

A close-up action shot of a Philadelphia Eagles player in a white jersey with the number 10, wearing a green helmet with a white eagle logo. He is being tackled by a Tennessee Titans player in a blue jersey. The background is blurred, showing other players and the stadium.

Livestreaming Sports + OTT:

# How the Eagles Win with Live Video

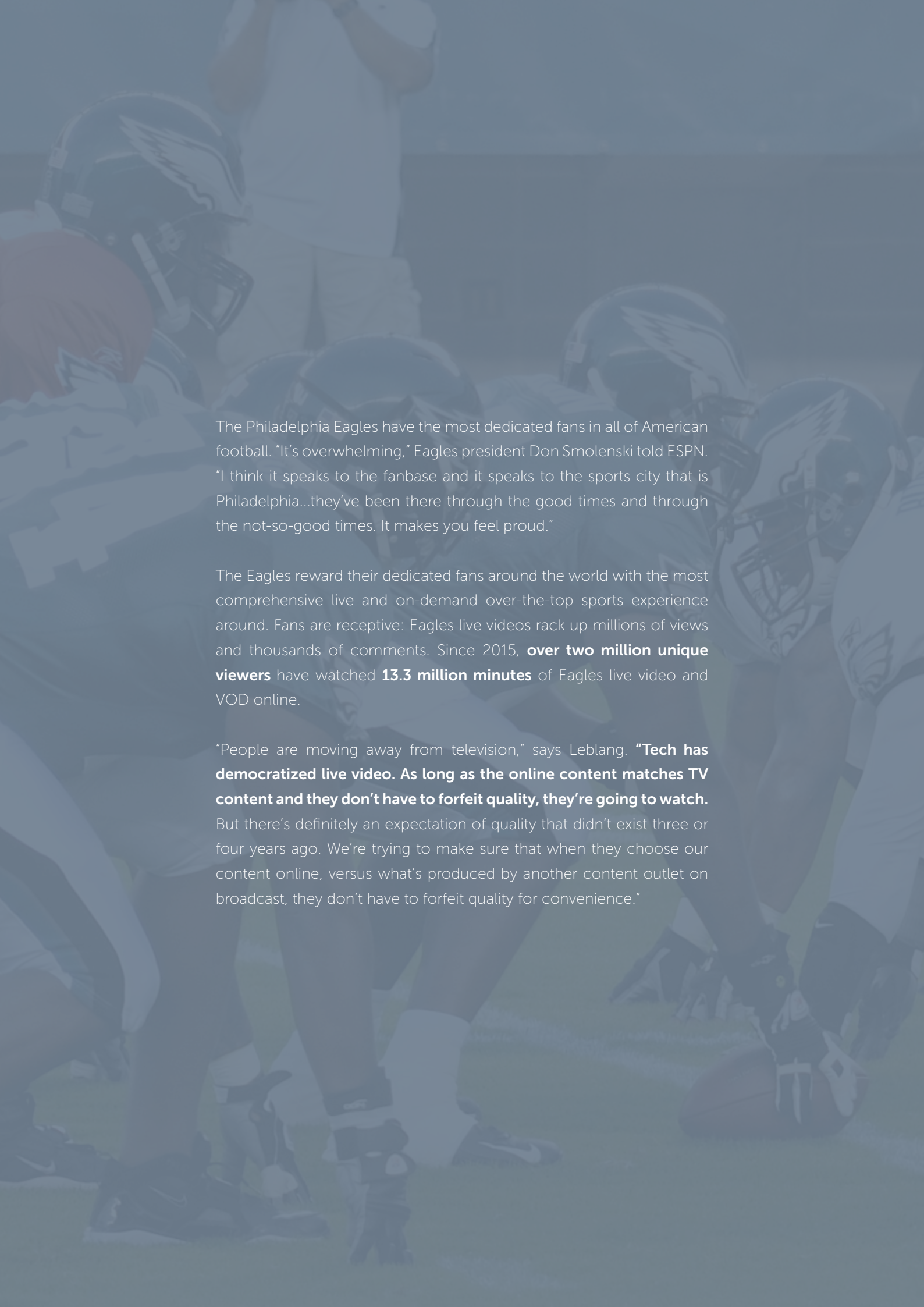
On draft day, the Philadelphia Eagles production team is in the zone: pushing the limits of their team and equipment to capture every crucial moment of the NFL draft live. The production team prepares for months – planning, researching, and testing every aspect of the biggest show they do each season. There's a film crew at the draft host city as well as Eagles HQ in Philadelphia, streaming each round. These crews set up the story, interview fans, and most importantly, do an exclusive interview with the Eagles first round pick. Back at Eagles HQ, a crew films analysis pieces outside the draft war room. Fans that watch live could not be closer to the action.

One team shoots live interviews with coaches while another crew does analysis pieces crucial to draft central production. After the picks are made, they go live to the press conference. "It's my favorite event because it's certainly the one we put the

most resources into," Mark Leblang, Studio/Live Production Manager for the Eagles tells Livestream. "But it's also a time when we can flex our muscles in terms of production."

While these videos could easily be packaged for ESPN or broadcast, the Eagles are doing this just for their dedicated digital audience who enjoy all of this content for free from anywhere in the world. "All of those contributions are funneled into our greater production at our central broadcast studio and distributed via Livestream on our website and app. Then we break them up and distribute them across channels," says Leblang. "That ambition really pays off. That's why it's successful. The response we get, that engagement we get – everyone's really blown away by how much we're able to do."



A background image showing Philadelphia Eagles players in a huddle on a football field. The players are wearing their blue and white uniforms, and the image is semi-transparent to allow text to be overlaid.

The Philadelphia Eagles have the most dedicated fans in all of American football. "It's overwhelming," Eagles president Don Smolenski told ESPN. "I think it speaks to the fanbase and it speaks to the sports city that is Philadelphia...they've been there through the good times and through the not-so-good times. It makes you feel proud."

The Eagles reward their dedicated fans around the world with the most comprehensive live and on-demand over-the-top sports experience around. Fans are receptive: Eagles live videos rack up millions of views and thousands of comments. Since 2015, **over two million unique viewers** have watched **13.3 million minutes** of Eagles live video and VOD online.

"People are moving away from television," says Leblang. **"Tech has democratized live video. As long as the online content matches TV content and they don't have to forfeit quality, they're going to watch.** But there's definitely an expectation of quality that didn't exist three or four years ago. We're trying to make sure that when they choose our content online, versus what's produced by another content outlet on broadcast, they don't have to forfeit quality for convenience."

# Building a Fan-Centric Live Video Platform

The Eagles were already working with Livestream when Leblang joined in 2012, but he had experience streaming games at the University of Georgia athletic department. While fans may not know the difference between the game broadcast that appears on their TV and the plethora of behind-the-scenes content created by the Eagles organization, they expect the same level of quality.

"If you were to watch a local broadcast leading up to game day, it's a lot of injury updates and coach statements," Leblang says. "We do that type of stuff, but it's really about **creating a sense of access to the team that you're not going to get by just following on Twitter.**"

With hundreds of football blogs, social accounts, and fan pages, information about players and games is readily available. The Eagles want to provide the live and on-demand content fans can't get anywhere else.

"People are coming to us for access," says Leblang. "So we're going to go behind-the-scenes as much as we can and we're doing it from somewhere no other camera crew can get to. Showing aspects of the team throughout the day or week really makes

it a different experience and one that allows the Eagles fans to feel like they're really there."

Leblang's primary focus is unique and excellent Eagles content: "Livestream handles the technical end and the functional side so we can concentrate on the content itself. I think Livestream and our partnership has really played a valuable role in helping the Philadelphia Eagles connect with our fans around the world."

Agility in scheduling streams and launching live events is one of the reasons Leblang loves working with Livestream. "One of the functions that's really important to us is the ability to trim events before making them publicly visible on demand," says Leblang. "Livestream helps us keep our content organized and generate unique links to those event channels. That's a nice feature to have."

**I think Livestream and our partnership has really played a valuable role in helping the Philadelphia Eagles connect with our fans around the world."**

His favorite thing about the platform is how easy-access it is for fans: "For anything to be successful, it has to be readily accessible to the audience and the viewing experience has to be stable and smooth. It speaks to why we're with Livestream."



# Tech + Testing

Extensive testing is paramount to a successful stream. Before going live, Leblang meets frequently with the crew and talent to get everyone on the same page while building extensive contingency plans. "An audience only sees production when it's bad," he says. "Everything we do reflects on the organization, so it's about being prepared and putting out a really high-quality product."

For an organization with such large programming schedule, it's not surprising that Leblang's team and livestreaming equipment setup is extensive. "We're blessed to have an organization that really believes in what we're doing," he says. "We've been afforded the budget and personnel to put us in a position to compete, not just with the local broadcast stations but national sports outlets. I think that's been reflected in the investment we've made in top-of-the-line equipment that represents all aspects of production."

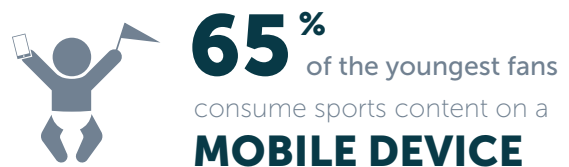
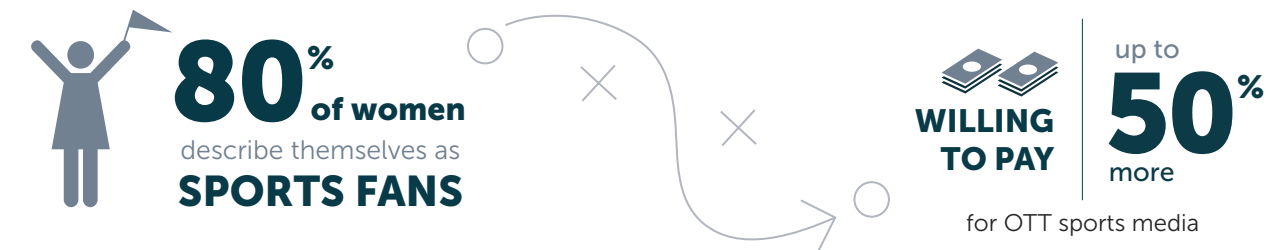
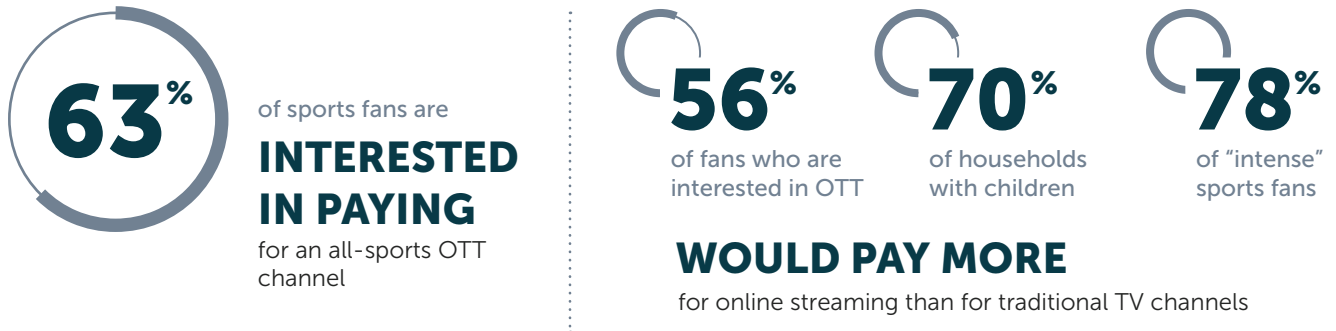
Leblang's team uses TriCaster live switchers, Livestream as platform and CDN, and Sony and Panasonic cameras. "We're on the leading edge of what an organization of our size can do because we have the fan support and the organizational support to really put ourselves out there in a risky way," says Leblang. "But we get to play with the newest and best toys to put out the kind of content we do."



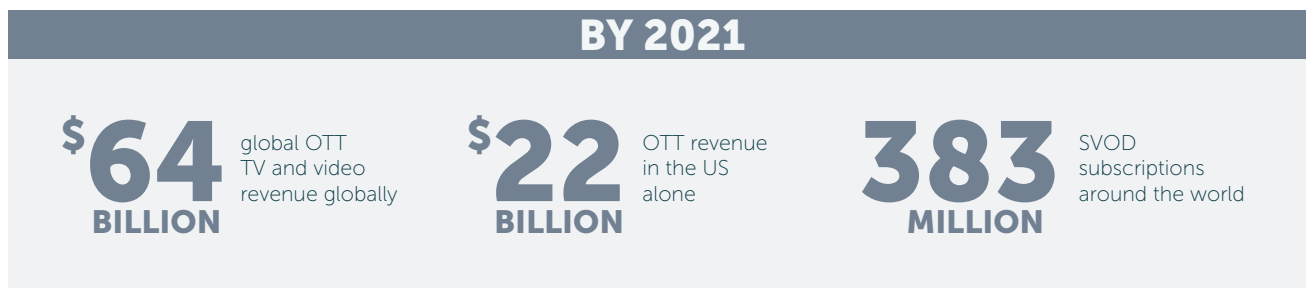


# You down with OTT?

The Philadelphia Eagles don't charge for their all-access OTT fan content, but...



Center for the Digital Future | ThePostGame



50% of sports fans in a USC Annenberg study say they've watched supplemental sports programming with 60% – mostly millennials – reporting that it's important to them.

Digital TV Research Limited



The Philadelphia Eagles don't charge for their all-access OTT fan content, but according to the Center for the Digital Future at USC Annenberg and ThePostGame, 63% of all sports fans are interested in paying for an all-sports OTT channel and 56% of those interested in OTT would pay more for online streaming than for traditional TV channels. In households with children that number jumps to 70%, or 78% for people who self-report as "intense" sports fans.

"Sports is the last category of must-see-now content," Jeffrey Cole, founder and director of the Center for the Digital Future told *Broadcasting & Cable* in an interview. "Based on our data, Gen Z and Millennial fans are clearly shifting preferences, behavior and spending." Another interesting statistic from this study: 80% of women describe themselves as sports fans and are willing to pay up to 50% more for OTT sports media content. When it comes to consuming sports OTT content, 65% of the youngest fans – millennials and younger – are consuming sports content on a mobile device. The study also aligns with the Eagles' finding that many of their fans are outside the local area, with 64% of fans living somewhere outside where their favorite team plays, noting: "The concept of a local sports market may be obsolete."

Another validation of the Eagles strategy: 50% of sports fans in the USC Annenberg study say they've watched supplemental sports programming with 60% – mostly millennials – reporting that it's important to them.

By most forecasts, OTT is poised for massive growth over the next five years. London-based Digital TV Research Limited predicts that global OTT TV and video revenue will reach \$64.8 billion globally by 2021. In the US alone, OTT revenue will increase to \$22.8 billion in 2021. Digital TV Research Limited also estimates 383 million SVOD subscriptions around the world by 2021.

"Today many consumers double-dip on traditional pay TV and OTT services and we think a major reason is most sports are only available on pay TV," Goldman Sachs analyst Drew Borst told investors in July 2016, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*. "In other words, sports is the glue that holds the bundle together, in our view." Once sports teams start to focus on OTT, the livestreaming possibilities are endless.

Brian Rolapp, Executive Vice President, Media; President & CEO NFL Network told the *New York Times* the league is "testing alternative ways to distribute games," noting: "If the world ever changes, we want to be prepared."

# Analytics + Data

Post-stream, Leblang zeros in on audience size and average viewing time through his Livestream analytics dashboard. "Analytics are a critical component for what we do," he says. "That helps us leverage a successful event into sponsorship. People understand it's an attractive property to go out and sell." For the 2016 draft weekend they saw over **112K viewers** and an average viewing time of over **13 minutes**. Another interesting stat: 85-90% of the viewing audience is international or non-local. "That to me says we're doing a good job of providing something they're not getting anywhere else and we need to continue to look for ways to stay ahead of that curve."

Leblang's team uses this data to inform their content strategy. "You have to think about the content that rewards them for coming to you," he says. "I think understanding devices and average viewing time is useful, but generally speaking we're looking to use those analytics to help us develop content types that help Eagles fans feel gratified for coming to us."

That gratification has turned into real ROI. "**The Eagles have seen steady growth in digital audience size since using Livestream,**" he says. "They're providing a platform that's grown along with us; that's agile and reliable which really matters now."

Leblang says working with Livestream gives the Eagles two clear advantages: "Fans can easily access the content we create since we can embed that player in any channel, and on my side we can focus on delivering great content instead of worrying about the quality of the viewing experience. With Livestream handling the technology and functionality we can concentrate on the content itself."





# Taking a “Holistic Approach” To Content Strategy

With a growing audience, Leblang’s team is now focused on delivering a consistently great product. “Everything we put out represents the Eagles so we put out max effort for max quality,” he says. “Livestreaming is important, and when it comes to newsworthy events it’s critical, but the live audience is the tip of the iceberg. The instant archiving technology on Livestream allows us to capture as much of on-demand audience as we can and keep viewer satisfaction high. Being able to put that event on our site as quickly as we can using Livestream means we don’t have to worry about people missing it.”

Since the Eagles have seen so much VOD traffic, they strategically repackage and repurpose all of their live video to redistribute across social and other channels. “Someone may not be aware we do all this great live coverage but they see a snippet on

Twitter,” he says. “We’re trying to drive people to watch live, but in some cases they can’t do that and we see the benefits of the live audience in other places. We fold live into our greater content strategy, taking a holistic approach.”

Leblang’s team at the Eagles has had so much success with live OTT content that other NFL teams have inquired as to how they do it. **“When you get your peers reaching out to you saying: ‘How do you do this how can we do the same thing?’ that means we have a good formula with draft weekend,”** Leblang says. He doesn’t feel any competitive disadvantage when sharing his livestreaming knowledge and tactics with other teams. It benefits all teams to push each other toward creating the best live content experience. “We just want to make sure Eagles fans are getting all the Eagles-centric info they want.”





## Interested in streaming your content live and OTT?

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