

## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

### Episode 4: Marketers: Time to up your Esports game

Date: August 12, 2021

---

Intro ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to the next big, whatever, a podcast that discusses the current trends and how it impacts marketing.

Speaker 1 ([00:09](#)):

Good morning and welcome John to the next big, whatever on this week's episode, we're going to be talking a little bit about e-sports and I am so happy to have John Cash with me. Um, he is the, and I'm going to hope I get this right, John, you are the founder and a professor of an HBCU e-sports and gaming program, as well as you have a ton of other distinctions behind your name, you've worked in sports and entertainment, brand marketing. You're also an air force veteran. Um, tell us a little bit about yourself and how you ended up as a founder and professor of an HBCU e-sports and gaming program.

Speaker 2 ([00:54](#)):

Sure. Well, first of all, I want to thank you, Lisa, and also Luke wire for this opportunity and a special shout out to Mr. Barry Finkelstein, senior vice president there, director of public relations who put us together. My name is John Cash, native of Washington, DC proud, uh, HBCU graduate of Howard university in Washington, DC. And again, my career includes earning my commission and my degree at how a university I'm at as an air force, officer second Lieutenant, and proud to have served six years active duty and reserves. Uh, unfortunately I, um, shattered my femur and busted my, my rotor cuff while I was in. So I'm a service disabled vet and there they are all passions of mine. Uh, data pivot got my MBA from the university of Texas soca mourns and got into consumer packaged goods with companies like Proctor and gamble, Coca Cola, and, um, also in the banking area, doing similar things with, uh, bank of America and Wells Fargo.

Speaker 2 ([01:54](#)):

But my passion area grew into sports entertainment, being a former athlete all the way up to college through college. Uh, I just saw the opportunities for sport entertainment grow and grow. So when I moved from Atlanta where my me and my family resided for 14 years to Charlotte, North Carolina on a corporate move, one of the things I wanted to do was give back to HBCU. Um, I'm always being a man of service. And then we also know that the best leaders are those who are servants. So my goal was to see what I could do a value and GCSU actually recruited me to become an adjunct professor. So I started teaching and the business school, marketing management strategy, advertising, all things I was familiar with from my corporate career. And then also my sports entertainment career, which includes, um, stints with, uh, Learfield IMG, arguably the largest and best collegiate multimedia rights property, where I launched also the first HBCU property, mid east Atlantic conference, which includes my Alma mater Howard university.

Speaker 2 ([02:56](#)):

I started teaching in the sports management there and after doing research and teaching there for about three years, being a gamer, a old time Madden gamer, and also NBA two K I just saw the growth of, uh, e-sports game, but this was the compelling piece. Lisa, when I was doing research and, uh, trying to put together a business case for the university to launch e-sports gaming, a glaring initiative CA came out, uh, again there at the time, there were over 400 predominantly white institutions that has some type of e-sports program course curriculum and or teams up until January, 2020. There was zero HBCUs that have that. So again, you know, there are disparities on opportunities, uh, that we know that, uh, in life and we've seen the social impact and we've seen initiatives be amplified, especially over the last year recently. So I saw the opportunity to really leverage, uh, education, empowerment and employment, and doing that through e-sports and gaming. I put together a business plan with the support of my faculty, uh, Lee, Dr. Bernadette Lawson Williams. And we launched the first, uh, HBCU e-sports program at Johnson C Smith university in Charlotte, North Carolina in January, 2020. I was also the professor. I helped manage the team and lead development opportunities for them. So that's a little bit abbreviated version of my journey and how we came to fruition of the Johnson C Smith e-sports initiative.

Speaker 1 ([04:33](#)):

I can't tell you how impressive that entire story is. And just your background, um, question for you. I didn't realize that you launched the first HBC U program, have others launched after.

Speaker 2 ([04:47](#)):

Yes. And that has been an exciting F uh, issue to see, of course, all universities, regardless of their predominantly white institutions, HBC use, whatever you have presidents, you have board of directors that really set the direction and course for the universities, some people might want to focus on FinTech. Some people might want to focus on cybersecurity as up and coming trends and opportunities, and some might want to focus on e-sports and gaming. I launched the program in January, 2020. And since then, I will say that there will probably be at least eight HBC use that have half or about to launch a e-sports gaming initiative of some type curriculum based by this fall of 2021. There are many, many more HBCUs that are now having fielding their own clubs and teams. And we know the only difference between having an e-sports gaming club on campus and the e-sports gaming team is that to have a team, you have to have a certified coach at your university. So I would, I would estimate that there are probably 25 HBCUs out of the approximate 102 HBC use in the country that now are fielding clubs or teams, which is really exciting because we know that the students are already playing on campus or off campus apartments, or probably for the most part right now, Lisa coming out of the pandemic in their parents' basements. But we want to make sure that we provide them an opportunity, a sense of unity community, as well as continued expansion to playing all types of, uh, institutions around the country.

Speaker 1 ([06:31](#)):

Amazing. Okay. Let's take a little bit of a step back for our listeners because you and I are familiar with these sports, but there are so many people who don't quite understand what e-sports is. Do you want to explain just briefly, what are e-sports and what does it encompass and how does somebody play it?

Speaker 2 (06:52):

Well, I'm going to take a little step back and take maybe 30 seconds to a minute to just share that e-sports is a sub sub segment of gaming. Now gaming electronic gaming goes all the way back guys to the fifties. They were actually scientists that were developers. And I can't remember the specific gentleman's name, but one of the gentlemen that was on the Manhattan project, which led to the first atom bomb actually developed one of the first games out there. So we're talking to 1950s. Now, of course it was a mechanical and a huge, uh, device, but it was actually gaming. Now, again, we graduated, we graduate up to, um, 1972 Stanford university actually had one of the first gaming competitions at their campus. And of course, now we get into, uh, more relevant gaming since the eighties. You had arcades, of course, everybody remembers donkey Kong, Ms.

Speaker 2 (07:48):

Pac-Man, uh, that led to Madden and Sega Genesis. And that led to of course, NBA two K. And then we get into first person shooter games, call of duty. Uh, we get into Fortnite where we are now. So gaming right now is a \$175 billion global industry. That includes e-sports. So that's the first thing I want to say in gaming can be everything from you playing candy crush on your mobile app to you playing, uh, electronic card games on your computer. Then we have e-sports e-sports stands for electronic sports league. So there's just that simple e-sports is approximately a \$1.7 billion global industry. And let me give you guys a little bit more context about that. The gaming industry is larger than the music and entertainment industry, movie entertainment industry. They are approximately a \$70 billion industry. E-sports again is approximately \$165 billion. So almost double and then E I mean, sorry.

Speaker 2 (08:56):

Uh, gaming is 1, 160 \$5 billion in gaming is a \$1.6 billion industry. So e-sports usually means competitive sports. Um, you can have competitive sports with a Madden. You can have competitive sports with NBA, two K you can have competitive sports, which includes call of duty, uh, and other games league of legends. What have you, and usually in e-sports you have teams of five, but usually six players for team. So you're working as a team to accomplish your goals in those games. So that's a little bit about e-sports and gaming and I'll, I'll give you a little bit more history about it. E-sports really originated in South Korea. They took that bull by the horns in the late nineties, early two thousands, and then China, Japan are also really huge in the market. And then you have us and now continued growth in Europe and Latin America, and then Africa.

Speaker 1 (09:54):

And along with that, I love that this history has been phenomenal, but I think what other people may not understand is that not only are you doing competitive game play, but there are spectators as well. So, and, and what might surprise a lot of individuals is that ESPN now carries e-sports competitions on their cable network. So, I mean, you gave some very impressive stats, but this is a big deal with ESPN starts carrying e-sports competitions. It's a big deal. And there are a lot of people participating or watching.

Speaker 2 (10:33):

You are exactly right, Lisa. And of course, Lisa knows her stuff in this area. She's just being humble right now. These crowds, these fan basis, they are in the thousands at events. So I'll give you a great example. DreamHack is a really large e-sports competition is held all over the country. They have another one coming up in Atlanta. I'll probably be attending. We're going to expect over 30, 40, 50,000 people. Now think about this. You have this many people watch it. Other people play games on a big screen. Now some of people primarily boomers or gen X might think, well, I would never do that. But truthfully, if you are a gen Z or millennial is no different than going and watching your favorite football team or basketball team baseball team at an arena or sports complex. So again, let's keep that in context. In addition to ESPN, Turner sports has also continued to grow and the e-sports competition in gaming space.

Speaker 2 (11:33):

And of course, I think one of the big highlights last year was during the height of the pandemic in may, in June NASCAR did a fabulous pandemic pivot by announcing and, and, uh, sharing E I racing the NASCAR platform. I racing average over 1 million viewers per with, um, for NASCAR on their networks. So what does that mean? Everything boils back down to business. Lisa, that means advertisers who might have clogged that money back from NASCAR. They continue to run their ads on those networks that had iRacing and you been in the industry knows that, you know, you want to make sure that you're giving those clients a great value,

Speaker 1 (12:18):

And that is a perfect pivot and segue into brands and how they they're participating in e-sport. And there are brands who basically have really embraced marketing opportunities within e-sports. Uh, do you want to talk a little bit about some of them and what they're doing and the opportunities that exist out there for brands within this platform?

Speaker 2 (12:42):

Sure. First of all, you have endemic brands that are just native to this area. So whether it's the developers, publishers, tech companies, the Googles of the world, the Microsoft's, uh, they are already all in an apples of the world. Then you have some great, um, examples of brands cross, uh, across, uh, categories that are doing great things. So let's take for example, um, McDonald's, McDonald's has a program with the Atlanta rain, a major e-sports team out of Atlanta. They're doing a program with the Overwatch league. So again, I mentioned to you how dream act is going to be in Atlanta. So what McDonald's is doing is seeding their messaging as a top QSR, the leading QSR, um, in this space by partnering with a major co a major, uh, e-sports team, Atlanta rain. So that's an example of McDonald's Coca-Cola Coca-Cola is a major sponsor of the Overwatch league and league of legends, which are two of the largest, uh, e-sports leagues and competitions in the world.

Speaker 2 (13:48):

And of course we expect Coca-Cola to do this, right, because Coca-Cola is always where life is happening. So sports events, uh, arts events, they all res integrated as an industry leader. But I think the opportunity for all of these brands is how do they fall? They show up in an authentic and accepting manner that e-sports, uh, gaming community fraternity sorority, if you will, is very fickle and they can really see the, the cream versus the, you know, the negativity, uh, in this area. So they, they are very fickle and you need to make sure that you, uh, have done your homework, like any other great brand or marketer when you're looking at partnerships. Another example is mountain Dew I'll stay within the, um, beverage category. Mountain Dew has a great program, uh, with one of their brands called game fuel. And it's integrated with Kia right now.

Speaker 2 (14:47):

So again, they are trying to again, highlight their, their brand attributes and property with another leading soft drink. And of course, this is out of the Pepsi camp, mountain Dew, again, transcends across youth and young adults. So what a great target audience for them, we even have financial services, uh, that are out in this area, Lisa, because financial services being their banking institutions or credit cards, they know that there are transition periods in youth lives that they can have major impact. One is as they're graduating from high school and going on to college or professional career, that's an opportunity for them to have impact. So discover a part for example, um, they're actually one of the sponsors for an organization league. I support community, which has, which has just finished our first year of the first HBCU e-sports league. We had so much so sex with our league and Verizon as our title sponsor. Now we're securing more sponsors and one of them is discover and of course, discover really markets to college students because they know that college students are transitioning and looking at building on financial services. So I will pause there with some of the examples of, uh, consumer brands across categories, what they're doing and how they're looking and leveraging them.

Speaker 1 (16:09):

I love those examples. And what I love most about those examples is how large brands are becoming involved. And it's because of all of the opportunity that exists within the platform. Um, I also love about this space, the fact that it is not defined in terms of what you can do from a brand and marketing perspective. And I love the fact that you can, there's almost a place right now as a brand to chart your own way. And, uh,

Speaker 2 (16:38):

One other thing I wanted to add, Lisa, first of all, all your points are excellent. And I appreciate your insight. I'm learning as much from you as anything here, but you are exactly right. I'm always, uh, I'm always driven by innovation, creativity and being the tip of the spear, doing things that haven't been done before, pursuing my passion and brands that do that. So I don't know if you've heard of the brand liquid death yet.

Speaker 1 (17:03):

I have, I love this plan.

Speaker 2 ([17:06](#)):

I think they're doing amazing things and the way that just they're just positioning themselves, basically there are sparkling water in a can, but I think that they are going to look and leverage their positioning more and more within the e-sports gaming space and the, the trend lifestyle, uh, segment of everything. I also love their environmental messaging that they use, um, and that they're leveraging. So just another brand that I'm just impressed in how they position themselves. And I've been checking their channels of distribution and they are getting distribution everywhere, not just groceries and C stores, but in other areas in boutique shops and everything. So just another insight of things that are going on. And I would be remiss if I didn't really quickly say that the gaming, uh, the, uh, e-sports teams, they are also brands, primarily lifestyle brands. And if you haven't seen yet in last week's sports illustrated, you have one of the top teams in the world, faze, clan, and faze clan has now, you know, they're, they're a lifestyle brand, but they're basically an e-sports team. And if you look at all of the sponsorships, they've been able to secure. That's another thing that brands are looking for, how the two to immerse themselves in this culture. And this opportunity is by a segway in themselves with trendsetting and leading e-sports teams, which again, is another opportunities for brands as they move forward in the space.

Speaker 1 ([18:41](#)):

Absolutely. So you keep mentioning, uh, gen Z and millennials, is that the core target of individuals who are participating in e-sports right now, should our clients be thinking about gen Z millennials, another space to reach them, or does it supersede that and are there, uh, are there more, I would say, are people a little older on Forbes?

Speaker 2 ([19:05](#)):

Yes. I think I like to use the Wayne Gretzky analogy, Lisa, because that's how I try to live my life and live my career in business. I don't skate to where the puck is. I work to escape to where the puck is going to be, and that's driven by research. So I'm an acolyte when it comes to market research is I bow down to them as a brand guy and business guy, um, and an advertising guy, you know, uh, you know, without, uh, fact-based analysis and research, all you have is a water sandwich, but to address your point, first of all, I think your sweet spot for e-sports game is right now is approximately 18 to 35. If you look at the research in new zoo is as a research platform, I think they do a great job in the industry. I think the average age of the average game right now is between 32 and 35.

Speaker 2 ([19:54](#)):

What the outlier is being of course, is as young as 18 that you can really go after and as old as 55. So I feel that there's going to be an opportunity based upon how you want to customize your message for different areas. So for the hardcore e-sport gamers, maybe your sweet spot is going to be more 18 to 30. Uh, for those who are outliers, having families getting married, maybe you look at them with a different positioning in games. Maybe they're more in the Maton or two K or fortnight or playing with their kids, and that'll be a different strategy and less think about it. A RP, just add on the cover of one of their weekly magazines and article about e-sports and gaming and boomers e-sports and gaming is now showing to improve cognitive ability, motor skills, and other benefits. Now, again, you can go through the research and find it for yourself, but there is a opportunity, I think, across platforms. Now, of course, we know that primarily marketers and advertisers target from the teens to basically the age of 55.



And if I was looking at it, I would really have to look at my brand what brands I'm representing and how I'm positioning it. But to answer your point again, Lisa, there is opportunity across the spectrum from gen Z to boomers based upon your brand and your vision, goal, and objectives. With that.

Speaker 1 ([21:15](#)):

I know a little bit about Twitch and its importance within the e-sports, uh, community. Uh, do you want to talk a little bit about what Twitch actually is? I think that out of any platform that is out there, Twitch has really helped expand e-sports to a much larger demographic. Let's let's talk a little bit about what is Twitch.

Speaker 2 ([21:39](#)):

Sure. Um, first of all, Twitch is the largest, um, streaming platform for e-sports gamers on the internet. So you have Facebook that has Facebook gaming, you have YouTube, they have YouTube gaming, but Twitch has a 91% market share for e-sports and gaming online. Okay. So that's a monumental market share. Um, we know that within the last two years, Microsoft actually tried to enter the streaming space with mixer that was going to be their streaming platform, but within a year and a half, Microsoft shut that down and there they pivoted on to other opportunities. So again, there are other competitors that are out there trying to, you know, it's not like a shark, that's going to bite you in one bite, but more like middles that are going to bite at your feet and, you know, and bother you. But Twitch remains the, the leader when it comes to online streaming and game.

Speaker 2 ([22:39](#)):

Now, one thing that I will share, Twitch's also about being present for content creators, Lisa content, creators in creation, as you know, is a booming industry opportunity for those who have a passion or expertise, and they want to share it online. And that's the beauty of, of online, uh, networks. You can have your own community and following no different than if you're doing it with mobile and, um, your Instagram account or your Tik TOK account now regarding Twitch and e-sports gaming. And I can speak from experience Twitch, a process approximately a year ago when us meaning communities about what the next CX M in U N I T Y community is the first HBCU e-sports Platt education and e-sports gaming platform. And because of the success we had with some initial programs, they are processed for a partnership. And we have a two year partnership with Twitch and I am so excited our first year with Twitch, we were on the front page of the Twitch channel.

Speaker 2 ([23:43](#)):

And what that means is that guarantees you approximately 250,000 views over the course of our league play from September to may. We had approximately 14 million views, uh, Lisa. So now when you're starting to think about your media plans, whether it's radio TV, print, cable, online, mobile, you got to include nail streaming and e-sport platforms too, because those numbers are very impressive. And our first sponsor Verizon, they was so impressed. Not only did they sign up for year two, which starts in the fall in September, they also forwarded us to, um, uh, the, the Verizon foundation. And we just did a \$1 million program for five [inaudible], including my Alma mater how a university, where we're going to empower those institutions to build out e-sports gaming, uh, uh, facilities, as well as provide five, \$20,000 scholarships to women to empower more women in the e-sports gaming community, but back to Twitch.

Speaker 2 ([24:50](#)):

So I shared a little bit with you regarding Twitch scale in the, in the marketplace, how Twitch works by streaming programs of gaming, whether it's call of duty NBA two K and they're building personalities. And these personalities become content creators that have their own following, and of course can be monetized by Twitch and the content creators. So, and of course they're owned by Amazon. They were purchasing, I think it was 2014. We're about 975 billion up, not \$975 million from the initial developers. So a little bit about Twitch. I'll pause there, Lisa, for any other comments I can provide you regarding Twitch?,

Speaker 1 ([25:32](#)):

No, I, I love Twitch and I actually, I love the fact that choices is not only a streaming platform for gaming, but it's also parlaying itself into music and entertainment too, because that is really important to the target audience that is using Twitch. Do you, are you on Twitch? I just thought I would ask. I have been on Twitch. I love following ninja playing. Um, I love following Wendy's and what they're doing on, on Twitch from a creation content creation standpoint, are you on Twitch?

Speaker 2 ([26:05](#)):

Yes, I've been really managing our league play, but one of my goals is to become a content creator myself and beyond there. And you are exactly right regarding music and entertainment to Lisa. So thank you for saving me with that one, throwing me a lifeline on that one, because we do not want to be remiss that that is integrated in the lifestyle and life stages of all content creators. So again, whether you're 18 or whether you're 45, there is a place for you once, which, because what we're talking about are trends. Lisa, we're not talking about fads. I talked about being rained, Gretzky, and skating to where the puck going to be the next step. And we're already there is with AR and VR. And for those of you who may not know is augmented reality and virtual reality. And the only difference is that augmented is like partial reality and virtual is like a total immersion of reality. So you've probably seen the Oculus rip hit sets. They're one of the more popular ones, but now that is going to be integrated with these sports. So in the past, when you were playing NBA two K now, think of yourself as a Steph Curry or Devin Booker. And you're the actual player on the port and with your, your augmented reality glasses. For me as a golfer, I can't wait to be able to put on my augmented reality or virtual reality headsets and play pebble beach. That's where we're going. Oh my God.

Speaker 1 ([27:31](#)):

But I'm right there with you because like I love tennis and like, I want to see myself, uh, playing Venus Williams on a, in a tennis match with my Oculus headset on. So I'm right there with you. Um, thank you so much for joining us today. Is there anything else before we end that you want to tell people about either your program? Um, e-sports in general, uh, that, that we do not know, or we didn't get to talk about?



Speaker 2 ([27:57](#)):

Well, for me, I would love the opportunity to share conversations about the opportunity for business and business growth. Uh, one through my organization, uh, you can call me at (678) 787-8098. I think it would just be easier to call versus trying to give you my email address, uh, 6 7 8 7 8 7 8 0 9 8. Or you can just email me, I will give it to you. Is jayCash@thethgnarmergroup.com. That's J cast at T H E N as in Nancy, a R M as in Mary E R group.com. And we can talk more about that. There are huge business opportunities to be made and leverage with e-sports and gaming Lisa, as you know, and it transcends age, culture, gender, and society. So again, I look forward to more continued conversations and please be on the lookout for community CX M M U N I T Y as we continue to do great things, I'll give you a little look under the cover. We're about to launch a program partnership with space jam two is going to LA and the announcement, the announcement is going to probably drop July 1st and on July 8th, we are so excited about it. So thank you very much, Lisa for your time and thanks again to your agency and Mr. Barry for allowing me this opportunity. I know

Speaker 1 ([29:30](#)):

And kudos to Barry too, because, uh, it varies. You're listening, John and I have become fast friends. So thank you. Thank you so much. Okay. You

Speaker 2 ([29:40](#)):

Have a great day. Take care.