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YouTube makes its biggest e-sports bet with FACEIT streaming deal



FILE PHOTO: YouTube unveils their new paid subscription service at the YouTube Space LA in Playa Del Rey, Los Angeles, California, United States October 21, 2015. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson



By Anya George Tharakan

Alphabet Inc's YouTube is doubling down on the lucrative business of competitive gaming, where players square off on virtual games for big prize money in tournaments.

The video site on Thursday made its biggest investment in the business to date, signing a multi-year deal with e-sports platform FACEIT to stream its competitive gaming league, the Esports Championship Series (ECS).

E-sports has been touted as one of the next big things in live events, drawing millions of spectators online. Traditional media companies and big videogame publishers are all clamoring for a bigger part of the stakes.

FACEIT, one of the largest e-sports platforms in the world, teamed up with Amazon.com Inc's Twitch last year to launch ECS. The gaming website had streamed the league's first two seasons last year.

"Now that YouTube is definitely investing more on the live side, we felt that it was a great opportunity to come together" Michele Attisani, co-founder of FACEIT, told Reuters.

Live video is becoming a highly competitive feature on social platforms, with YouTube last month rolling out live streaming from mobile devices for users with more than 10,000 subscribers.

The third season of the ECS, which features gamers squaring off on "Counter-Strike: Global Offensive", will stream exclusively on YouTube starting March 25, London-based FACEIT said.

"This is definitely our biggest investment in this space overall," Ryan Wyatt, YouTube's head of global gaming, content and partnerships, said in an interview.

Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Revenue from e-sports is expected to surge 41 percent to \$696 million in 2017, according to research firm Newzoo.

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The global audience for e-sports is expected to reach 385 million in 2017, from more than 200 million in 2015.

YouTube will work with ECS players to help build audiences on their YouTube channels.

The league will also offer advertisers sponsorship packages on YouTube, which has over a billion users.

"I think the big thing that e-sports needs to do right now is ... introduce e-sports to the masses, so that we can continue to get bigger brands involved," Wyatt added.

(Reporting by Anya George Tharakan in Bengaluru; Editing by Sriraj Kalluvila)

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