



GAMES

Facelt esports community raises \$15 million to go global

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Above: Facelt is getting an injection of capital to serve the huge, dedicated community of esports players. Image Credit: Facelt

Esports is a growing market, and it isn't only about the top 1 percent of players in the world that show up for the tournaments you see on Twitch. And one company is basing its growth on serving everyone who is a pro gamer, everyone who wants to reach that level, and beyond.

Facelt, an esports community platform, has secured \$15 million in a Series A funding round. Investment firms Anthos Capital, Index Ventures, and United Ventures all participated in raising the money for the startup, which has more than 3.5 million registered members that use Facelt to play in a wide range of gaming competitions — some that stream to Twitch and others that don't. It also works with sponsors and partners like Turner Sports and WME|IMG on tournaments. With this influx of cash, the company will continue investing in its North American office that it is opening in Los Angeles this month. The company will also work with its investors to broaden its reach in Europe as well.

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Facelt thinks that this strategy will help establish it as one of the go-to resources for any gamer with a competitive streak, and that could lead the company to capturing a significant piece of an esports market that analysts expect to generate \$1.1 billion in revenues by 2019.

Facelt has full support for two games: Valve's ever-popular military shooter Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, and Riot's billion-dollar multiplayer online arena battler League of Legends. It is also in beta with Dota 2, and Facelt promises it is expanding to include more games soon. The company goes through testing and only adds games that it can fully support because it wants to ensure developers use its technology, which makes it easier for consumer.

"We work on the player side, we work with tournament organizers, and we work with developers," Facelt chief executive Niccolo Maisto told GamesBeat. "For developers, we are an easy way to access the esports ecosystem."

You might laugh at the idea of Valve and Riot needing any help reaching the esports audience, but Maisto points out that the pro-gaming market is so much bigger than the famous tournaments with top-ranked teams. He compares it to an iceberg where everyone sees just the portion above the ocean's surface — and Facelt works with those players — but the company claims that it also provided a platform for the massive esports player base that people typically don't see.

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This means that Facelt needs to solve a number of problems for a variety of different kinds of players. Most notably, the company needs to ensure that the most casual players will feel welcome.

"As a casual player, you're not used to competing," said Maisto. "You don't want to commit three days to going through a competition. You don't want to wait a half-hour for the next match to start. And you don't want to do the work of making sure your opponent has everything set up right and will report the right data once the round is over."

Facelt handles all of this and provides microtournaments for an enormous range of skill levels. This means that just about anyone with any competitive aspirations can find a competition that suits them.

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And this is working for Facelt. In addition to the approximately 3.5 million registered players, Maisto told GamesBeat that his company has more than 1 million monthly active gamers. On top of that, people keep coming back for more.

"Out of every one hundred users that were active nine months ago, we had more than 40 of them still active in December," explained Maisto.

With young people embracing esports more every day, Facelt seems like it is well positioned to give them a taste of that action. And Maisto says the company will keep investing in its technology and services to do everything it can to stay tapped into that community.