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Commercial venue streaming site Screach targets 11 key markets in global launch

Thursday, 06 May 2021

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By Euan Cunningham

Screach, a sports streaming platform aiming to link rights holders and broadcasters specifically with commercial venues, has launched internationally today, through UK-based technology firm Screenreach.

Screach has made its app available to commercial venues in 157 countries (after launching in the UK in late 2019), having secured \$2 million in investment, and aims to attract premises including bars, cafes, hotels and gyms.

It offers to link rights holders such as leagues and federations with these premises, initially in 11 key markets over the next year, and aims to provide these content owners with over-the-top solutions for commercial venues, in the same way many have already developed mobile apps and platforms for consumer offerings.

Robert Rawlinson, Screenreach's chief executive, told GlobalData Sport: "Many rights holders are looking at moving off their legacy platforms for consumers, we're now talking to them about doing the same for enterprise and commercial venues.

"Our target market initially is everyone who has rights, owns them or has bought them, and doesn't have their own distribution on a commercial level, because we offer a much more flexible solution than satellite or cable."

He added that there is exactly the same opportunity for sports leagues and other rights holders to offer OTT solutions for commercial premises, but that "it's much harder to execute... We can come along, we make it

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easy for them to link us with their streams as they all have the infrastructure to do it anyway, so we're simply removing the friction by dealing directly with the customer."

Rawlinson said that during the second half of 2021, the service will launch with a range of rights holders as partners in five key markets, and that six more territories will follow in the first half of 2022.

He said that all those deals would be long-term, up to three years in length, with this being "a strategic decision, we want agreements that will stand the test of time".

The service is already available in the UK, having first launched in October 2019. Screach rolled out across thousands of pubs at that point, with venues given access to the Premier Sports and LaLiga TV subscription platforms, as well as to English Premier League soccer fixtures shown by Amazon.

Initially in the 11 key markets, commercial premises across the globe will be able to access live sports content through the app, with Screach aiming to act as the middle-man between rights holders, broadcasters and the venues.

The platform allows pubs and other commercial venues to stream matches in high-definition, and also to create bespoke, audience-tailored adverts for subsidiary TV screens in the building.

Having first established itself with what it claimed was a first-of-its kind innovative partnership with Premier Sports, Screach has waited to expand globally until the vaccine rollout for the coronavirus pandemic has begun accelerating across most nations.

Rawlinson said on that subject that although "our growth looks dynamic and exciting from the outside, we'd have preferred to launch in a steadier way, the pandemic has made us concertina our partnerships. We'll be announcing deals once a month from June onwards."

While the service will be available for one-off events in 157 countries, Rawlinson admitted that they will concentrate on a much smaller number of key territories, and that the other countries will be "passive... we will partner with venues in those territories for mainly one-off events, linking them with broadcasters and content owners for a particular tournament or match, but in our key regions we will service them through full-time partnerships".

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He said that Screach will be looking to partner with as many content owners and rights holders in each country as possible, and that “we won’t be choosing between providers, we’ll be aggregating as many as possible across all territories”.

The service has a ‘freemium’ business model: the app itself is free to download and offers a free marketing and advertising channel for the venue, with customers then able to pay for whichever sports subscriptions or pay-per-view events they want via the web-based Screach online portal, using a single log-in.

In the UK, a monthly rolling contract with Screach costs £249 (\$346), with discounts available if venues sign up for a longer period.

Rawlinson has said he does not want to become a competitor to UK pay-TV broadcasters such as Sky or BT Sport but instead to simply act as a platform provider - and to “stay neutral”.

He added: “We’re trying to be friends with everyone - we’re giving rights holders more flexibility to get their content in front of more customers, and we’re giving broadcasters a way out of legacy technology through our app... as most are experiencing cost-cutting anyway.”

The chief executive did admit, however, that “while some broadcasters do see the opportunity, some are looking at us more sceptically, because they like the fact that venues previously have had no option but to use their boxes, and that other content owners have to come through them”.

“While they may see us as a pain today though, I think they will embrace it, they know they’re going to need to move off their legacy platforms in the end, as they will become economically unviable.

Funding for the international launch has been provided by Hotspur Capital, the Future Fund of the British Business Bank, and several high-net worth individuals, Screenreach has announced.

Rawlinson claimed his team had also done a lot of work on the dangers of commercial content piracy - which can be exacerbated by the rise of OTT, with bars and other venues potentially being able to log on to access content via an individual consumer’s details, when a commercial premises license is actually required.

He added: “We’ve been developing location data to work out who precisely is using our service, and then we can help our content partners by going in and offering that venue an alternative through our enterprise solutions.

“This is one of our major unique selling points - a lot of our partners haven’t necessarily thought about this before, so we’re really adding value here.”

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The chief executive summed up by saying: "The conversations we’ve had means we’re absolutely sure the market is ready... The rights owners are ready, they see it’s just an extension of their direct-to-consumer strategies, and we’re not asking the venues to do anything that individual consumers aren't already doing."

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