

# IPL 2023: How Digital Marketing hit 'Creative Sixers' this season

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It is a well-known fact that India is a land of hard-core cricket lovers. This is one sport that makes people come together for good. Nothing makes this claim more evident than the scenario from the last week of May that witnessed some of the biggest controversies, like the launch of the new parliament, the wrestlers' protest, and the outrage over a famous celebrity commentaries in the media in favor of the government. Amid this mayhem, the country also celebrated the victory of MS Dhoni's team, Chennai Super Kings (CSK).

That is the power cricket holds in India. It is rightly said that cricket, for Indians, is not just a sport but an emotion that transcends the good, the bad, and everything in between. Over the centuries since the inception of this sport, we have truly made it ours. As much as it is a pastime for everyone, the success of this sport has transformed cricket's commercial scenario and created excellent business opportunities for thousands of Indians.

From merchandisers to restaurants & bars, advertising companies to marketers, and shopping malls to digital agencies, businesses of all kinds cash in on this cricket frenzy to promote their brand and voice and reach a larger audience. With the rise of digital life, conventional marketing of IPL through TV ads and brand sponsorships has taken a back seat. Modern tools like influencer marketing, celebrity endorsements, social media campaigns, and live streaming have taken a front foot. Clearly, for newbie entrepreneurs and traditional business owners who want to go digital, this season of IPL has an array of learnings and tips for application.

### Role of Digital Innovations in Creating Brand IPL

#### Brand Partnerships:

When popular brands partner, there is much buzz surrounding their partnership. The ability of IPL to drive high impact for growing brands reflects the authority of IPL marketing. Brands like Unacademy, Herbalife, CRED, Disney + Hotstar, Star Sports, and RuPay leveraged this opportunity to stir excitement around the tournament, engage with cricket fans, and improve their visibility. Consequently, some of these brands gained a competitive edge through brand mentions on merchandises, video sippets, display ads, and social media teasers.

#### Live Streaming:

With the onset of the pandemic, online streaming platforms rose to immense popularity as an alternative to traditional television broadcasts. This opened up great avenues for both IPL marketers and live-streaming platforms to capture the attention of their target audiences. Disney Star begged the TV broadcasting rights for IPL 2023 in the Indian subcontinent for a staggering amount of Rs 23,575 crore. Similarly, Viacom's JoCinema mobile app acquired the digital rights to stream IPL matches and, in turn, benefited from a massive surge in downloads. Data suggests the platform's penetration has increased 4X to 40.25 percent due to free streaming and targeted ad placements. Clearly, streaming services pose excellent outreach opportunities.

#### Social Media Engagement:

Social media has remained and will continue to be a key platform for IPL marketing. From connecting with users to engaging with fans via targeted content, influencer campaigns, and brand partnerships, IPL 2023 has done and seen it all. Using the reach of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, marketers and brands created the right amount of curiosity amongst cricket enthusiasts before the match and in real-time. Several brands, including Pepsi, Puma, and CEAT, jumped on the IPL bandwagon and ran targeted campaigns featuring cricket players and celebrities. Brands like ITC went a step further and conducted contests and giveaways on Instagram and Twitter to keep fans glued to the match while boosting recall for its snack product Bingo. The brand also partnered with JoCinema as the associate sponsor for IPL 2023. It ran its signature campaign, "Match Start Bingo! Start," that aptly encapsulates how viewers put aside their schedules to sit back and cheer for their favorite teams while snacking on Bingo Snacks. The campaign relayed a fun tone and resonated with young, urban viewers.

#### Influencer Marketing:

In recent years, influencer marketing has played a substantial role during the IPL season to help brands reach specific demographics. During the 2023 IPL season, influencers subtly harnessed the potential of moment marketing and drove branded content on Twitter. Pushing influencer-generated content proved impactful, as it was more engaging, resonated with users, and promoted products or services with an authentic touch. Fast-forward to 2023, brands yet again took the opportunity of running influencer marketing campaigns during IPL to reap the rewards of enhanced visibility, increased engagement, and a more extensive customer base. However, this time, the platforms of preference remained Instagram and YouTube due to their high user base.

#### Mobile Advertising:

The usage of mobile applications has grown year after year. This rapid growth has led to an increase in online advertising spending. By analyzing consumer habits and targeting the right audience, marketers and advertisers capitalized on mobile-friendly ad formats like native ads, in-app advertising, and mobile video ads. The popular fantasy gaming app Dream 11 made the most of the IPL 2023 fever through its 'Sab Kholenge' campaign. The video campaign featured Indian cricketers and actors from the movie '3 Idiots' sharing a playful banter. Besides playing games on mobile devices, IPL fans also placed bets and used the apps to keep track of match highlights and scores. As a result, sports betting apps witnessed significant growth during the IPL season. The demand for food delivery apps, too, saw a surge, with installs and sessions increasing considerably.

These pioneering digital marketing tactics have enhanced the fan experience and changed how brands interpret IPL, and engage with their audience. The increasing relevance and acceptance of all things digital have further reinforced these efforts, which show that digital is where the future lies. What is needed is for brands to brace up and explore the interests of millions of cricket fans nationwide. This event, single-handedly, can change the fate of brands!

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