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Facing up to UK esports

Facet co-founder Michèle Attiani talks big events, big wins and big risks in UK esports



Facet co-founder Michèle Attiani

MICHELE ATTIANI co-founded competitive games outfit Facet in 2012 and before that had been gaming competitively for 15 years, supporting the team with a career working with various Fortune 500 companies and several tech start-ups.

Attiani is, as a result, ideally positioned to talk about the state of the UK esports industry and in the mind, the competitive scene in the UK is "definitely" growing fast.

"The games industry is shifting from a traditional console market into a more PC and sport focused market," says Attiani. "I think 2017 so far is also the largest for esports events in the UK, which is a great success."

"This trend is continuing to the grassroots level, too, where players are eagerly competing in the hope of a call up to the big leagues."

Attiani adds that with their recent WCS Counter Strike: Global Offensive, which played out in front of a sold-out Wembley Arena, they "proved this year there's a demand in the UK, and hopefully esports organisations will push more people to do more events in the UK. We're certainly planning to do more. And I'm sure other people looking at the success we had will try and follow our lead."

At the WCS finals, there wasn't a single British team competing, so we ask Attiani if he feels the British scene is

necessarily a big step for us. The WCS is very global league and we have the best teams and players in the world participating. Therefore, the level of talent is extremely high, so it has been proven, even without a UK team participating."

"Historically, the UK has always been more skewed towards console. Attiani says, suggesting the reason why the UK is behind in PC based esports is the lack of interest in the platform. "I think now the trend is converting. We can see very strong growth in terms of PC gaming and PC sport in the UK, so now there's a real opportunity to catch up as there's a large number of people that are highly engaged and there's a pretty healthy scene to take advantage of."

The WCS is notable in Counter Strike because all of the teams competing have equity and revenue shares, and Facet has been working with some big esports groups as a result of this. Regarding traditional sports teams,

Attiani says that their involvement is an "opportunity" as long as they "understand the difference between traditional sports and esports and are respectful of the system."

Attiani adds that "pretty much every sports federation is looking at esports right now and thinking about the market. Every sports group understands that in the next ten to 20 years, it's going to be as big as traditional sports, if not bigger. And as a result everyone is looking at ways they can participate."

He's likely on more announcements from established sports brands and a lot of different attempts to experiment and explore the market as they move to

Gfinity: Waking the giant

Gfinity's head of partner relations Martin Wyatt discusses why the UK "is a sleeping giant in the world of esports"



Gfinity's head of partner relations Martin Wyatt

WYATT we speak to Martin Wyatt, Gfinity's head of partner relations. Gfinity's title Series has built out of the company's esports stadium, profiled on the back of a few shows in Fulham Broadway. For Wyatt, who joined in 2013 and is now Gfinity's head of partner relations, it's the culmination of a lot of hard work and planning, but also the start of a golden age for UK esports.

"It's going to be a very positive picture over the next 12 months, because what is happening in the UK esports scene is a very positive picture," says Wyatt. "The fact that the quality of esports tournaments and content being created is starting to increase across the board, instead of being held solely by one or two particular companies, is really encouraging."

Wyatt also mentions that as more people start to invest in UK tournaments, it not only attracts more teams from further afield, but also means production values can increase. As a result, it's never been easier to keep up to date with UK esports.

Wyatt claims: "We have to be realistic. I don't think the UK scene as a whole is going to explode and start hitting some of the huge heights that we've seen from our one title and esports tournaments. I think the forecast of growth is a very positive picture indeed."

That said, he also "humbly" thinks that the UK is lagging behind. "Acknowledging that the UK esports scene is slightly behind North America, parts of Europe and Korea is quite a sensible perspective to take. But at the same time, I would like to see a business take the view that the UK is a sleeping giant in the world of esports."

"There's an abundance of talent here that just needs to be found, and I believe Gfinity has the skills and the investment needed to do a big spotlight on the UK."

With that in mind, Gfinity is also investing heavily in grassroots esports, with the Challenge Series providing a clear path of progression for amateur athletes. There that

"One of the roles of Gfinity as a business is to take responsibility to drive some of that growth," Wyatt continues. "We're driving that participation growth, and we're driving and taking responsibility for pushing the scene forward as quickly as possible."

Wyatt thinks Gfinity's goal is to lead in the UK scene. Competitors are just started for a good platform to compete on and have their craft. This is where Gfinity's Challenge Series comes in.

"The ultimate goal of the Challenge Series is to provide a platform for participation opportunities for people that want to start having competitive gaming experiences. Then, they can do that in a safe place with some real strong tournaments."

Creating this narrative, and developing UK esports players to the position of professionals, is a key part of Gfinity's plan to wake up the UK's esports industry.

"When you see a successful execution of anything sporting like for example the 2012 Olympics, the Rugby World Cup, even going back as far as Euro '96, and they're executed well, it stimulates the population to be involved."

"We're really aware that there's a low barrier to entry. In the UK, it's hard to find in order to really start aggressively accelerating how we catch up to the rest of the world, and that's part of the Title Series."

"We want it to follow the same model, so as we start to broadcast the tournaments, and people start to see how seriously we're taking it, one of the things that we've excited about is that it will stimulate and excite gamers everywhere to want to start competing more and build careers for themselves."

"Gfinity has done probably more for the UK esports scene than any other company out there because we are passionate about esports. We're very humble and very, very grateful for the support that we have because



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