

- On this episode of "Innovation Ambassadors," we're showcasing the journey of Fox Sports Mexico, the leading multi-platform brand in Mexico that provides a unique sports entertainment experience to fans across the country. We'll explore their work with the AWS Innovation team in Latin America on harnessing the power of the AWS Cloud and AWS Media Services to innovate and deliver enriching viewer experiences at unmatched speed and scale. Well I am excited to welcome Israel Gomez, Senior Vice President of Media Production, Technology and Operations at Fox Sports Mexico, Mucho gusto, Israel. Thank you so much for joining us.

- Hola, Sara. Thank you. Thanks for having me here.

- And from AWS, we have Elisa Escalante, Senior Innovation Specialist for Latam. Elisa, thanks for being with us.

- Of course, glad to join.

- And also from AWS, we have Arturo Velasco, Senior Solutions Architect. Arturo, thank you also for joining us.

- Thank you so much, Sara.

- So Israel, for our international audience, can you tell us a little bit about Fox Sports Mexico?

- Fox Sports Mexico, it's part of Lauman Group since 2021, November, 2021. So we are 100% Mexican group of media and technology, and we took over Fox's sports operation after it became it became independent from The Walt Disney Company in 2021.

- Wonderful. Serving the entire Mexican listenership?

- Yes.

- Across a range of sports and other-

- Yes, we are one of the networks that have more live content. We do over 7,000 live sporting events per year. We have four TV channels. We have NFL. We're the group of channels with more NFL games per week. We do 40% of the Mexican premier male soccer league. We do 60% of the female league. We do MLB, we do UFC, WWE, Formula One, boxing, other mixed martial arts, Mexican baseball, just to name a few.

- Fantastic, exciting. You have a fun job, don't you?

- Oh yes! Yes. Now sports are seven days a week content. It's no longer a weekend hobby like used to be many years ago.

- Right. Right. And tell us a little bit about this vision you had for a platform as a service and how you came to work with AWS.

- When we took over, we identified a number of challenges that were required to start thinking about by becoming independent. One of those challenges, that was also key for our future business strategy, was to develop a solution to better serve our direct to consumer customers. Our main line of business, still nowadays, it's the traditional cable industry, but we know that there are younger generations who are not willing to go to a store, hire a service, wait a couple of weeks for an antenna or a set of box to be installed, and they want things immediately. Right away, right? We know that more and more people, it's consuming content on desktop, on mobile phones, and not only on a traditional TV set. So that's why we decided to go for a direct to consumer product. This direct to consumer product needed to be equivalent to the content quality and production quality that we offer. By having premium events like NFL, MLB, Formula One, UFC, you can imagine the level of service, the level of content that the experience our customers require from Fox. And certainly to achieve that in a short period of time, and as a new business model, it made sense to go as a platform. We knew that we didn't have the scale to build and maintain a platform by our own. So we started a project when we identified different vendors that provided parts of the solution, and that's how everything started.

- Fantastic, and how did you come to work with and learn about our innovation specialists, with Elisa and our innovation programs?

- During the pandemic, I was invited to take part in a number of, let's say training sessions, conversations, innovation chats that Elisa was hosting during the pandemic. And then I start to get excited about all the alternatives that the cloud and these kind of innovation processes that are now viable with technology. And we learned from the thinking backwards, that the AWS philosophy on fail quick solve things quicker. So I already had that information in me. Our group comes from technology, comes from providing services for customers in this industry, and not only in Mexico but also in Latin America. So we were familiar with different project management processes. And when we identified this new challenge, we tried to put in place everything we learned in the past, tried to leverage all those 20-something years of experience working in this industry, and being fueled and pumped with the AWS innovation that we learned, thanks to Elisa and multiple AWS people that we had the opportunity to learn from. Made things more exciting.

- Hmm, absolutely. So Elisa, starting with these workshops that you were helping run and really with multiple different customers and then sharing that innovation approach that Amazon has. And then you also did some deeper engagements with Fox Sports too, isn't that right?

- Yes, we started with a program called Digital Leaders in Mexico. We realized that when the pandemic hit, all of the executives were dealing with a lot of changes and technology was not the only challenge that they have. They really needed a change of mindset, different tools to support them in that tough time for all of us. So we created this program to help them with those tools, with that change of mindset, with that strategy that we had as an innovation

company from the start and the best practices that we could share with them. And Israel was the first one registering in our first Digital Leader. Then the program evolved into different versions because we had a lot of interest from a lot of companies and executives. So we did Digital Leaders Transform, and then Digital Leaders Agile. Then we did one for emerging technologies, AI/ML, data analytics. And in all of them, Israel was there upfront and center. He was an amazing student. And from there, every time we did a new program, a executive program around innovation, he was our first call. Then we started piloting. When we were able to go back to in-person events, we piloted this Innovation Day where we could do Working Backwards with many customers at a time. And he was one of our first call to help us shape that new program. We started working on March, 2022, if I'm right, Israel, I think?

- Yes. Yep, yeah.

- And from there, they created this amazing solution and we started supporting their evolution development implementation, with Mauricio as well, that supports the account with a great communication and trust between the two companies to work together.

- Absolutely, and as I understand it, Israel, you had sort of two core areas that came out of that, the website, is that right, and the direct to consumer product, in terms of ideas?

- Hm, part of our group, we also own a business and finance newspaper in Mexico called "El Financiero." And we made the switch to the Arc platform, to Arc XP. This technology developed inside the "Washington Post." And we were actually the first customers in Mexico to start working on that platform. And the results were amazing. So when we took over Fox, it was a no brainer for us to say, "Hey, we already have skilled people. We already have experience. Let's go the same direction and let's leverage everything we learned during the pandemic." So we did that project that was, let's say a quick win, was a low hanging fruit, to call it somehow. And that was the easiest of those projects because we really had experience, and recent experience. On the direct to consumer, we knew as being a subscriber for different platforms, what we liked and we didn't liked. There was a legacy product that we inherit with the transition. But it was not something we felt comfortable offering our customers. So we wrote some ideas on this event Elisa was mentioning. We start prototyping our customer, you know, creating the press release, identifying the pain points, identifying their behavior. If it's a customer that it's on the move or it's someone willing to innovate or if it was someone more traditional, less tech-friendly. So with all of that, and with our own experience and the team we put together to face this project, it's been always a collaborative way of working that we have in our group. So we wrote an RFP. We start looking in the market for different options. And it was a, I don't know, maybe six months project while we were researching. It was narrowing all the way to, let's say, a runner ups, where we went to a proof of concept. And then we chose the platform. The platform, it's running on AWS infrastructure. It's provided by a company called SeaChange, who creates all the back office, all the UX management and all the native apps for all the devices where we offer our content. We're on browsers, on mobile phones, tablets-

- Streaming.

- Streaming devices. Everywhere you would think, right? Like big screen TVs as well. So they were providing that part of the solution. Then we came to Mauricio, to Arturo, to talk about content distribution, the CDN and all the video part. A big part of the solution, it's to have the best video and audio quality regardless the device you have and the connectivity. So we know that AWS, with their video products, with Elemental product line, was very good. And also CloudFront to share the content and then made the content available for our customers. And that was just the start, right? Right now we're doing more and we will talk about it later.

- Absolutely. So Elisa, starting from that big vision, focusing on a particular benefit to the customers, identifying those customers, focusing on that benefit, and really honing in on how we can create something that would be of value for them. Part and parcel of the innovation process here at Amazon, is that right?

- Yeah, well, it was a time for everyone to experiment, not only the customers but ourselves as well. So we tried different things. We got feedback from them to understand what they needed, how we can support them. So it was very challenging for us but excited as well. We are from a culture that we like to spice things up, so we were having a lot of fun together, right, Israel?

- Oh, yes.

- Right.

- It was really something that was perfect timing for us, right? Because when the Digital Leaders program started, we were not 100% sure that Fox Sports was coming to our group. So it was perfect timing.

- A lot of ambiguity, a lot of change that you were managing through and, at the same time, trying to be forward-looking, customer-centric, looking after your listenership, and viewership, rather. Arturo, let's bring you in. We heard a lot about the requirements and the vision and the type of customers who we're trying to serve. Talk to us a little bit about, and Israel mentioned Elemental and CloudFront and some of the media services that we have. Talk to us a little bit about the architecture and some of the decisions that were made.

- Yeah, we started the conversation with Israel since the beginning of the project. I mean, Mauricio was a very key point and key part of that with some proof of concepts, as were the RFP that at some moment Israel gave us. And we decide to use the media services because, well, some of the drivers are still the innovations, the innovations on quality, innovations on audio, innovations on distribution. So the key part of this architecture is the, let's say the serverless component. This is component is very important because it allowed Israel and his team to manage, to be, let's say, focused on the business models. Not only management of the platform, you know. And this platform, let's say, it's scalable also. So the scalability, it's very important for them. Because at some points they have more events, more sports events, or in

some seasons, they have more demands of those events. So the architecture and the solution scales, let's say, almost automatically.

- And Israel, that's so important, right?

- Yes. Yeah.

- Because your viewership can change dramatically based on what event you're streaming, yeah.

- This world of sports, it's about live.

- Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

- Sports are still one of the few types of content that people watches live. So we know that there will be thousands of people joining minutes or seconds before. And not only joining to watch content, but they will be willing to subscribe, to download the app, configure it. We know that people forget their passwords. They have issues with internet connection. They changed a streaming device or they bought a new TV set. And this happens minutes before your match, your match, your race, your fighting starts. So this needs to be proven to support all that stress, that Arturo said, changes from content to content, from day to day.

- Yes, and Arturo, that live, that live nature of what you are providing, so important in the consideration of what architectural choices you're making, right?

- Yeah. Many, many things to consider. Many devices are emerging, let's say, new technologies. So that's a big challenge for all the customers, for direct to consumer customers, right? Because every single year, we're launching new devices, new protocols. So the customer needs to be ready to support those new devices.

- Right, so talk to us about some of the technology that came in some of the services that are fundamental to how the team built this out.

- We are using several media services, almost all. Because if, let's say, if this solution is pure live streaming, we have also a VOD part. Fox Sports is using this part for advertising. They have this SeaChange solution also for advertising. So we are using MediaConnect, MediaLive, MediaPackage and MediaTailor and as well as CloudFront, okay? So we have all the media services. And even, well Israel, I'm sure that we'll be talking about this later, but they are innovating as well in the experience side. Let's say, what are the adding value for the end users?

- Right, right. So Israel, oftentimes in this podcast, we talk about the fact that experimentation, and you hit on this in the beginning, about failing fast, about experimentation also being the twin of failure sometimes, right? Of learning from-

- The evil twin.

- That's right. But taking that, those learnings, and applying them, was there something in this experience that you had that was unexpected, or challenge that you faced that didn't quite go as we thought and that we had to work through?

- Yes, one was that maybe we were too conservative to start. We thought that the start will be slower. But it was not, right? So after a few days that we launched, we were seeing a larger demand for video services, for people trying to connect. So we had to say, "Hey, let's scale now!" So maybe we were too conservative with enough threshold to support this higher demand. So-

- That's always a happy problem, right?

- Yes-

- I was gonna say, that's a good problem to have.

- It's a happy problem and we said we should be bolder, let's say. And trust more in our project, trust more in the offering, that people liked it, and people, it's using it heavily. So that was one. The other one, it's that maybe our MVP, right? Our version one for launch, maybe we were also conservative. We said, "Okay, let's just start with this, and then we will add this a few months later, and then we will add this." And the answer is no. You have to identify all the different things you want to have, but the priority, the customer will give it to you, right? So we were thinking, well, this is the direction we think things will go. And it was not 100% accurate, right? So we were trying to set a path, and we have to adapt it quickly 'cause the customer was prioritizing what they wanted. So I would say those were not really hard problems. They were happy problems. But again, if we should go through a project like this again, I think we will think in a richer MVP, a stronger infrastructure, larger infrastructure, because I think it's better to be a little over, that certainly under, right? So those were like our two findings. And those happened quick, right? Those happened at the beginning.

- Absolutely.

- So we said, "Okay." Let's not wait for another event to have this bottleneck. No, no, no. Let's grow. Let's go big now!

- Mm, hm-mm. And Elisa, I feel like there's always that balance, right? Between the idea of getting something out there and in the hands of customers or in the eyes of customers in your case, right? Eyes and ears of customers, and then iterating on what you have and learning and doing that fast follow in terms of enriching the experience.

- That's how we operate in Amazon, that's how we share it with our customers. They each adapt what works best for them. So, many times, customer worry about doing something very little, investing a lot of time and doing something little, but we're sure that if we built with the

customer, we can grow and go into the direction where the customer wants. So all of our impact will be much higher and much richer with them along the way than working tons of months and years in something that we will deploy, suddenly to have those learnings that Israel is talking about.

- Mm, and Arturo, there's more on the horizon, right? There's more invention, there's more innovation to come. Israel, maybe you can share a little bit about what's next.

- Yes, for sure. Remember that we come from technology, so we feel confident with technology. So, part of the changes in the mindset, like Elisa was mentioning before, was to make people, no matter what their role is, if they're a producer, if they're an editor, if they are a camera guy, whenever they have a need, think on technology, right? So we're always thinking outside of the box and saying, "Okay, what can we do to make our lives easier?" And just to mention a couple of things, we were receiving content already produced in English or in other languages. And the usual way was to have someone listening, taking notes, doing a manual translation, then going to a word or a text processor, make a script, go to the editing room, type everything manually. And a couple of days after, you can put a 30 minutes piece on air. So when we started getting these needs, I said, "I'm sure my AWS friends can help me." So immediately, I called Arturo, I called Mauricio, and told them, "Hey guys, I have this challenge now. What can we do?" And luckily they said, "Oh, yeah, yeah. There are some things." My team, it's, let's say, used to these pop-up projects or new ideas or new challenges. So they are always willing to innovate as well. So we started doing tests one day, and maybe two days after, we were already putting content on air using AI tools to do translation and subtitling in a very cost-effective, not only on the budget side but also on how much time do you spend to put a piece of content on there. So that's one of the things we are doing. We made a POC recently to have a high dynamic range content in our direct to consumer platform, where we are not constrained to the bandwidth that the cable company gives us. So we can go for higher resolutions, better picture quality, better audio performance, more let's say immersive audio capabilities that we can launch, that we can put on air, without waiting for the cable industry to follow up or adopt these trends. So that's something we're working right now. We are a few weeks away. Right, Arturo? A few weeks away of being evil-

- That's right. That's right.

- No pressure.

- We have no more pressure.

- No pressure.

- A little bit, but... But that's one of the things we are always trying to do. People it's paying for this content, they are watching the Super Bowl, they want to have the best experience. So how can we deliver a better service, a better product, right? So we are, let's say we like to adapt new technology, we like to adopt new trends. And that's why we're always spending time just

talking. Because we may have a narrow point of view from our desk, but I mean Arturo and all the technical team in AWS have multiple experiences around the globe that can really be very, very helpful for us. So we're always keen to listen, to learn. You need to be humble because this thing changes so much that you can never feel confident, you can never feel, okay, I don't need anything else, right? So there's always someone who will keep innovating and that's who we want to be.

- Absolutely. Well, thank you all for being here today and sharing your journey with us. And I'm wondering just, Arturo, we'll start with you. What would you share with our listeners? What was your key learning out of this experience?

- One of the key drivers for us, as technology people, is innovation. Innovation is one of the main things when we talk about the technology, and we are very, very concerned of that. So thanks to our customer who are influencing those innovations in every service that we can offer to the audience.

- Absolutely. Elisa, how about you? What was some of your takeaways or key reflections?

- Because of the nature of what I do in AWS, I share the best practices of Amazon, but honestly, most of the time, I learn more about our own customers. You know, having different perspectives, getting to know their challenges. So I think that's what I like the most. It's been very amazing doing that with Fox Sports and with Israel in this journey. So looking forward of what's coming next.

- I love that idea of the open mindset. It's really a, it's a two-way conversation, isn't it, always.

- Always.

- Absolutely, yes. We can always learn from everyone. Israel, final words for you, anything, reflections you would share or guidance for our listeners?

- Yes, well, there are many, but I would say that innovation needs to be adapted all across the company, all across all the different teams. It doesn't work if it's just the technology team thinking outside of the box. I would say that the upper management really needs to embrace this and encourage their people to think outside of the box. In our case, we start innovating with a blank piece of paper, a whiteboard, and that was very well spent time. We tried to develop these ideas, we polished them, then we said, "Okay, why don't we go in a completely opposite direction?" And when we had something that made us feel comfortable, that's when we started really to talk with technology people. So that, to give yourself that time to think, I think it's very well spent. And then don't be afraid of failure. You need to put something on air, you need to develop something, but do it. Even if you're not 100% sure that it will work, try it and then react on that. Make corrections, make changes, go opposite ways. There's always takeaways from failure. And always keep innovating. Don't feel comfortable to the point where you say, "Okay, I don't need to do anything else." No, I'm sure there will be somebody else

thinking outside of the box and they will provide a better solution than you in a short period of time if you stay, let's say, calm.

- Oh, very well said. We have this saying at Amazon, clear on the vision, flexible on the details, right? That iterative nature of what you're talking about. And getting feedback from our customers, right? Wonderful. Israel, Elisa and Arturo, thank you so much for being here with us today and sharing your journey.

- Thanks for having us.

- Thank you.

- Muchas gracias, I should say.

- Gracias, Sara. It's been a pleasure.

- Okay.

- Thanks for thinking of us for this podcast, and it's been an amazing journey. And it will continue. This is just version one.

- Okay. Let's see, let's see. Looking forward to the future. I'd like to thank our listeners for coming on today's journey with us. Look for future episodes of our podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Share your ideas for future episodes or comment on this one via the email in the description. Thank you.