

**tec:agency**

the sports technology specialists



**Technology,  
The World Cup and  
The future sport experience**



## Technology, the World Cup and the future sport experience

**Football today is very different to the game FIFA sought to celebrate with the first ever FIFA World Cup in 1930. For the best part of a century, the ways in which we play, watch and engage with football have been shaped by a steady stream of innovations; innovations that have increasingly been driven by new technologies and the opportunities they offer society.**

The experience of modern football, for all the stakeholders involved, has been revolutionised by the accelerated development of digital technologies over the past 20 years and the FIFA World Cup – the game’s most iconic milestone – is a good way to frame this development. By the time of the 2002 tournament in Japan and South Korea, while performance related innovations like video analysis and heart rate monitoring were already in place, the tournament was the first which enabled reporters to use wireless local area network (LAN) technology to access the internet<sup>1</sup> and the coverage they produced was shared via traditional media outlets with the advent of social media still a few years away.

Two decades on and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar – only the second to be held in Asia – will be the most digitally advanced yet, with innovations ranging from air conditioned stadia to semi-automated offsides debuting at the tournament.

FIFA’s commitment to harnessing the potential of new technologies, as stated in their Vision 2020-23 document<sup>2</sup>, is impressive and it is something that we at TEC Agency share. Our work with leading sports rights holders such as The R&A and Scottish Rugby has enabled us to use a variety of innovative technologies, across a range of projects, aimed at transforming the digital experience of sport. In this whitepaper, we will take a look at some of the digital innovations that will be seen at this year’s tournament, drawing on our own experiences to understand not just of how technology has transformed the way we engage with football, but how these technologies can be implemented elsewhere and – crucially – how technology will continue to disrupt the different stakeholder experiences of sport going forward.

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.itweb.co.za/content/KA3Wwqdle5BqrydZ>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://publications.fifa.com/en/vision-report-2021/>

# Data Management

**Data is at the heart of much of football’s digital revolution. Empowered by technological advancements, the ability to better capture, manage and analyse data has proved crucial to improving performance on and off the pitch. Player data is the most valuable in this regard and for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, players will, for the first time, have access to a dedicated app that delivers all their individual performance data shortly after each match. Collected via a mix of manual and automated processes, the multiple data points will be synchronised with match footage and imagery, providing players with content that can be used for assessing their own performance or for sharing via their own channels, to better engage their fans and drive commercial potential. The app is part of FIFA’s work with FIFPro, the global representative body of professional players, to protect player data rights and the increasing value they represent.**

While performance metrics offer valuable data for the player to understand their worth, they are just one of the data sets that clubs need to process when it comes to understanding the value of their squads. Player contract data is equally important and increasingly complex to manage, given the myriad of clauses and conditions that are now inserted. From the ownership of image rights to number of games played, these clauses impact the value of each player in the transfer market and can help shape decisions on when to buy or sell a player, something that is crucial to the business model of all clubs.

The management of different data types from multiple internal and external sources and the ability to model different outcomes is therefore a crucial requirement for all football teams. While some off-the-shelf solutions exist, there is always a large element of personalisation required to meet the needs of each club and so often, the best solution is to build something bespoke. TEC had the pleasure of working with a leading Premier League club to build such a platform. The goal was to create a bespoke software solution that provided an overview of all player-related financial activity and enabled the club to efficiently manage all aspects of player’s contracts, including all the different performance-related clauses and bonuses involved.

Working closely with the club and their consultants, we built an intelligence platform, based around a live rule engine, that empowered the Premier League club to quickly make financial predictions and decisions based on contract conditions and performance outcomes. The platform also allowed them to make better-informed decisions about scouting and managing transfer-related costs like taxes and agent’s fees. The intelligence platform is so successful it is now used by over 40 football clubs worldwide.



# Streaming

**Arguably the first real technological transformation of football came with the advent of TV and televised matches. Match day broadcasts brought games to bigger audiences and paved the way for commercial activities such as sponsorship, advertising and rights deals to generate the kind of revenues that sparked the evolution of football into the cultural and economic phenomenon it is today.**

The digital disruption of the TV industry means much has changed since the first FIFA World Cup broadcast in 1954. The advent of streaming technologies has transformed the way in which match action and other football content can be consumed, creating new opportunities for rights holders, as well as broadcasters, to manage the distribution of content via their online channels and meet the non-linear needs of fans today.

Earlier this year, FIFA joined a number of rights holders in launching their own OTT Streaming platform, FIFA+. This new direct-to-consumer (DTC) service allows the governing body to engage with (and capture data from) football fans around the world by providing coverage of the men's and women's game, through feature-length documentaries, docuseries, talk shows, shorts and live matches, of which FIFA expects to have broadcast 40,000 by the end of 2022.

While production values are important for any sports right's holder operating a streaming service, the digital infrastructure they put in place to ingest and distribute the streams is vital to its success. As F1 found out to its cost with F1 TV, stability is key with streaming of live sport and any problems with the stream's integrity will hugely impact the fans' experience.

TEC are experts in supporting scalable platforms and created the streaming infrastructure which the R&A uses to distribute content across their different digital channels. The platform was designed to take the content produced by European Tour Productions, from events such as The Open and the AIG Women's Open, and manage the digital distribution of the different streams according to the geographics rights restrictions in place, while coping with the spikes in demand around key moments in the tournaments.



# Personalised digital experiences

Football, like all sports, has many different stakeholder groups. There are the players who bring the game to life, the fans who follow it, the media who capture the experience and the corporates whose investment brings important revenues – and which in turn offers them a route to align their brands to the beautiful game – to name but a few. For a major tournament like the FIFA World Cup, each stakeholder group has a different set of requirements and expectations that need to be catered for and developments in mobile technology have enabled the creation of personalised digital platforms tailored to meet the needs of each group.

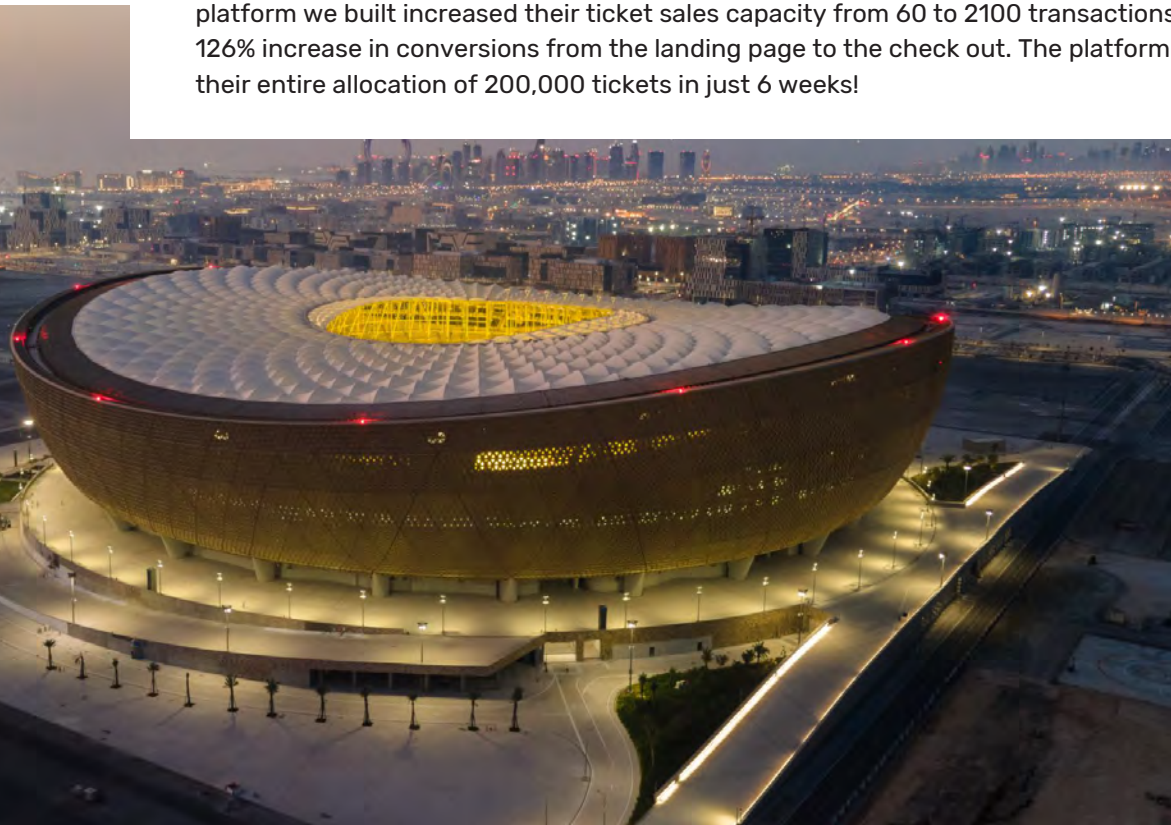
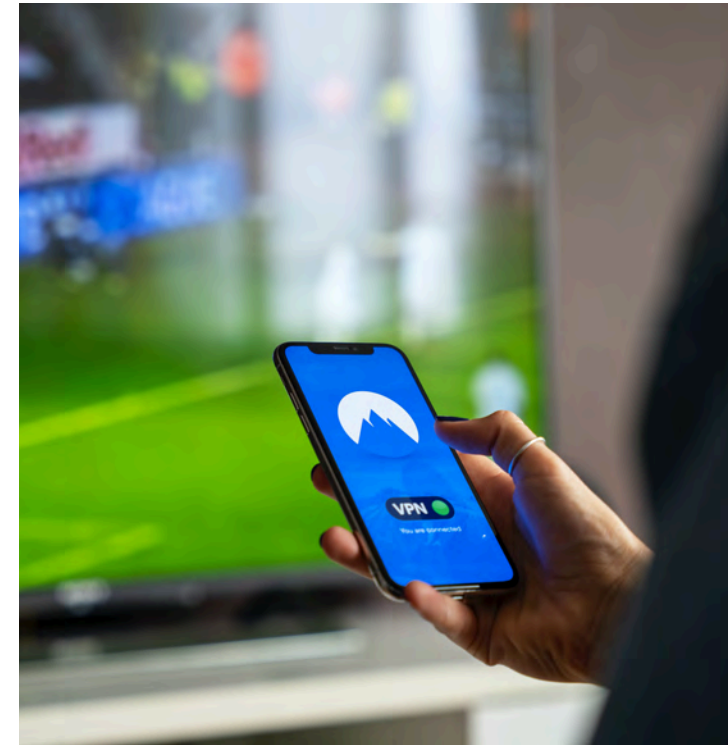
What do these personalised platforms look like and what services will they deliver? Well, as we have already touched upon, FIFA have acknowledged the data needs of players through the development of the Player App and are able to deliver content and merchandising opportunities for fans through their FIFA+ platform but what other platforms have been – or could be – delivered?



## Ticketing...

Fans looking to attend the tournament were able to access a dedicated World Cup ticketing platform, something that is an expectation now for any event around the world. The digital development of event ticketing has had huge benefits for sports fans, improving the purchasing process and distribution of tickets, whilst also helping to fight ticketing fraud. There are many big established online ticket sellers out there but the benefits in owning the process mean that more and more rights holders are setting up their own ticketing platforms.

When building a bespoke ticketing platform, scalability is a key consideration, making sure it can cope with surges in demand around peak sales moments and you need to consider the sales strategy being used; whether its straight purchase model or a ballot system to help drive up interest and ensure a sell out for larger events. TEC has experience in successfully delivering platforms for each strategy, having built the ticketing solutions for leading European dance festival UNTOLD and the golf governing body, The R&A. With UNTOLD, we were set the challenge of selling out their first block of allocated ticket inventory – 80,000 tickets – in just two minutes (our platform let them do it in 30 seconds). With The R&A, they were looking for a robust, scalable ticketing platform that could help them achieve a sell out for the first time. The platform we built increased their ticket sales capacity from 60 to 2100 transactions per minute and drove a 126% increase in conversions from the landing page to the check out. The platform enabled The R&A to sell their entire allocation of 200,000 tickets in just 6 weeks!



## Hospitality / VIPs...

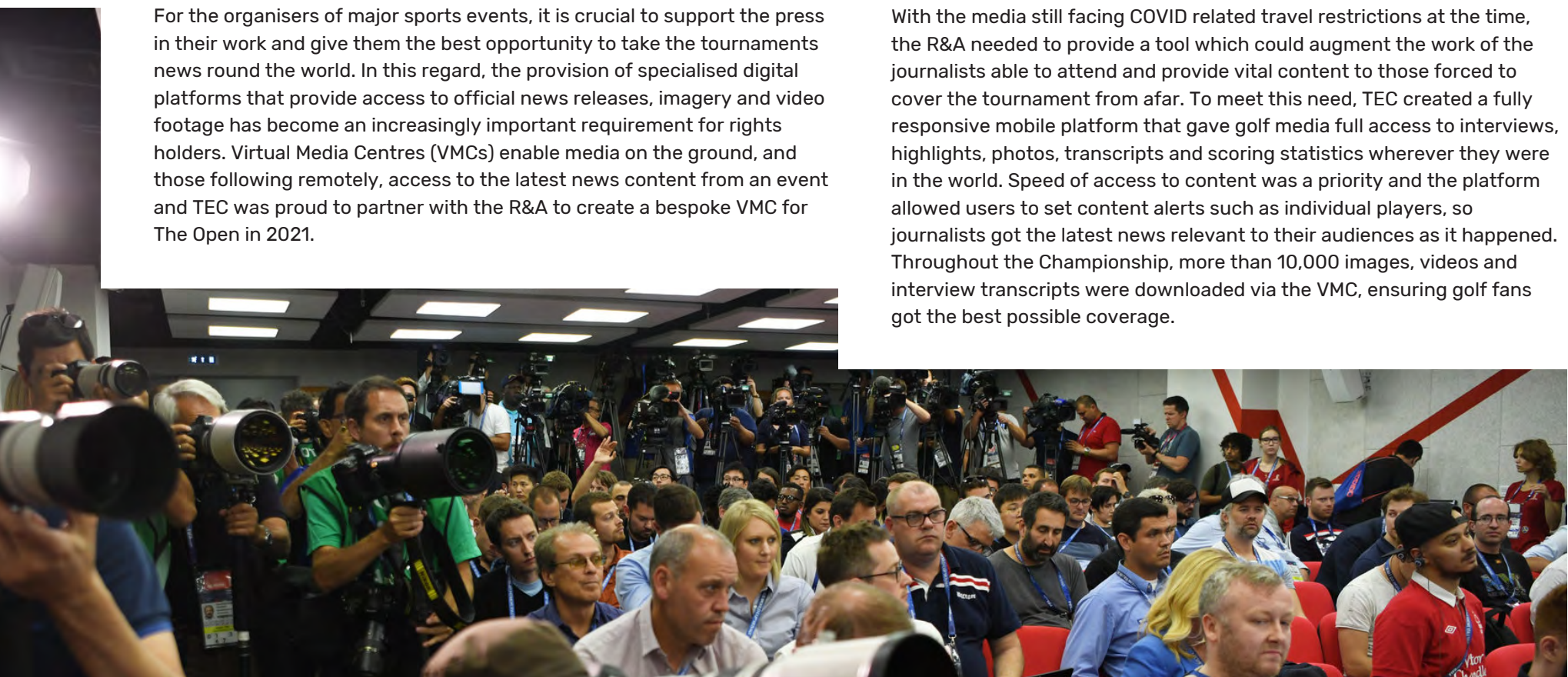
Another new platform FIFA have launched for the World Cup is their Client App which provides VIPs and corporate guests with all the information they need to get the most out of their attendance, ranging from personalised travel details to ticketing information. Common in the hotel and hospitality sector, this sort of digital concierge service is likely to become standard practice in sports too, particularly around major events as rights holders look to offer enhanced levels of service and also offer enhanced engagement opportunities for sponsors.

## The media...

**With a record breaking global viewership of over 5 billion expected for the tournament, the media tasked with bringing the latest news to their audiences will play a crucial role in feeding this worldwide interest. The landscape for media operating at major sports events like the FIFA World Cup is very different to what it was a decade ago. The development of the internet and social media has brought about a plethora of channels to consume sports news content and also created the means to meet the demand for immediacy, in terms of news updates, that the modern fan expects.**

For the organisers of major sports events, it is crucial to support the press in their work and give them the best opportunity to take the tournaments news round the world. In this regard, the provision of specialised digital platforms that provide access to official news releases, imagery and video footage has become an increasingly important requirement for rights holders. Virtual Media Centres (VMCs) enable media on the ground, and those following remotely, access to the latest news content from an event and TEC was proud to partner with the R&A to create a bespoke VMC for The Open in 2021.

With the media still facing COVID related travel restrictions at the time, the R&A needed to provide a tool which could augment the work of the journalists able to attend and provide vital content to those forced to cover the tournament from afar. To meet this need, TEC created a fully responsive mobile platform that gave golf media full access to interviews, highlights, photos, transcripts and scoring statistics wherever they were in the world. Speed of access to content was a priority and the platform allowed users to set content alerts such as individual players, so journalists got the latest news relevant to their audiences as it happened. Throughout the Championship, more than 10,000 images, videos and interview transcripts were downloaded via the VMC, ensuring golf fans got the best possible coverage.





## What's next?

In one way or another, technology will influence the experiences of all those who watch or are involved with the 2022 FIFA World Cup and will continue to do so long after the final whistle has been blown in Qatar.

On the pitch, innovations in areas such as wearable and performance tech will generate more and more data that will help players and teams as they seek marginal gains through better understanding player performance and wellbeing. Fan experience will continue to evolve as AR and VR technologies advance. Artificial intelligence will help rights holders better understand and cater for the needs of their fans.

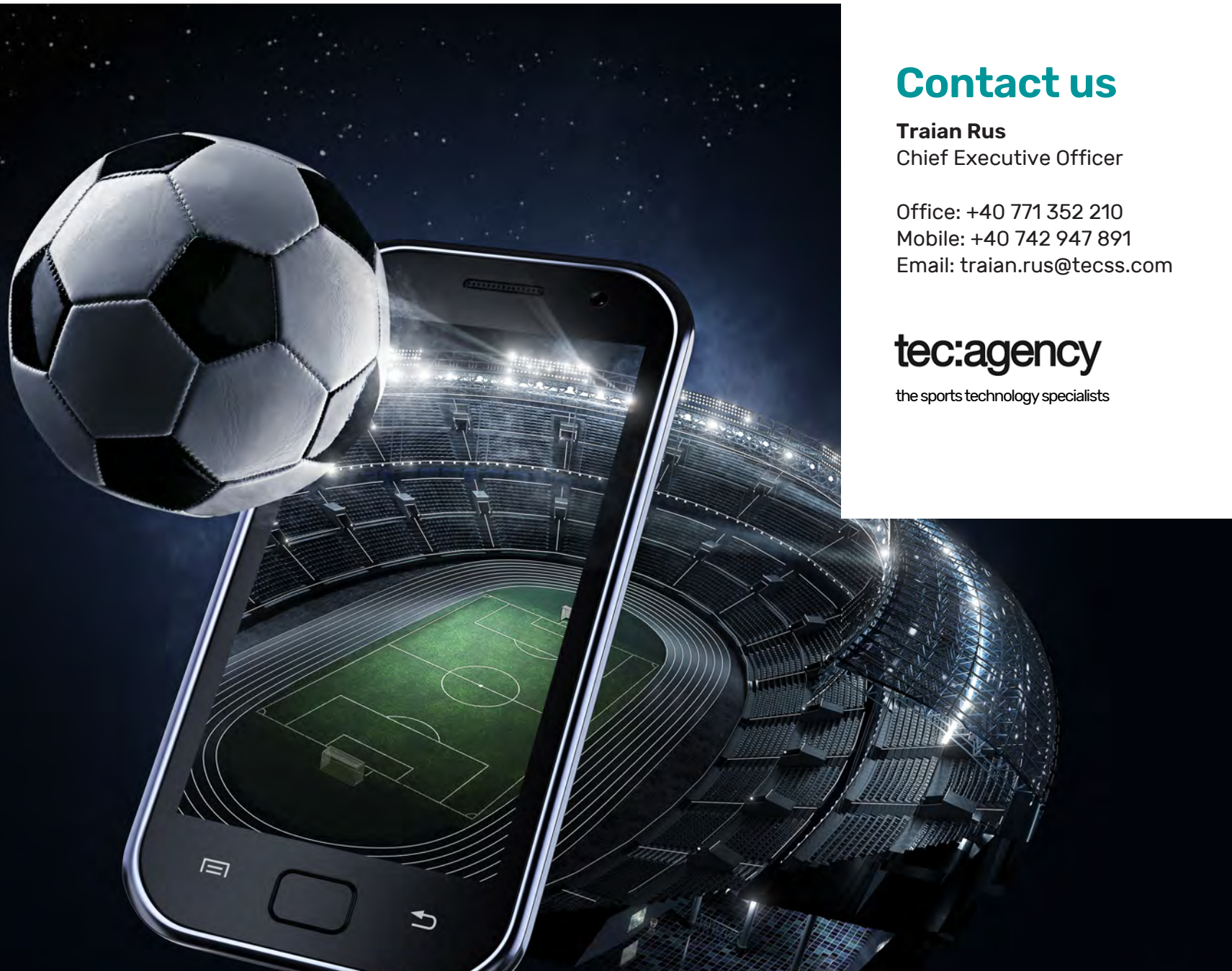
By the time of the next World Cup, due to be held across Canada, Mexico and the United States in 2026, there will be greater connectivity with 5G more readily available, allowing richer content to be shared on the go, creating more possibilities for rights holders to exploit on their different digital platforms.

We are also likely to see a rise in the use of direct-to-fan platforms, like FIFA+, enabling greater data capture, greater personalisation of content and fan experience and more targeted commercial opportunities for commercial partners. To achieve this micro level of targeting, rights holders will have platforms that can be personalised to the needs of their different stakeholders and be able to integrate and analyse data that is captured from different sources into one intelligence platform.

With more platforms to build and more data to process, rights holders will face many challenges in keeping pace with technology and ensuring their digital strategy is future proofed. At TEC we are looking forward to helping the different rights holders we work with overcome these challenges and if you're looking to ensure your digital platforms are fit for purpose, we'd be happy to help!



Lets talk some more



## Contact us

**Traian Rus**

Chief Executive Officer

Office: +40 771 352 210

Mobile: +40 742 947 891

Email: [traian.rus@tecss.com](mailto:traian.rus@tecss.com)

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