



## Facing up to UK esports

Facit co-founder Michele Attaran takes big events, big wins and big risks in UK esports



**Portrait of Michele Attaran**

**MICHELE ATTARAN** co-founded competitive esports outfit Facit in 2013. Just before that he left being general competitor for 15 years, supporting the industry with a career working with various Fortune 500 companies and several tech startups.

Attaran is now a small, ideally positioned to talk about the competitive scene in the UK's "giant", growing esports market. "The growth is mainly fueling the traditional esports scene in the UK," he says. "It's a very good market," says Attaran. "I think 2017 is going to be the year for the largest esports market in the UK, which is a great success."

Attaran is continuing to the grassroots level, too, where players are esports competing at the top of a call to arms. "It's a bit going to the grassroots level, obviously on the Facit platform where we have a lot of activities at local level, but of course also with other organisations like Clarity. Multiply and others."

Attaran adds that with their recent MCV Counter Strike first, which played out in front of a sold-out West End arena, they "proved that you don't need to be based in the UK, and especially 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 MCV trials, there was a single British team competing as well. Attaran is of the belief that there

is naturally a big issue for us. The ECS is a very global league and we have the best teams and players in the world participating. Therefore, the level of interest is extremely high, and it hasn't proven, even without a UK team participating."

Historically, the UK has always been more skewed towards console, Attaran says, suggesting the reason why the UK is behind in PC-based esports is the lack of interest in the gamers. "I think now the trend is changing. We can see that in terms of attendance in terms of PC gaming, PC gaming in the UK, we have more and more opportunity to reach out to a much larger audience of people who are highly engaged and there's a pretty healthy scene to take advantage of."

The ECS is notable in Counter Strike because all of the teams competing have equity and revenue share, and Facit has been working with some big sporting groups as a result of this. Regarding traditional esports firms, Attaran says that their involvement is "very early" in "long as they" understand the difference between traditional sports and esports and are respectful of the前者.

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

With many more announcements from established esports 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"



**Portrait of Martin Wyatt**

**WEBSITE** we speak to Martin Wyatt, it's the day before Gfinity's Esports Series ticket off at the company's own esports stadium, granted onto the back of a barbershop 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's happening in the UK is that more and more people are interested in esports," says Wyatt. "We have the just-right esports tournaments and audiences are coming along to watch. It's a great moment for the board, instead of being led solely by one or two particular companies, it's really encouraging."

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

Wyatt states: "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 big budgets that we've seen from the likes of China and esports tournaments. I think the forecast of growth is very healthy."

That's not to say that the UK's "biggest" esports tournament, "Acknowledging that the UK esports scene is relatively behind North America, parts of Europe and Korea is just a monthly perspective to take. At the same time, I feel Gfinity as 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 shake a big footprint on the UK."

With that in mind, Gfinity is also looking heavily to grassroots esports, with its Challenger Series providing a clear path of progression for amateur players. Those that

"One of the roles of Gfinity as a business is to take responsibility to drive some of that growth," Wyatt continues. "Who's driving that participation growth, who's driving the excitement around the UK esports industry, and who's driving and taking responsibility for pushing the scene forward as quickly as possible?"

Wyatt thinks there's plenty of talent in the UK scene. Companies are just starting for a good platform to compete on and to have their own. This is where Gfinity's Challenger Series comes in."

"The ultimate goal of the Challenger Series is to provide individuals more participation opportunities for people that want to start having a competitive gaming experience. When they can do that, it's a safe place with more and more incentives."

Creating this narrative, and elevating UK esports players to the position of role models, 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-wise, for example the 2012 Olympics, the Rugby World Cup, every going back as far as Gary Neville, and they're executed well, it stimulates the population to be involved."

"We are looking to do the same with the UK, to do new key things that, in my opinion, we need to do in order to really start significantly accelerating how we can do on the rest of the world, and that's part of the Gfinity series."

"We want to follow the same model, so as we start to broadcast the tournaments, and people start to see how amazing we're looking, it's one of the things that we're 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 worse for the UK esports scene than any other company out there, because we are promotional about esports. We're very humble and very, very grateful for the support that we as a business



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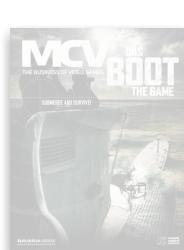


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