



ESPN FANTASY FOOTBALL

JAY CHIAT 2023
AWARDS SUBMISSION





FANTASY

**ISN'T
ABOUT
FOOTBALL**

SUMMARY

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FANTASY ISN'T ABOUT FOOTBALL

As the Fantasy Football category leader, ESPN must grow the category in order to grow their business. Growing the category, which is extremely popular among hardcore sports fans, means getting more casual fans to play fantasy football.

The problem is, casual fans just aren't that into sports, and perceive fantasy football as a complex, time-consuming endeavor that requires a deep understanding of the game. However, consumer research revealed that what they are attracted to is the social aspect – its ability to connect them to family and friends.

With this knowledge, we saw an insight that would completely flip the Fantasy Football brief on its head: Fantasy Football isn't about strengthening your football knowledge – it's about strengthening your relationships.



**LET'S GET
INTO IT**



BROADER CONTEXT

Sports fans are becoming more casual. For one, younger generations don't consider fandom to be core to their identity, nor are they as interested in the nuances of the game – the strategy, analysis, and statistics behind the plays. In fact, they see sport more as a headline or highlight, rather than a multi-hour, play-by-play viewing experience.

But the casualization doesn't just end with younger fans. After living without sports during the pandemic, and filling the void with other “more productive” activities, there has been a softening of core fandom across the board.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

For years Fantasy Football enjoyed steady adoption from hardcore sports fans, and despite stiff competition from the likes of Yahoo Sports, NFL, and CBS Sports, ESPN has continued to be the most used platform. Maintaining the brand's leadership position is not only critical for the brand, but Fantasy Football participants are significantly more valuable to the business than non-participants.

However more recently, as the category has plateaued, it has become harder to increase sign-ups year over year. Not only is Fantasy Football a highly loyal category due to the familiarity, ritual, and rollover of consumer leagues year to year, which makes stealing share difficult, but the casualization of sports fandom as a broader cultural trend has led to an "aging out" of hardcore fans who are most likely to engage with highly involved sports content.





THE CHALLENGE

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Our task was to drive unique sign-ups among new users, while retaining current users, continuing to cement ESPN's position as the #1 Fantasy Football destination.

As the category leader in a highly loyal and competitive category that has all but maxed out participation amongst hardcore fans, our focus became attracting more casual fans in order to grow fantasy football participation.

So how do we make fantasy football more approachable to the casual fan?





STRATEGIC THINKING

In conjunction with ESPN, we dug into consumer research, social listening, and cultural trends, and learned that the casualization of sports fandom was indeed affecting fantasy participation – the primary barriers were that it’s too complex, time consuming, and required too deep a level of football knowledge.

However, research also revealed that what casual fans (and hardcore fans) are attracted to is the social aspect – its ability to connect them to family and friends in a way many things today do not. It’s a chance to get together once a year, break down the social barriers of “real life” and engage in some healthy, low-stakes competition. In fact, the “fantasy” nature of the game enables more “real” interactions with people, like friendly trash talking, generating nicknames for coworkers, and more.

With this knowledge, we saw an insight that would completely flip the Fantasy Football brief on its head – and with the largest user base, one only ESPN could own.



CREATIVE STRATEGY

Convince casual fans that the #1 fantasy football platform is about so much more than strengthening your football knowledge.

It's about **strengthening your relationships.**



IDEA IMPLEMENTATION

The strategy was brought to life through a creative platform entitled “Only In Fantasy. Only on ESPN Fantasy Football,” which brought to life the unique relationship dynamics that only play out in ESPN’s Fantasy Football environment. The executions gave audiences a completely different look at Fantasy Football – one that doesn’t exist inside the gridiron, but inside places like the home or office.

ESPN led an integrated effort, with TVCs that established the concept, along with audio, digital, OOH, and social content such as Twitter Spaces and Instagram Reels that amplified the message. In addition, the campaign included conversion-driving tactics such as linear drop-in and live streaming slates, CRM, push and in-app ramp-ups, search, and DV360.



THE RESULTS

The campaign surpassed the all-time sign-up record for ESPN Fantasy Football with 11.2 million users, up 33% from the platform's 5-year low in 2020. The 11.2M sign-ups consisted of 7.3M retained users and 3.9M new users.

Not only did fans love the relationship-driven concept, but the ESPN organization rallied around the campaign as well, making ESPN Fantasy Football an organizational highlight. Needless to say, the campaign won't be a one-off, but will remain a primary component of the strategic and creative platform for years to come.





CREATIVE ASSETS

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ELEVATOR TVC

This TVC brings to life how ESPN Fantasy Football spices up office culture and colleague camaraderie.

[>WATCH NOW](#)



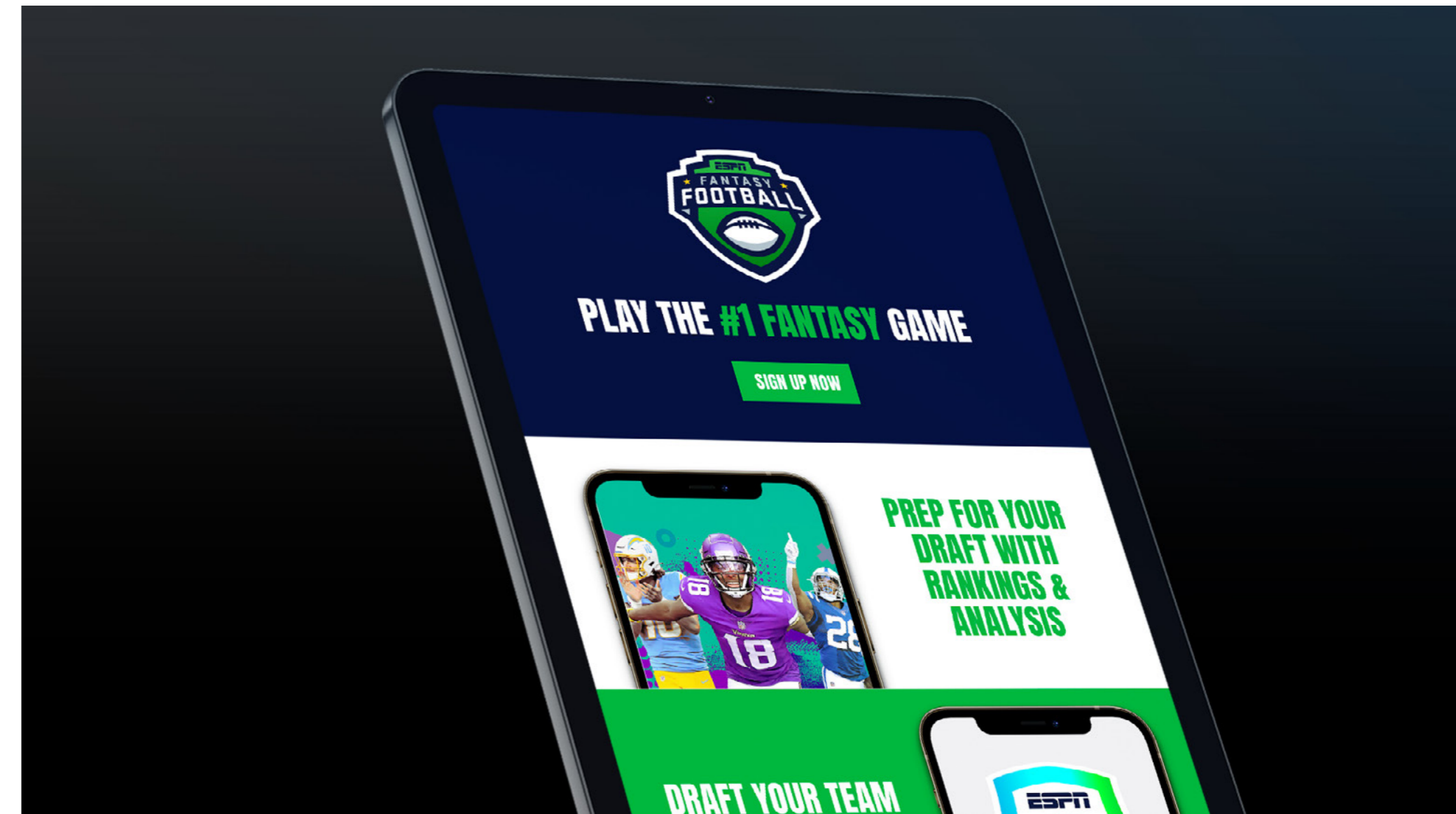
ICE CREAM TVC

This TVC demonstrates how ESPN Fantasy Football can even give grandparents and their teenage grandkids something to bond over that goes beyond the typical relationship dynamic.

[>WATCH NOW](#)



CREATIVE ASSETS



THANK YOU