

CASE STUDY

Phoenix Suns Transforms the Fan Experience Using BlueJeans

Three months after the National Basketball Association (NBA) suspended its season due to the pandemic, the Phoenix Suns elaborately prepared for its return to action. It was one of 22 teams the NBA selected to play in a “bubble” at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. After careful planning and going through strict health protocols, the Suns players joined hundreds of others to reboot the NBA season in July 2020.

But being in a bubble meant playing in an empty arena. With no fans allowed in person, how could the Suns organization engage them from afar? How could it give them that viewing experience they were so used to — with cheers and chants filling the arena, firing up both the players and also the fans watching at home?

The Suns’ executive and marketing teams knew they had to act quickly to engage fans, recapture viewership, and retain season ticket holders. They must find new and creative ways to connect with fans.

“There are a lot of things we learned through the last year’s challenges, one is that our fans love the game of basketball, they still love watching. We also learned they miss, and crave, interacting with the Suns in a more intimate way,” said Dan Costello, Phoenix Suns Chief Revenue Officer and SVP, Business Innovation.

Engaging Fans Through a Second Screen

Days before its first game in the NBA bubble, the Suns deployed BlueJeans Events to give fans an immersive “second screen experience.” TV broadcasts served as each game’s first screen while the BlueJeans



Industry: Sports, media, and entertainment

Challenges: With fans no longer able to attend games in 2020 due to COVID-19, the Phoenix Suns had to find new ways to bring the in-arena experience to fans and engage them after a months-long hiatus in the NBA season.

Solutions: BlueJeans Events was deployed to provide fans with a “second screen experience” during its games in the NBA isolation zone at Walt Disney World.

Results: By providing additional streamed video content that enabled real-time participation, the Suns organization was able to offer unique experiences, engaging fans around the world through contests, giveaways, chat, polls, and Q&As.

Using BlueJeans, the Suns also gave partners a platform to promote their brands and interact with a wider audience.

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platform allowed fans to simultaneously stream other content on a second screen, such as a mobile device or laptop. This additional content included interviews with NBA legends and insiders, live contests, and promotions for the Suns and its partner brands.

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The Suns successfully ran a virtual event on BlueJeans during its first game in the NBA bubble, engaging fans and members in ways it hadn't done before.

A high point of these BlueJeans events was when NBA Commissioner Adam Silver was spotlighted as a guest interview during one of the Suns' broadcasts. It was a league first by an organization using a second screen, and fans thoroughly enjoyed the experience — with about 350 of them engaging throughout the interview.

Reaching More Viewers

By providing a second screen experience, the Suns were able to reach thousands of viewers and interact with fans around the world. About 95% of its fans have never watched a Suns game in person, so virtual events offered a great way to bring them closer to the game.

“Our fans, and our brand, thrive in this digital world and the partners we're aligned with, from an innovation perspective, are coming to us to help meet our fans where they are, which happens to be heavily in these digital spaces. Having these events allowed us to go to a greater mass of viewers and connect with our fans in a better way.”

While in the past the Suns' online interactions with fans were largely passive, now they were more active and in real time, helping create better relationships with them and bolstering their loyalty.

BlueJeans Events features such as chat, polls, and Q&A's enabled these interactions and connected fans to the team they had been dearly missing.

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Enabling Partners to Interact with Fans

Using BlueJeans, the Suns were able to preserve sponsorships by providing a platform for partners to continue to promote their brands and interact with a wider audience.

For example, unable to continue its ritual of throwing free T-shirts into the stands for its sponsor, Fry’s Food Stores, the Suns did this virtually instead. Fans got a chance to win a free T-shirt when they watched a show on BlueJeans—using the “hand raise” feature to determine those interested in receiving one. And if they were eligible, they could pick up their prize in person at a designated Fry’s store.

Doing More with BlueJeans

As the Suns’ staff members became more comfortable with producing content, they started making other shows after the NBA bubble. They used NewTek TriCaster for video production and then Open Broadcaster Software to move the content to BlueJeans Events for streaming.

Using only one software platform to present or stream content made the staff members’ job so much easier. It also helped ensure they could deliver content without delay.

Incorporating branding elements into content was also easier with the BlueJeans platform. For example, the Suns team was able to add the team’s colors to shots featuring players, accentuating the team’s brand identity and personality.

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Creating a New Way for Fans to Engage

By offering a second screen experience using BlueJeans, the Suns has created a new way for fans to watch and interact with their favorite team and brands across the NBA. While a complete paradigm shift, this new wave of sports engagement is something Costello believes is likely to stay.

While Phoenix Suns Arena has opened back up in limited capacity to welcome fans in person, BlueJeans continues to allow the Suns organization to provide a specialized experience to members regardless of where they’re located.

“When you think about a partner like BlueJeans, I don’t just think about best-in-class technology, I think about the people behind it who are intellectually curious and 100 percent focused on creating a product that will help us accomplish specific objectives.”

From hosting a virtual ‘State of the Suns’ where season ticket holders could interact with players in a live Q&A format to raffing off an immersive VIP training session with the Suns’ physical trainer, the Suns continue to find new ways to utilize the BlueJeans platform to engage fans and reach a broader audience. And according to Costello, this is just the beginning.

“That is what I love about the BlueJeans partnership, they roll up their sleeves and are really focused at ensuring we are hitting the mark with our fans in every way possible. The product is constantly adjusting to make a better experience for our fans. The commitment level for world-class technology and innovation is paramount, and gives us the opportunity to test and experiment, to make the product better with our partner at BlueJeans.”

By leaning in to their larger partner ecosystem and getting strategic with their approach to fan engagement, the Phoenix Suns are proving that teamwork makes the dream work.

ABOUT THE PHOENIX SUNS

The Phoenix Suns is a professional basketball club based in Arizona, in the United States. The team has been a member of the NBA since 1968 and plays in the Western Conference of the NBA competition. It is the oldest professional sports team in Arizona and has won two conference titles.