

Giving 'mobile player' a new meaning

Hockey, basketball fans can participate during games by answering trivia questions

BY GILLIAN SHAW
VANCOUVER SUN

Hockey fans wielding mobile phones will be the latest players in the National Hockey League under a multi-year rights deal signed between the league and a Vancouver online games company.

Under the deal announced Tuesday, Exponentia will be able to deliver its mobile game PlayAction to NHL fans via their mobile phones, allowing them to take part in an online version of the game with their own predictions and hockey trivia expertise.

The players, who participate in real time as the NHL games are being played, can create their own leagues and compete for team jerseys and other prizes.

"To be the place where the audience connects is our motto," said Jim Fawcett, a software engineer and former Canadian team rower who started Exponentia with Andrew Gregory about seven years ago. "It is quietly being rolled out right now and the people who are playing so far are really, really enjoying it.

"We have a real core of people who play game after game."

The mobile NHL PlayAction is currently available for Toronto Maple Leafs fans through an agreement with that franchise and with the Phoenix Coyotes. Fawcett said the company is hoping to extend the game's availability to fans of other teams as agreements with the teams are reached.

Under those agreements, PlayAction is promoted live at the sporting events and teams award prizes to their winning fans.

"NHL fans are totally involved with our game," Keith Ritter, president, NHL ICE, said in a release. "We and Exponentia are going to give them a chance to compete and demonstrate that involvement while having some fun in the process."

Participants in PlayAction sign on for each game, texting the name of the team they support to the code 24365 on their mobile phones. During each game, play-

ers receive eight multiple choice or trivia questions related to the game's outcome via text messaging.

The total cost of participating in the text messaged game is \$2.50.

"It is 25 cents per question with a total of eight questions and two messages associated with the registration," said Fawcett. "We're putting it on par with let's say you went to the game and want a cup of coffee or half a beer."

In a recent game between the Montreal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs, the first question that popped up on phone screens was: "What will happen first?"

Those who answered, 'Leaf's goal,' scored top points on that question. The second question offered players a choice of five players as the most likely to score the next goal, with the correct answer turning out to be, 'none of the above.'

PlayAction follows the on-ice action, coming up with questions that relate to the particular events of the game that is underway.

Along with correctly predicting the action in the game they are watching,

fans are expected to answer trivia questions, such as 'What Hall of Famer scored exactly 500 career goals?'

At the end of each game, the three top participants have their names go into a random draw for prizes.

On Dec. 12, Canucks fans will be able to participate as their home team takes on the Phoenix Coyotes and the game is carried on PlayAction. Scheduling and details of the PlayAction game can be found on the Web

at www.playaction.tv.

The latest announcement builds on the Exponentia's earlier success in drawing fans into interactive games and activities online, through different sports and media outlets.

PlayAction is also available for Toronto Raptors games and Fawcett said his company, which now has a staff of 15, hopes to see it extended to other major sporting events.

"Our goal for next year is to be running PlayAction for every professional sports game in North America," he said. "It is a big goal, but you have to start somewhere and you have to have big goals."

gshaw@png.canwest.com

