifier.

Source: Forbes

stop it. And you certainly shouldn't let it prevent you from pursuing a role in its expansion.

"It's as easy as this: Do you think there's an opportunity to provide transportation for NHL, NFL, and NBA players and fans? Go to espn.com and you'll see esports is there, listed among everything from soccer to baseball. It will become just as popular if not more," Ghorbani says.

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"Look at the sponsorships these teams are bringing in from big name brands; those are obvious pointers. If you don't see that, you just don't get it."

As long as developers continue to make games, esports will never go away, Wolf says. "It's ever evolving. The games at the top might not exist forever, but there will always be games that get popular. Even if one game dies, the entire industry won't."

"Even if you think watching people play videogames doesn't make any sense, look at the data," Keating adds. "It doesn't matter if it makes sense or not. People might think video gaming is lazy, but once you see professionals play at the highest level and how much really goes into it, the contracts and the sponsors, it really hits that it's professional. It's on a more cerebral level than physical sports."

For those who might think esports are nothing but a passing fad, Taylor says they're dead wrong. "I've been involved in esports as a player and manager for many years, and I truly believe the industry is on a meteoric rise: What other

The Dallas Fuel enters the
Blizzard Arena in Burbank, Calif.
Credit: Blizzard Press Center



NOTABLE ESPORTS TOURNAMENTS

- The International (Dota 2) (dota2.com/international/overview/)
- League of Legends World Championship (lolesports.com/en_US/)
- Intel Extreme Masters (various games) (intelextrememasters.com/)
- ELEAGUE (various games) (eleague.com/)
- ESL One (various games) (en.esl-one.com/gate/)
- Capcom Cup (Street Fighter V) (capcomprotour.com/)
- DreamHack (the world's largest digital festival that hosts various tournaments) (dreamhack.com/)
- Overwatch League (overwatchleague.com/en-us/)

sport besides maybe football (soccer) can count 300+ million global followers among its fan base? The Overwatch League is a great step in the right direction to bring esports to the mainstream, and we're excited to have the Dallas Fuel be part of the industry's rapid growth."

It's time for operators to be a part of that growth. **LCT**
— Lexi@LCTmag.com

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