

Big Data in Sport Industry: Interview With Michal Lorenc, Head of Industry—Ticketing and Live Events at Google

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Michal Lorenc, head of industry—ticketing and live events at Google, has been with Google for 19 years. Lorenc has held multiple leadership roles on the revenue-generating side of the business. He currently oversees the sales and account services team responsible for fostering strategic relationships with key partners in sports, family entertainment, music, and ticketing industries. A seasoned industry veteran, Lorenc worked on a variety of strategic initiatives in marketing, business development, and sales capabilities in North America and Europe, including establishing Google’s presence in his native Poland; helping build out Google offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and building out the midmarket sales team for Google Canada. Lorenc sat with Gashaw Abeza to discuss Google and sport, the impact of COVID, and, mainly, big data in the sport industry.

Abeza: Let’s start by discussing COVID-19 and its impact. How has COVID-19 changed your job?

Lorenc: My job changed drastically. We went from helping sports entities with ticketing and selling tickets to events to no events and no tickets. I now do way more of the thought leadership type of initiatives, and provide lots of data and insights to our clients, helping them understand what the sentiment is and what is happening, but it is a less transactional approach, meaning that we are not asking any of our clients to spend money on Google right now because it would not be an effective use of their funds. So, it has changed a lot. What we are seeing though, is that there is a pent-up demand for sports content. Following COVID, people are at home. They want to be entertained. They have more time to be entertained, ironically, because they do not have to commute, they work from home, they learn from home. So, the consumption of sports-related content continues to increase. People are Googling and looking for information about the archives or the games, and they are using YouTube and YouTube TV to try to find and watch video content that is related to sports. So, COVID drastically impacted my job.

Abeza: Do you think, then, that COVID-19 changed how Google views sport?



Michal Lorenc — Head of industry—ticketing and live events at Google.

Lorenc: As I mentioned, there are differences in what we are prioritizing right now. But, sport is such a huge part of the entertainment industry that we continue to be engaged and continue to look at it as an important category long term.

Abeza: You are living in a world where change is happening almost every day. How do you manage the constant change?

Lorenc: Well, COVID-19 could be a good example. COVID has completely changed everything about live events. So, the whole industry—the ticketing, the live events, sports—has been impacted. Up until 15 March, 2020, all of the projections talked about 2020 being the banner year, the best year ever. We were supposed to sell the most tickets, make the most money, have the highest viewership. Things were already set up for live events and ticketing to have an amazing trajectory. And, literally in a period of a week, the NBA was canceled, and then Coachella was cancelled, and then Broadway shut down, and then almost everything shut down, changing things dramatically. So at Google, we went from working with hundreds of advertisers and tens of thousands of events, helping them market and sell tickets, to literally none of the events happening and no advertising, and there were no marketing needs. That is one aspect. Lots of clients spent lots of money on marketing, trying to sell tickets for events that were canceled. And, those clients were dealing with having to refund the prices of tickets. So, that is a classic example. And then, when it comes to professional sports, you have anything from Major League Baseball that was just starting its season and then everything stopped. In basketball and hockey, you had the teams that were deep in season and had to stop. Similarly, Major League Soccer had to stop after a couple of weeks of