

THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Lotteries Use the Reach and Immediacy of Facebook, Twitter, Other Platforms to Engage with Players

Jim Acton, Lottery Industry Consultant

Most of us were happy to see the calendar change from 2020 to 2021. In a year marked by lockdowns, zoom meetings and cancelled celebrations, we were ready to turn the page.

At the Minnesota Lottery, they didn't just celebrate the end of a challenging year. The lottery provided its players with an outlet for their built-up frustrations and have a little fun as well. The lottery hosted a Facebook Live event featuring a 2020 pinata and when players typed "I'MN" in the comment sections, a lottery representative took a swing at the confetti-filled 2020 pinata. Players who participated in the

event were randomly selected to win a lottery sweatshirt and \$100 in scratch tickets.

The lottery industry has always been a leader in offering engaging promotions which attract players, promote games and offer attractive prizing. But with COVID-19 changing the way many aspects of our lives have unfolded over the past 18 months, lotteries have had to re-think and re-imagine how they engage with their customers. Even one of the most important and attention-gathering aspects of lottery operations – the awarding of prize money – was altered and made more complicated.

Lottery marketing teams, boasting some of the most creative event and promotions professionals in the business world, pivoted quickly, assessing the resources available to them and pivoting accordingly. As marketing budgets vary greatly in the lottery industry (ranging from almost non-existent to enviable, with most lotteries having limited marketing budgets), marketers got creative, particularly when public gatherings weren't being held. Enter social media, with a strong emphasis on Facebook and its Facebook Live functionality through which a livestream can bring the lottery community together virtually. The lottery world could gather safely, quickly, efficiently and cost-effectively.



MN Lottery players were encouraged to “take a swing” at the Year 2020 pinata.



“Our goal is to make these live events feel like a true experience,” said Shyla Howell, Digital Marketing Manager at the Minnesota Lottery. “We try to make them as interactive as possible by engaging with all the viewers who are along for the ride. A key is to offer fresh and unique content. And we see the results of our efforts, as the engagement and viewership for our live events has continued to grow.”

While many lotteries have offered Facebook pages and other social media sites for well more than 10 years, the use of social media to hold live events is a more recent phenomenon. With more than 220 million users and an easy-to-use live interface, Facebook is the preferred avenue for lotteries to hold live events.

In fact, Facebook has proactively widened its interaction with different industries and community groups to help them reach customers, members and interested parties. Earlier this summer, the company participated in a forum among faith leaders on how they can use Facebook to reach their followers and expand their community. In a recent New York Times article about this collaboration, Bobby Gruenewald, a pastor at Life Church in Oklahoma said, “From our vantage point, Facebook is a platform that allows us to build community and connect with our community and accomplish our mission. So I think it serves everybody well.”

That is a thought echoed by many lotteries.

PROMOTING PRODUCTS & PUPPIES

At the Arizona Lottery, social media livestreams have been used to promote everything from beneficiaries to giveaways. The lottery’s first Facebook livestream was in 2017 – Puppy Pick. Teaming with the Arizona Humane Society to help raise awareness for adoptions, the lottery had puppies pick draw numbers live on Facebook. Viewers could guess which numbers the puppies would pick, and the best part? All the puppies were adoptable.

In 2018, the Arizona Lottery featured its



(Left to right): Deirdre Calcoate, Program Manager of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Arizona Lottery Executive Director Gregg Edgar are hosted by Arizona Lottery mascot Windfall Willie during the inaugural “Windfall Willie’s Virtual Holiday Party Livestream Giveaway.”

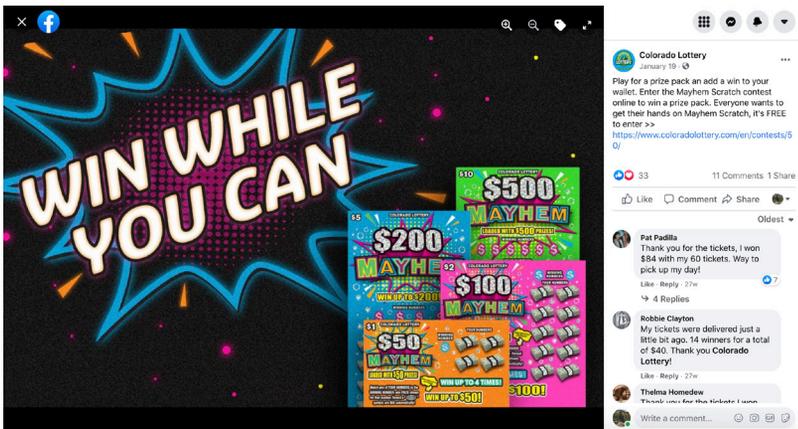
largest livestream event – “Windfall Willie’s Virtual Holiday Party Livestream Giveaway.” This was a talk-show style event with the lottery’s two brand mascots, Windfall Willie and his sidekick Derek, and dozens of prizes were awarded. Then, in March 2020 with the pandemic ramping up, the lottery hosted cash giveaways for frontline employees impacted hardest by COVID-19, including healthcare workers, grocery store employees, teachers and others.

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“It was beyond rewarding to know how much our Community Giveaways benefited those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Allyson Saltford, Marketing and Social Media Coordinator. “We received so many ‘thank you’ comments from people who couldn’t believe they’d won and heard moving stories about how much the money helped our recipients. That included a server who used her prize to pay for sommelier classes and was then able to get a more stable, higher paying job. Social media is an incredible tool for brands but it’s an even more powerful tool for coming together as a community in times of crisis.”

Another early adopter of using social media to reach players is the Colorado Lottery. When the lottery first began reaching out to players using social media, it was primarily product-focused information about new scratch tickets and players were redirected to the lottery’s website to win prizes. In 2019, Colorado partnered with the Rockies for a season-long Twitter campaign which allowed participants to win seat upgrades.

But the lottery has really ratcheted up its social media game in 2021. They launched their first Instagram influencer campaign in July, partnering with outdoor influencers to promote the Lottery’s diverse proceeds projects across the state. To drive home that lottery proceeds fund parks, trails, open spaces and recreation projects across the state, the Lottery also partnered with a new TV show host, Kathie J., a popular long-time entertainment personality in Denver. The communications team in Colorado launched bi-monthly Facebook Live events with Kathie J. The Facebook Live events cover news that ranges from proceeds to product news and responsible gaming.



Screen shot of the Colorado Lottery's Facebook page

"We are adding both micro and larger influencers to our proceeds influencer campaign every week," said Meghan Dougherty, Colorado Lottery communications manager. "Influencers range from 30,000 followers to over one million, and it's helping us reach a younger, non-player outdoor audience to share the message of how the Colorado Lottery supports the outdoors and the places Coloradans play."

For the Nebraska Lottery, as COVID-19 played havoc with its scheduled promotions, the marketing group quickly pivoted to other methods of reaching players. Leading the way was the Sizzling Summer Giveaway. Running from the end of June through July 30 in 2020, this Facebook promotion allowed players to enter to be selected as a Spin-n-Win virtual contestant. The response was so positive that the lottery added Awesome Autumn Giveaway (August-September 2020), Sensational Seasons Giveaway (October-December 2020), and Spring Fling Giveaway (March-May 2021).

The Facebook Live broadcasts which supported each promotion were recorded live at the Nebraska Lottery headquarters in Lincoln. The hosts spin the wheel as proxies for the at-home contestants, ask trivia questions and present new lottery games and promotions. The interaction between the lottery and players takes place when players answer questions in the "comments" section of Facebook and the hosts answer live on air and announce winners.

"These livestreams are fun to produce but they take a lot of work on our

end," said Neil Watson, Marketing and Communications Specialist at the Nebraska Lottery. "At a minimum, we have the hosts, a director drawing manager, props manager and comment moderator. But the engagement has continued to go up and we think Livestreams are here to stay. Even though we're attending public events again, these events will continue, especially when our regular event schedule is lighter."

OHIO FOCUSES ON OLD FAVORITE

He might be more than 40 years old, but PAC-MAN can still generate a high level of excitement. When he's featured on lottery games, he can also sell tickets.

This past June, the Ohio Lottery teamed

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with the famous arcade game icon for PAC-MAN's Live Extrava-game-za!, a 30-minute interactive game show that was held on Facebook Live. The event featured more than \$2,000 in prizes and over 70 winners announced in real time.

"Everybody has a memory of PAC-MAN whether they played in an arcade or at home, and this event gives us the chance to draw on the nostalgia of the game to promote our new PAC-MAN Scratch-Off and EZPLAY Games in fun, interactive ways," said Danielle Frizzi-Babb, Deputy Director, Communications.

The metrics were impressive:

- 5,000 average viewers throughout the show
- 10,000 reactions
- 100,000+ comments

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Tate Schneider, Marketing and Communications Specialist for the Nebraska Lottery (Left), and Chris Raff, Special Event Coordinator from IGT, spin the wheel during a Sensational Season Giveaway determine the prize for a virtual contestant.



The Ohio Lottery marketed its live event on Facebook



Danielle Frizzi-Babb, the Ohio Lottery's Communications Director and FB Live Event Host, is joined by PAC-MAN at the Lottery's live event

The lottery was joined by its ad agency, Marcus-Thomas, on the planning and rollout of the game. The agency developed a proprietary drawing and display process that will allow the lottery to continue to offer and award prizes during future Facebook Live events. The takeaways

gained by the lottery include structuring an event that can be scaled, allowing players to comment and win often and as close to real-time as possible, and establishing a turnkey framework for future Facebook Livestream events.

“Our long-term plan is to create real-time, one-to-one winning experiences by making FB Live appointment viewing for our customers,” said Tom Ackerman, Assistant Marketing Director, Ohio Lottery.

The Minnesota Lottery enjoyed such good results from their 2020 year-end livestream that they held a Groundhog Day event in February 2021 followed by a Hive Live event to promote their Bee Lucky ticket, and other subsequent events. The hope is to hold one Facebook Live event each month and include a look at beneficiaries that receive funding from lottery revenues.

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“Our goal is to make these live events feel like a true experience,” said Shyla Howell, Minnesota Lottery’s Digital Marketing Manager. “We try to make them as interactive as possible by engaging with all of the viewers who are along for the ride. We utilize the comments section to ask questions, answer questions, promote products and fill in new viewers on what’s going on as they join in on the fun.”

“With the majority of our in-person events on hold due to the pandemic, Facebook Live has been a wonderful opportunity for our brand to engage with our players, and catch some new ones along the way,” added Howell.

Pandemic or no pandemic... social media is here to stay as an important communication tool for lotteries. Whether the outlet is Facebook, Twitter or any of the other popular outlets, lotteries now have ubiquitous and relatively inexpensive channels to reach players. And the opportunities for creativity are practically endless for lottery marketers who proven to be some of the savviest marketers in any business. ■