

VIDEO CASE 12

LA Galaxy: Where Sports Marketing Is a Kick!

"We have a unique product for people," exclaims Chris Klein, president of the LA Galaxy soccer club. Soccer combines many elements of athleticism, teamwork, and competition to make it fast, exciting, engaging, fun, and increasingly popular. Klein goes on to explain, "This is a cool sport, and it's something that's growing." His enthusiasm is supported by a sophisticated strategy that Klein and his marketing team have designed to help people "experience the excitement" of their product!

Video 12-5

LA Galaxy

Video Case

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THE LA GALAXY

The LA Galaxy is a professional soccer club competing in Major League Soccer (MLS). The club was one of ten charter clubs when the league began, and is now part of the league's Western Conference. "The LA Galaxy was founded in 1996," says Klein, and "through the course of the League's history, the Galaxy has been the most successful franchise in Major League Soccer." The team has been conference champions nine times, regular season champions four times, and the MLS championship winners five times.

The first Galaxy games were played at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, until the team moved to its current location in the soccer-specific stadium StubHub Center in Carson, California. Players are primarily from the United States but also represent countries such as Brazil, Ireland, Italy, and Panama. "We have signed some of the biggest players, not only in our country, like Cobi Jones and Landon Donovan, but we've also signed some of the biggest players in the world," explains Klein. English soccer superstar David Beckham joined the LA Galaxy in 2007 and played through 2012, helping the team win two championships during that period.

Today, the LA Galaxy attracts an average of 23,000 fans to each of its games. While the hard-core fans tend to be 18- to 34-year-old men, the team also appeals to many other segments. For example, because soccer is the largest participant sport in the United States, many kids and youth soccer teams come to the games. In addition, many college students and families attend. According to Klein, it's a welcoming environment where "you can paint your face and yell" or you can bring your kids and just "have fun at the game." The team's mascot, Cozmo, is a frog-like extraterrestrial

who entertains fans at the games and throughout Southern California.

MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER

As part of its negotiation to hold the 1994 FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) World Cup in the United States, the U.S. Soccer Federation promised to establish a professional soccer league. The result was Major League Soccer. Since its beginning with 10 teams in 1996, Major League Soccer has expanded to 20 teams, including 3 teams in Canada. Each team plays 34 games during the regular season from March to October, and the top 12 teams participate in the playoffs, which end with the MLS Cup in December.

Even though soccer is popular around the world, introducing professional soccer in the United States presented some difficulties. Klein describes the problem:

Soccer is the biggest sport in the world, but here in the U.S. we have a lot of competition. Major League Soccer is the equivalent to Major League Baseball, the NFL, the NBA, and the NHL. These are established leagues and MLS is the fifth major sport. In 1996, we started thinking that we had to get every baseball fan, basketball fan, and football fan to enjoy our sport.

To attempt to attract fans from other sports, MLS experimented with changes to traditional soccer rules. For example, MLS added shootouts to resolve tie games, used a countdown (to zero) clock rather than a progressive clock, allowed extra substitutions, and even considered making the goals bigger to increase the scoring. Eventually, the league concluded that the changes had alienated some traditional soccer fans without attracting new fans from other sports, so it went back to the traditional rules for MLS games.

As the league shifted from an "attract all sports fans" philosophy to a focus on people with some existing interest in soccer, it made several other changes. First, it began

moving MLS games from large, rented, football facilities to new, smaller, more intimate soccer-specific stadiums. In addition, the league made efforts to internationalize the teams by allowing up to eight players per team from outside of the United States. Finally, MLS encouraged all teams to create youth development programs to help find talented local players. To complement these efforts, each team manages its own marketing program.



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