

Interview With Rong (DanDan) Hua, Digital Media Manager of the National Football League’s China Office

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The National Football League (NFL) has been making efforts to increase its international reach in the past decade, including expansion in the Chinese market. The league set up its first China office in Shanghai in 2007. Rong (DanDan) Hua, a native of China, is a digital-media manager of NFL China’s office in Shanghai. With a huge passion for American football, after earning a master’s degree in sport administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), Hua returned to China and accepted the position at the NFL China office in 2015.

Hua shared with us how they apply various digital strategies to promote the NFL and expand the impact of American football in the China market, especially in dealing with the challenges of diversity in sport culture. Hua and her colleagues also introduced TianTian NFL (TTNFL), a new local fantasy game for Chinese football fans. We discussed the creation and application of TTNFL. Hua also told us how she, being native Chinese without the culture of American football while growing up, became a fan of American football and now works for the league. She provided suggestions for students and sport professionals who are interested in the field of digital media in professional sport.

Zheng: Can you tell us about the NFL China office?

Hua: The NFL established its China office in Shanghai in 2007, demonstrating its long-term commitment to China. It was a significant milestone in our continuing effort to promote the game worldwide. We aim to grow the number of the NFL fans in China by driving fan engagement and passion for the game. We do this through strategic content cooperation with national and regional media partners and by focusing marketing efforts on local football participation and development.

Currently, we have eight people who focus on the key areas of media (rights distribution, content development) and marketing. NFL China reports to the NFL international department, which is headquartered at the NFL office in New York.

Zheng: As a digital-media manager, what does your daily routine look like in NFL China?

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Rong (DanDan) Hua — Digital media manager, NFL China, Shanghai.

Hua: One of my responsibilities is to develop content strategy and oversee content production, localization, and distribution—whether originating from the NFL media team in the United States or created locally by our team in China. This requires working with our local video-production team, as well as the NFL international marketing and content team. The coordination allows us to produce locally relevant content that will resonate with our China audience—both with existing fans who want to dive into the game and follow their favorite player or team and with new or potential fans who are just looking to get a handle on the basics. During the season, I work closely with our media partners (e.g., Tencent, BesTV) to oversee and analyze the performance of NFL content on their platforms, as well as providing support to help ensure that our content reaches a broader audience and continues to trigger interest and engagement throughout the season.

Zheng: Tell us a bit about yourself and your background and how you ended up working for NFL China.

Hua: Actually, like most Chinese kids, I grew up as a fan of sports other than football. I was a basketball fan. I did not learn much about American football until I started my graduate internship in the athletic department at UNC. During my internship, I worked closely with many football student-athletes and coaches. That is how I was able to familiarize myself with the sport and learn just how interesting and exciting it is. After I moved back to China, I got a chance to work at NFL China in their digital-media department, which helped me gain more understanding from both media and marketing perspectives of how to best promote and drive awareness, interest, and consumption of a new product—in this case, the product being our game and game-related content.

Zheng: Unlike soccer and basketball, American football has neither the relevant traceable history nor a strong fan base in China; in other words, American football and the NFL are both brand-new products to Chinese audiences. So, how does your digital-media team create and develop content strategies to better introduce the sport? Do you integrate local cultural elements into football?