Talking Esports

A guide to becoming a world-class esports broadcaster

Paul "ReDeYe" Chaloner

INTRODUCTION

It doesn't matter if you're a casual or professional gamer - you're likely to have heard or watched an online broadcast of an esports match or tournament at some point in the last ten years. Those who commentate these are often referred to as 'casters', or originally 'shoutcasters'. At the top end of the scale today, these same people are now full-time professional video game broadcasters, but it wasn't always that way.

The term 'shoutcaster' comes from the software written by the good chaps at Winamp.com, and introduced what we now know as internet radio. Then, a shout-caster was simply a synonym for an internet radio DJ or commentator. As time moved on, it became inextricably linked to those who specifically covered gaming matches and tournaments.

While the software is no longer updated (but still widely used for online radio), shoutcasters have expanded beyond the limits of the software (and their bedrooms) to bigger and better things such as live TV productions, huge events set in sports stadiums and dedicated gaming TV shows the world over and, more often than not, they're now called broadcasters or commentators. However, the term 'casters' is still widely used as an abbreviated version of the original 'shoutcasters'.

In 2007, I wrote a mini book to help those who wanted to get started in shoutcasting, and I've had many, many requests since to update and rewrite it.

The book you are now reading started life more than 8 years ago, but really came to life only in 2014 with a series of parts published

on eslgaming.com over a 5 month period. Now, for the first time, those original parts plus many revisions, updates and new information are put together in one place and in one document, Talking Esports.

All of this hopefully means that you now have a complete guide to video game broadcasting, at least from the point of view of a budding host or commentator. That's not to say that other forms of esports broadcasting wouldn't benefit from reading it, but it's predominantly focused on going from bedroom broadcasting to the big stage in front of tens of thousands of people.

I hope that you enjoy the book, take something from it and that in some small way it helps you improve your commentating of video-games.

HOW ON EARTH DID WE GET HERE?

We've come an awful long way since those early days of bedroom radio broadcasting, but many of the skills and talents required to succeed remain the same. That said, with the advent of modern streaming services and cameras everywhere, you're going to need more than just a touch of natural talent to succeed.

I first started shoutcasting in 2002, and purely by accident, but I was extremely lucky as I could make a ton of mistakes and get away with it. Back when I started, we were thrilled to get a couple of hundred people tuning in, and don't forget - it was on internet radio, with no cameras pointed at me.

Over the next couple of years, I poured all of my spare time (when not competing in esports) in to delivering coverage of various online cups, mostly for ClanBase and ESL.

In early 2005, I joined Inside the Game (iTG) thanks to Marcus "djWHEAT" Graham recruiting me as part of their drive to increase their European casting talent.

I continued with audio casting when I joined iTG, but quickly got into video casting at the ESWC Finals and QuakeCon, which was a totally different experience from providing audio commentary for online matches.

Firstly, there were cameras, and I had no idea how to react on camera or even where to look. I realised I needed help and enrolled in a local college course for a couple of evenings a week in order to help me understand the importance of voice projection, where to look

on camera and how to use all of the tools available to me in order to present better on video streams. I was lucky enough to work on many top tournaments around the world, but while most of our expenses were covered, we rarely returned home with more money than we started with.

Things started to change in 2006 when both Stuart "TosspoT" Saw and I started to get other work in the form of voice-overs for commercials and movies, and had a chance to work on several segments for TV. We were also given a six part series to film for UK TV, which, while the production was pretty poor, did give us an insight into the workings of TV and allowed us to learn and make mistakes in a very low risk environment.

In 2007, I formed a new company called QuadV with the help of Joe Miller, Stuart Saw, Leigh Smith and Oliver Aldridge. Our aim was to have a dominant European commentary station for esports and, for the most part, we achieved our goal, certainly having the best European commentators on our books at the time. Almost all of them now work full time in esports in one way or another.

Over the next few years, I did hundreds of live TV shows on DirecTV, Eurosport, Sky Sports and Sky One, pieces for Ubisoft including two rock concerts and even a live TV show from the Playboy Mansion. In addition to this, I hosted the stage at Multiplay events in the UK and commentated at the biggest esports events of the day including the WCG Finals, ESWC, CPL Finals and QuakeCon. I even commentated

on a dedicated gaming channel (Xleague) on Sky TV in the UK on a regular basis – esports had surely arrived.

Sadly, most of the TV contracts dried up in 2008 as the recession took hold, and once again we returned to scraping by on internet TV streams, but the experience we had gained was invaluable. Additionally, internet streaming costs at this time were huge and prohibitive to making a real salary, but Twitch wasn't far away from launching.

In late 2011, having kept in touch with esports throughout this period, I attended the WCG Finals in Korea for the final time, and just as esports was really starting to lift off, again.

2012 was one of the busiest years for me personally as I was hired more and more for hosting duties, but I continued to commentate, too, and with a wide array of games in my repertoire I was considered one of the most flexible commentators in esports. Over the years, I have commentated on more than 40 different titles from as wide a field of genres as RTSs and FPSs right across to pool games, racing games and many from the fighting game scene.

I joined ESL TV in early 2013, as head of the commentary team, training and guiding them as well as hiring talent for all of the major events such as Intel Extreme Masters, ESL One and WCS. Alongside all of this, I continued to host major events and commentate on a wide range of games across the world. Towards the end of my time

with ESL, I hosted in major venues such as the Commerzbank Arena, previously used for the World Cup, Madison Square Garden and the San Jose Sharks Arena in California, not to forget the epic Spodek Arena in Katowice.

Today I am Head of Broadcasting for Gfinity in the UK and continue to hire and work with esports broadcasting talent right across the board and across multiple titles. I was also chosen as the host for the $17million tournament The International in 2015.

Hopefully this gives you a brief idea of who I am and why I decided to write this book. I'd love nothing more to see even more, well prepared and passionate commentators enjoy doing what I have in esports, so if this guide helps just one person, I'll be thrilled!

BROADCAST ROLES

Before I jump in to the core of this series, it's important to understand who it's aimed at. To do that, you need to understand what I mean by 'shoutcaster' as it's not only an old term but one that confuses a lot of people.

There are lots of different types of broadcasters in esports these days, and not all of them can be considered commentators or hosts, which is what this series focuses on. This is not to detract from the other roles, but to establish who this series is aiming to help.

For those also looking to make a living from esports broadcasting, it's not impossible that you will end up filling the role of several of these types of shoutcaster. Most will tell you it's only a few that can truly make a reasonable amount of money from esports in broadcasting terms, and that to supplement the income derived from tournaments and events, they have had to do several other jobs alongside.

Roughly speaking, the following list provides an outline of roles referred to in this series.

- Play-by-play commentator

- Colour commentator (analysis style commentary)

- Host/presenter (presenting programs, shows or stage action)

- Show/anchor host (usually presents from an analyst desk or hosts a show)

- Interview host

- Voice-over artist (adverts, radio commercials, movies, documentaries, etc.)

- Expert/analysis (this would be 'on the desk/sofa' commentary for shows)

- Streamer (anyone who streams video but isn't considered a commentator or host; usually a very casual style)

The majority of this book will concentrate on advice for play-by-play commentators and hosts. However, many of the skills and tips discussed in this series are transferable to other roles within broadcasting.

STREAMING

Streaming is an important part of many budding shoutcasters' repertoires.

Back when I started streaming (in 1834 or thereabouts), we didn't have video streams - we relied solely on Winamp and shoutcast software to broadcast matches and tournaments. In fact, in 2005 I streamed an entire DreamHack Quake 4 tournament live from the venue via audio! How far we have come…

Today, of course, there are many options for streaming live video, but the one I'll focus on here is Twitch. I've said this many times: without the advent of Twitch and video streaming that we today take for granted, esports may not have become as huge as it has, and I truly mean that. Twitch may well be one of the top three biggest things to happen to esports in its short life span.

With that in mind, you'll need to get yourself signed up and set up. Even for the most technologically challenged (like me!), it's not hard to get up and running. I've included a link to an excellent setup guide below, and although it's for a specific game, there is enough in-depth information to be able to adapt this to almost anything you want to stream including shows, practice matches and even entire tournaments. You should think of this as a starting point, however - it's not going to give you a home studio that rivals the BBC, but it will get you up and running.

To start with, concentrate on just streaming, and if you can (and you are serious about it), try and get a backdrop

that sits behind your chair just to make it look cleaner - much better than a shot of your bedroom. You'll also need some decent equipment, and there is a whole range out there to choose from. I've listed some of the basics below, and while I won't recommend anything in particular (I'll do that much later in the book when you're sure you want to get serious), you can't go too far wrong by using Sennheiser or Shure microphones and headphones.

What you'll need to start streaming:

- A powerful PC (or two if you prefer to stream from a dedicated machine and play on another)

- A strong CPU, such as an Intel i5 2400 at minimum

- A good graphics card that can show off the game well

- A headset with a good mic or headphones and a standalone mic

- A boom for the mic (if you have a standalone mic)

- A small four track mixer (though you can get away without one to start with)

- XSplit

Here you will find a guide on how to set up Twitch and XSplit.

There are other pieces of software out there, but of all of them, XSplit is my software of choice. It offers great streaming quality, it's reasonably easy to use and set up and it won't give you headaches while you're trying to focus on learning how to be a commentator.

If you get stuck, remember that there is a lot of help out there - the guys at Twitch can give you a hand with a lot of the issues you might face with both setting it up and using XSplit.

RESOURCES

Twitch help

XSplit help

EARLY BROADCASTING

THE FIRST BROADCAST

So you have your software and hardware set up nicely, you've opened up an account on Twitch and your XSplit is just waiting for some juicy game content to flow through it: it's time to find a match to commentate on.

First of all, stick to what you know and find a match from the game you play and know best. Ideally, pick a low key match, and not one from the upper echelons of the tournaments. That way, you won't be so heavily berated for making mistakes or be given a hard time if someone doesn't like your voice first time out. You should also find clans friendly and receptive to the idea of you covering their game - after all, who doesn't want to be on TV?

To start with, just jump into a game, commentate it and record it for yourself. Do what you can in terms of commentating and don't worry too much about anything else at this point. The first few commentaries you do will drastically improve every time provided you follow a few simple steps.

First, listen back and watch your first commentary before you do another one. Then pick out the things you liked, things you didn't like (and be honest - it's just you at this point anyway) and areas you think you can work on initially. Leave it a day or so, reread your notes on your first commentary and then find another match to cover. Do the same thing again, record it and watch it back while making notes. Do this three or four times and you'll already hear how much better you're getting each time.

GOING PUBLIC

When you're ready to go public (the earlier the better, but you need thick skin, too!), find your match ahead of time - a few hours, usually - and advertise your stream on social media, Reddit and anywhere you can find that runs community-based forums or sites for your game.

Your first public game also needs a little more depth than just your commentary, so ensure you collect some of the basics in terms of information before you go live. It will help you pad out the downtime and gaps in between maps:

- Tournament name and structure

- Which part of the tournament you are in (semi-finals, league, group stage, etc.)

- The two teams line-ups

- Some information on form

This is only really the bare basics, but it will get you up and running in your early commentaries. Once you're more comfortable and have conquered some of the other skills, you can start to add better preparation (see later for more information on preparation).

If you get a one-sided game and it's a blowout, that's when your preparation becomes important to maintain the interest in the show. On a great game, it's likely you won't need 80% of your preparation, but don't get into the bad habit of thinking "I won't need it", because one day you seriously will.

TEETHING ISSUES

In the early days, you will absolutely fall into some of the more common pitfalls of the role. It's totally normal, and you'll learn more by 'doing' than anything else in those early weeks and months. Ask any experienced commentator and they will tell you how bad they were to start with, but how much they learned on the job by practicing.

I've listed a few of the more common things you might run in to in the early days in order to help you avoid or conquer them faster:

- **Swearing** - You'll probably swear a lot to start with, but try not to if you want to succeed as a professional commentator - you'll impress the 12 year olds but perhaps not those who are looking to hire you

- **Calling the wrong play** - You aren't going to see every single play ever, so you're bound to make a few mistakes. It's fine, you're new, but learn fast

- **Over projecting** - A common issue for new commentators as they often try to inject an almost false level of excitement by being loud at the wrong moments. Focus on bringing as honest coverage as you can provide and over time you'll understand when to project and at what points they are valuable

- **Talking too much!** - This is the most common problem for new commentators. Learning the art of 'dead air' makes a powerful commentator, but that's for later. For now, just concentrate on taking a breath sometimes!

Using the same words over and over - Another problem that comes up a lot, especially for non-native speakers, and not only for new commentators. The easiest way to get over this is to get a dictionary and a thesaurus (or use the online ones!). Write down the most common words you use for explaining things. Once you have a list of five to ten words, check them in a thesaurus and find some alternative words that can be used instead. Write ten words down that mean the same thing on a piece of paper and stick it to your monitor for your next game. Challenge yourself to use as many of them as possible. When you're comfortable with all the words, change the note and add ten new ones (and so on)

You also need to be having fun. So go ahead, let your hair down and have some fun with the game, but remember to remain respectful of the players and teams competing - it's an important match to them, even if you don't think so.

Likewise, interact with the people tuning in via chat or other messaging systems, wherever your listeners are (via webcam chat, for example). It probably doesn't mean your cast would be bad if you didn't, but it really adds to the value of the commentary when you can include people's names from a chat window - people love nothing more than to hear their name mentioned.

Got an opinion on something? Share it with your audience and encourage them to debate it in between the games - it really does help the quality of the cast for everyone, including yourself. Don't be afraid of being controversial, but avoid being controversial for the sake of it - you will soon get found out as a fraud.

HANDLING CRITICISM

Often you will get critique from people either during or after the cast, and frankly this is natural. If you don't have the thickest skin and don't take kindly to harsh critique, then this is probably not the job for you. However, there are things you can do to avoid or at least lessen the dent to your confidence, especially in the early days. You may find people say things like "Oh my God, you're crap compared to <insert famous commentator's name here>". Comparison is understandable, especially if you cover a game that has had
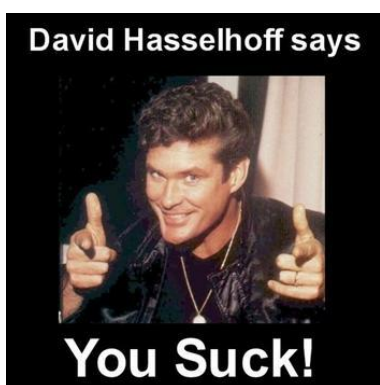
one particular caster attached to it for a long period of time. You'll need to ignore most of these, although you can study those who people say are great and see if you can learn from them. Be careful not to clone them, though - you need your own personality!

Try to be selective about what you take on board. Read past the fan boy comments (good and bad) and look for those that offer advice from respected community members or other casters. You could even ignore Reddit posts, forums and news comments for a while until you're comfortable in the scene you commentate in. You can't run or hide forever, but those early few weeks can be very harsh on you unless you take some form of preventative measure to block some of the rubbish out.

And please, for the love of God, do NOT take anything in Twitch chat seriously. As much as it can be fun, it can also contain some of the most putrid bile of 'feedback', and rarely will it help you.

I could spend an age analysing why this occurs, but that's not really important right now to you, the budding commentator. All you need to remember is why you started doing this in the first place. Eventually through numerous casts you will improve and grow to have your own fan base of people who enjoy what you do for them or at the very least respect the time and effort you put in.

LEARNING FROM THE PROFESSIONALS

One of the best ways of learning from experts I found early on was to listen to sports radio broadcasts. It actually doesn't matter too much which sport, but try and find something that has the same kind of pace. Football (or soccer) worked for me. Those on BBC Radio 5 in particular offer excellent insight into the world of radio broadcasting. Listen to the way they explain things, their energy, their pace, how they interact with their co-commentator and how they bring in the action and do hand-offs (throws).

I learned more from listening to this style of commentary than anything in esports could offer me.

Obviously, commentating in your home is very different from doing the same thing for a large televised show like LCS or WCS, and even more removed from a tournament event like Intel Extreme Masters or ESL One in a huge stadium. But that's for a later chapter!

At this point, you need as much help as you can get, regardless of where you think you are in your progress. Help comes in the form of advice from your peers and fellow broadcasters (who are likely to have felt just like you do when they first started). It also comes in the form of reading books on TV production (particularly sports production), biographies of professional sports commentators (I can particularly recommend Murray Walker's biography and John Mot-

son's, too, to learn more about preparation) and watching plenty of varied sports and listening and watching how the commentators work.

You can, fairly inexpensively, enrol in a local college course, either full time or, like I did, part time in the evenings for a few weeks. A general media course is enough for most, but you can take it to degree level if you are academically minded. In fact, a number of commentators run media degrees alongside working for a games broadcaster, and the two help each other.

It might be that you take to it easily and none of the above will apply to you, in which case, great - you're probably a natural born show-off, and that's pretty cool for the job you just chose!

THE KEYS TO SUCCESS ON ANY FORMAT

Regardless of whether you're broadcasting on TV, video, audio or any other format past, present or future, there are several things that you can do to ensure a successful cast each and every time. In fact, I have developed my own little mantra that I use every time regardless of how big the job is. This has come to be known as "the four Ps".

PREPARATION

As I explained earlier, preparation is the first key to a great cast. It doesn't make the cast great on its own, and in fact it usually won't have any impact on the cast being great at all - it's usually how exciting the game itself is that decides how great it was. However, lack of preparation will almost certainly make a great game a bad cast, and a terrible game even worse.

Remember the viewer or listener is relying on you, and will often put a lot of faith in you for information on the players, the teams, their backgrounds and the stories around them. They're relying on you to make these virtual characters come to life, and for you to humanise what, to the outsider, looks like a very non-human sport.

To do this, you will have to spend the time required researching the match or tournament ahead. You also have to be 100% sure what you are about to say is 100% correct - again, your integrity will be heavily damaged if you say something that simply isn't true. Sure, we all make mistakes, but without preparation, you will make more mistakes and be taken less seriously. Eventually you won't be trusted at all, and that's about as bad as it gets as a commentator.

It's especially important to prepare if you are a colour commentator, and in some ways you will need to go ever deeper than the play-by-play guy as viewers will be expecting you to tell them something they don't know. The other guy just has to explain what's going on!

I was once told that it's better to say nothing at all than say something you're not sure about. In other words, say what you have to say with total conviction, even if it ends up being wrong - at least it will then be seen as a genuine mistake. There's nothing worse than a commentator saying "I think that's right" - it either is or it isn't, and if you're not sure, you shouldn't be saying it anyway.

Preparation comes in many forms, and how important it is will also vary on the type of role you perform at an event and how good you are at retaining information yourself.

Roughly speaking, you should be preparing for the following items:

- Team and player information, line-ups, player names, nick-names, ages, etc.

- Team and player statistics, wins, losses, trends, form, ta-bles, results, etc.

- Tournament information, structure, prize money, entry sys-tem, qualification results

I've included a recent spreadsheet I used to prepare for a big tournament so you can see the various tabs and perhaps use this as a base for your own preparation. [Check](#) it out.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	**MMA**	Korea						
2	Team Acer	**Terran**	WCS #21 (600)			Ro32		
3	Mun Seong Won	Oct 29 1988 (25)		$234,037		Gp H	NightEnD	2-0
4						Gp H	Welmu	1-2
5	WCS Europe 2013 S1	RO16				Gp H	Starbuck	2-1
6	WCS Europe 2013 S2	3/4th				Ro16		
7	WCS Europe 2013 S3	1st				Gp A	VortiX	0-2
8						Gp A	Bunny	2-1
9	2013 WCS Europe S3 1st					Gp A	Mvp	2-1
10	2012 Iron Squid II 1st							
11	2012 IEM Kiev 1st					Ro8	Snute	3-1
12	2011 Blizzard Cup 1st					Ro4	San	3-2
13	2011 GSL October 1st							15-10
14	2011 MLG Columbus 1st					Race Results (all time)		
15						TvP	63.24%	
16						TvT	60.95%	
17						TvZ	64.61%	
18								
19	Reigning WCS Europe champion from Season 3 2013							
20	The oldest player left in WCS Europe at 25							
21	Winner of SIX premier tournaments in his Starcraft 2 career, 3rd on the all time list							
22	Will move up to 5th highest career prize money of all time thanks to reaching RO8 this season							
23	The first person ever to win the Triple Crown (Premier titles in all three regions)							
24	Has lost just twice to Zergs in his last 19 matches, both times to VortiX							
25	In Season 3 MMA was 14-1 in maps heading in to the final, this season 15-10							

What you're also looking for in all of this information is storylines. You can find many golden nuggets if you do your preparation right. It could be you find a team has never lost using a particular strategy or hero or champion. You might find a winning or losing streak of matches for a player or team.

You could find they've never beaten or lost to the team they're about to play, and all of these things on their own or collectively invite a story line that allows people to understand the magnitude of what they are watching. It also helps people who are mostly neutral choose a team or player to root for, making it more enjoyable for everyone.

Some of the biggest matches in other sports are those which have one or more of these storylines involved. If you're an NFL fan, you'll no doubt be aware when any team gets to the end of the season that the 'perfect season' is pulled out as a storyline. In 1973, the Miami Dolphins became the only team in history to have a perfect season, not losing a single match. Brazil about to win a third World Cup was a story in its own right, one made even more remarkable by the fact they became the first to achieve that success. The added story was that they got to keep the first version of the World Cup, too.

HyuN (2)
Roccat

PERSONAL INFORMATION
Name   Ko Seok Hyun
D.O.B.   January 15, 1988 (age 26)
Race   Zerg

WCS Rank (Points): #2 (6,300 points)
Total Earnings: $184,609

WCS ACHIEVEMENTS
2014 WCS AM S1 – 1ˢᵗ
2014 WCS AM S2 – 3ʳᵈ /4ᵗʰ
2014 WCS AM S3 – 3ʳᵈ /4ᵗʰ
2013 WCS AM S3 – Top 12
PREMIER ACHIEVEMENTS
2014 2ⁿᵈ Taiwan eSports League 2014
2014 7ᵗʰ-8ᵗʰ MLG Anaheim
2014 5ᵗʰ-8ᵗʰ Dreamhack Valencia
2014 5ᵗʰ-8ᵗʰ Red Bull Battlegrounds Detroit
2013 1ˢᵗ Dreamhack Valencia

- Finished second in the WCS points system in 2014 after failing to reach the top 16 in 2013
- Has played more matches and more maps than any other player in WCS history
- Is the oldest player in the last 16 at 26 years and 9 months, 1 day older than Bomber!
- His 74.9% win rate in WCS matches is the third best of the final 16
- Gained the nickname "Spider-HyuN" when he entered the stage for his quarterfinal against DongRaeGu at IEM Season VIII - New York dressed as spiderman
- Has finished in the top 4 in 10 tournaments during 2013 and 2014
- Has the 4ᵗʰ highest earnings of any player in the world during 2014
- Gained 3250 points from WCS, 2800 from Tier events.
-

Organizer	Tier	Year	Matches				Maps			
			Played	Won	Lost	%	Played	Won	Lost	%
WCS	Native	2013	8	3	5	37.5%	21	8	13	38.1%
WCS	Native	2014	22	18	4	81.8%	65	47	18	72.3%
WCS	**Native**	**All**	30	21	9	70.0%	86	55	31	64.0%
Other	Tier 1	2013	44	35	9	79.5%	113	79	34	69.9%
Other	Tier 2	2013	17	15	2	88.2%	47	36	11	76.6%
WCS	**Non-Native**	**2013**	61	50	11	82.0%	160	115	45	71.9%
Other	Tier 1	2014	5	4	1	80.0%	13	10	3	76.9%
Other	Tier 2	2014	64	43	21	67.2%	159	104	55	65.4%

It's storylines like this that separate the ordinary or good games and turn them into amazing ones that people remember for a long time, and it's partly your job to find these and put them out there in the community. You'll be amazed by how far some of them travel and help hype a game, ultimately making your job even easier!

GAME-SPECIFIC PREPARATION

If you are attending an event where you haven't covered the game before, you will need a lot more preparation, but it's specifically learning the game and the community.

I've developed something of a regime which allows me to get a basic underlying understanding of the game in question. It also allows me to then use my experience to complement it, and often means I can commentate on almost anything to a reasonable standard right off the bat. Practice makes perfect, though, and we'll talk about that soon, too, but for now, concentrate on the following if you want to learn a game to the point where you can commentate on it.

PLAY THE GAME!

Depending on the depth of the game, learn as much as you can about it - maps, champions, units, heroes, etc. Read up and watch tutorials to help you learn them faster and make notes as you go

Learn the strategies and try them out for yourself against other players. You aren't expected to be a top player within a few weeks, but you need to understand the plays

Get involved in the community. Find out where people hang out and talk about the game, and in particular the esports part - official game forums, community websites, Reddit and Twitter are particularly good for this

How long this will all take depends on how deep the game is and how long it's been around. If you suddenly decide to get involved in an existing game like StarCraft or Dota 2, it will take you a lot longer than a new game that just came out. You will have to invest hun-

dreds of hours of game time to be very good and ready to commentate on it, but a new game may be something you can jump in on almost right away, so if you can, pick your game carefully. It also helps if you have experience playing another game in the same genre as you can generally use your experience of that game to good effect in the new one, cuttings some corners and saving you some
time.

Once you have a basic grounding, though, get commentating and learn as you go along - nothing beats actually doing it! As you go along, you will also learn more depth and start to put some 'meat on the bones'. There are also some techniques available to you to aid preparation, but not replace it. I will usually have a large binder on my desk while commentating which contains all the information I have collected on a player, but in a very short format and easy to navigate, also including a photograph so if the player pops up on screen I can easily identify them. I also use my laptop to display my stats, which is usually something I put together on a spreadsheet

before the tournament. Make sure you double check your stats with someone else, too, as blurting out a stat on air that everyone watching knows is wrong is going to make you look like an idiot.

The final piece of preparation, particularly true if you are attending a very international event, is to check on pronunciation of player names. If in doubt, ask the player directly. All too often this is overlooked and a commentator says a nickname or real name completely wrong until corrected half way through a show or cast. There is nothing more embarrassing to you or the player concerned. Again, it will add weight to the viewers' impression that you have no idea what you're talking about!

PRACTICE

There is a famous gamer who swears by the mantra "practice, practice, practice", and while it's only one of my Ps, it's no less important when it comes to commentating. Practice when and wherever you can, either live or back to friends or family. Work on your pronunciations, work on your phrases, and don't be limited to just a few of the same adjectives in explaining the action - use the thesaurus tip explained earlier in the chapter to expand your vocabulary.

If you really want to succeed and you have the voice and the personality for this kind of job, practice is probably all you need to get good at it, so stick with it, even if you're being battered by the often overly critical gaming communities.

PASSION

Never lose sight of why you wanted to do this job. Passion is as important in commentating as preparation is. You can spend two months preparing for a tournament and know every single thing about someone, including the colour of their dog and their inside

leg measurement, but if you aren't passionate about the games or players or teams or league, you aren't going to come across that way either. How can you possibly expect to enthuse others about gaming if you aren't enthused yourself?

It is, as I see it, one of the fundamental reasons I commentate, and also a responsibility that I feel in my own small way that I can spread the passion of gaming and esports to others outside it, to enthuse them through my own enthusiasm, as it were.

PROFESSIONALISM

My final P is an obvious one, but probably the least adhered to in gaming broadcasters (except perhaps by the top guys who are already full-time commentators). If it's not obvious to start with, let me put it in black and white. In everything you do, in everything you say and in every type of event regardless of size or the broadcast format it's going out on, you should be professional. That extends from what you say on live TV to what you say on an audio broadcast from your bedroom.

Sure, there are others out there swearing and cursing as if it's second nature, but I don't see commentators doing that in any sport I watch on TV. It can also be seen as cool, especially to such a young and highly influenced audience, but it depends on what you want to do with this. If you're out to gain some e-fame and make a small name for yourself, sure, going on an audio cast and swearing at all the players is going to making you look cool to all the 12 year olds, but if you really want to be taken seriously in this business and go on to have a career in it, it probably won't.

Likewise, being professional doesn't mean you can't have fun on air - you really should be having fun or there's little point in doing it in the first place. Shows are a little different, too - I'm talking about commentating here, and when it comes to shows, if you play a sound up front that explains there's going to be strong language in it, it's probably fine, but just remember: it's not big or clever to go on air and swear for the sake of it.

You may also consider this: as an industry, video game broadcasting is very, very small. There are only a couple of dozen full-time professional commentators in the western world. While all of us want it to grow and allow others to become full-time salaried commentators, we also need to remember that everyone us has a responsibility to help grow the entire industry of competitive gaming. To do that, we need to be as professional as the lack of money will allow us, and work together to aid the entirety of gaming and gaming broadcasting to grow to the point that we have many more casters on TV and in high-production works, not just a few.

OFFLINE EVENTS

So you've been up and running for a few months now, streaming, commentating on online tournaments (of which there are plenty to cover!) and you then get invited to come to an offline event. For the

first time in your life, you will be thrust in front of a crowd in a live setting.

Offline events range from small studio-based efforts to large-scale productions on massive

stages in football stadiums, such is the modern way with esports, but whatever the setting and scale, it's going to be very different from the casual commentary you've been doing online from the comfort of your bedroom.

At an offline event there are a number of key differences, including:

- A crowd

- Sponsors

- Journalists

- Producers and production members for lights, audio and cameras

- Multiple cameras

- In-ear devices

- Show rundowns and/or scripts

- A dress code

So how do you deal with all these?

LANGUAGE

In addition to all these differences and depending on how you presented at home, you'll most likely have to alter your presentation. The first and most obvious aspect of this is vocabulary.

I don't mean you need to dumb down the commentary - far from it - but you'll need to consider such things as the event having sponsors, there being young people in the crowd and the presence of the mainstream press, particularly at large events. All of this means you need to moderate your language, especially if you're used to swearing on your regular online stream.

THE CROWD

A crowd is a wonderful thing for an esports broadcaster: hopefully you'll be with them or facing them rather than stuck backstage so you can use their noise and hype in a positive way in your commentary. I don't recommend specifically asking them to cheer all the time (it's actually pretty horrible to hear "let me hear you cheer!" and similar phrases) but through your voice and commentary you can invite it.

Great plays deserve great commentary, and the crowd will add to this feeling, hopefully hyping you up, too. I've always felt a great crowd helps commentators feed off the emotion, hype and feel of the match to deliver something much better than they would be able to at home.

It can, of course, be nerve-wracking the first time around, but if you do find the crowd to be unnerving, focus on the role, put the head-phones on and concentrate hard on the game itself. Getting used to the crowd and using the energy it can provide you with takes longer for some than others.

PRODUCTION DIFFERENCES

Having a producer or director is a real help for a commentator. Although you have to do everything yourself at home, these guys allow you to fully focus on the actual role of commentating at an event. Everyone is there to make your job easier and handle all of the other production issues that come up. You should strike up a good relationship with your production team, get to know them, understand what roles they do and then work with them to ensure you are comfortable, your headset works properly, volumes are good and also that you know what's coming next.

Often you'll find yourself doing things in the show that you perhaps might not have done before, such as doing proper throws and standing in front of a screen to explain pieces of play in replays. You should embrace all of these things but ensure you know what is expected of you. You also need to ensure you can hear everyone you need to, including the producer in your ear, otherwise mistakes can happen very easily.

Producers do so much more to ensure the overall delivery of the show is great, but the relationship you build with them should be one of trust. They have your back, you have theirs. You'll find your-

self saving them occasionally, but they usually save you much more often!

On a good show, you'll also be given a show rundown and possibly even a script. These are essential to ensure everyone - you, the producer, the camera guys, the sound, lights, etc. - are all on the same page at any given point in the show. Big events are complicated beasts, and ensuring you are familiar with the show rundown is essential.

Here is the first page of a rundown of a show we produced at ESL to give you an outline and idea of what it includes. You can even use this as a basis for writing your own as this will help with show flow and planning, even when producing for yourself at home.

SHOWRUNDOWN - 26.07.2014			EU PRO LEAGUE SMITE KICK OFF LAN		Turtle Entertainment TV GmbH		
POS	CONTENT	MOD	SPOT	DESCRIPTION	GFX/VIDEO	AUDIO	START	LENGTH
1	Program hint			Show starts in 30 min	L3_Upnext	Electro	11:30:00	00:30:00
2	Opener						12:00:00	00:00:25
3	Show opening	Paul	StudioOne ifo. audience	Welcome to the show...	L3_Paul FS_Explanation?	Opener theme	12:00:25	00:01:30
4	Expert talk	Paul Expert	StudioOne Bar	* Discuss the Brackets * Go through team line ups * 2 top players of each teams	FS_Brackets FS_Teamcard FS_Playercard		12:01:55	00:05:00
5	Caster intro Champion Select	Caster	Caster desk		DL3_Caster FS_Picks&Bans L3_Player_VS._Player		12:06:55	00:07:00
6	Match_1 1/3	Caster	Rondell	Semifinal #1 Cloud 9 HyperX vs SK Gaming	VS_PiP OL_Overlay	VS.-PiP GG	12:13:55	00:40:00
7	Caster outro Replay	Caster	Caster desk	REPLAY	FW_Replay		12:53:55	00:03:00
8	Throw to video break	Paul	Social_PC				12:56:55	00:00:10
9	Video break			Videos + Bumper			12:57:05	00:05:00
10	Welcome back	Paul	Social_PC	Quick throw	Music		13:02:05	00:00:10
11	Caster intro Champion Select	Caster	Caster desk		DL3_Caster FS_Picks&Bans L3_Player_VS._Player		13:02:15	00:07:00
12	Match_1 2/3	Caster	Rondell	Semifinal #1 Cloud 9 HyperX vs SK Gaming	VS_PiP OL_Overlay	VS.-PiP GG	13:09:15	00:40:00
13	Caster outro Replay	Caster	Caster desk	REPLAY	FW_Replay		13:49:15	00:03:00
14	Throw to video break	Paul	Social_PC				13:52:15	00:00:10
15	Video break			Videos + Bumper			13:52:25	00:05:00
16	Welcome back	Paul	Social_PC	Quick throw	Music		13:57:25	00:00:10
17	Caster intro Champion Select	Caster	Caster desk		DL3_Caster FS_Picks&Bans L3_Player_VS._Player		13:57:35	00:07:00

DRESS CODE

It's important to find out what this is before you even pack your suitcase to fly to the event. It's also very important to make sure you are comfortable with what you wear so it doesn't become a distraction while you are commentating.

If a tournament insists on a full dress code of suit, tie and jacket, you'll just have to get used to it, so spend some time wearing it at

home first so you understand what's annoying about certain pieces of clothing and can get it fixed before you go to the event. Get others to help you shop if it's not clothing you would ordinarily buy yourself.

CAMERAS!

One of the biggest differences will be the presence of cameras, cameras everywhere! At home, you'll likely have gotten used to one small camera and started to use it pretty well. At an event, there can be dozens of cameras and sometimes at least three of those will be pointed at you at once. It's not always a comfortable feeling, either, especially outside the safety of your home setup - I well remember my first time on camera as it was about as comfortable as having my nipples blowtorched.

When you attend tournaments in person, you will be expected to go 'on camera' at some point to deliver analysis or your views on the games ahead or just played out. You may even appear in something called PIP (picture in picture) - although I personally don't like it, some broadcasters put their commentators in PIP during the actual match. If, like I was initially, you aren't comfortable on camera,

remember that very few people are and it's likely anyone put in the same position would feel the same.

The next thing to do is get help. Help comes in the form of advice from your peers and fellow broadcasters (who are likely to have felt just like you do when they first started). It also comes in the form of reading books on TV production (particularly sports production), biographies of professional sports commentators (I can particularly recommend Murray Walker's) and watching plenty of varied sports and watching and listening to how the commentators work.

You can, fairly inexpensively, enrol in a local college course, either full or, like I did, part time in the evenings for a few weeks. A general media course is enough for most, but you can take it to degree level if you are academically minded. In fact, a number of commentators run media degrees alongside working for a gaming broadcaster, and the two help each other.

If in any doubt, look right down the barrel of the lens in the camera - you can't go too far wrong from there. Just ensure you're looking at the right camera (usually the one with a red light on top of it if it's live on you) and listen to your producer for further guidance on which will be being used.

It might be that you take to it easily and none of the above will apply to you, in which case, great - you are probably a natural-born show off, and that's pretty cool for the career you've chosen!

REHEARSALS

Rehearsals are just about the most boring parts of live productions. However, they are also the most important if the show is to go smoothly.

Often times, you'll find yourself getting a call time that is two or even three hours ahead of the show start time. Unlike when you were at home running your own stream with a single camera, there is much that can (and often does) go wrong on a big live show. Thus, rehearsals are an essential process of testing equipment, levels, lights, sound, camera positions and much more. They are actually almost pointless for talent, in the sense that you probably know how you are going to commentate and you can't really practice it live, but for the host of the show, rehearsals are very important as much of what they do will be scripted or part of the show rundown.

With all of that said, as a commentator, even if you aren't getting much from it, being at rehearsals and taking part is extremely important to the rest of the production crew, so take a deep breath, keep hydrated, bring food and be patient while all of the hundreds of pieces of a complex show are figured out in the lead up to live show time.

THE VOICE

I won't lie to you here: the voice is important. In other words, if you don't have the right voice for a broadcaster, you start with a disadvantage which means you will have to work twice as hard as someone who was born with one.

There are things you can do to improve several aspects of your voice, but even if you do have the voice for broadcasting, it doesn't mean you will automatically be successful - it just makes it a little easier to start with. You also have to remember that gaming communities are the most diverse and critical people in the world. As such, even if you do have the voice, some will still not enjoy it and you just have to learn to live with that - you can't possibly please everyone all the time.

If you're not sure if you have the voice, check with someone established in commentary and they will be able to tell you. That said, some do have success with what I would call 'non-broadcasting' voices, though as mentioned previously, they have to work terrifically hard initially just to get into the business.

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE MY VOICE?

Professional lessons (I am not kidding here) called elocution lessons are the extreme end if you really want to broadcast professionally, but there are things you can do to improve things without spending money such as working on your inflection, projection, vocabulary and pacing, all of which are very important to an esports broadcaster.

Many are not aware of these skills even when they use them properly, but when used and improved upon they can make up for shortfalls in a non-broadcast voice. Likewise, they are essential skills to perfect even if you do have a TV-friendly voice.

INFLECTION

Figure out what you are saying and how you want it delivered. If you want to come across as more confident (for whatever reason), practice how to end a sentence on a downward inflection. If you want to use surprise in your voice or exude excitement, learn how to end the sentence on an upward inflection.

PROJECTION

Many people get confused between projection and volume, and the two are very different. Projection can help with improving volume, but its main purpose is to ease the strain on your voice while still allowing those listening to fully hear and understand you.

ENUNCIATION

It sounds simple, but open your mouth wider. It will help you enunciate much better, and if you find yourself tripping over words when talking quickly, opening your mouth and extending your jaw will help you with this. You can also improve enunciation by breathing better and for example just before you start on what you think will be a long period of fast talking.

Remember that it isn't just your mouth or your vocal chords but also your tongue control that matters when enunciating properly. If you work to keep it wider and flatter, this will also help.

You can also try standing up, something many of today's commentators often do as this allows you to open your lungs wider and be

more expressive at the same time. You'll be amazed by how much easier it is to enunciate when standing up compared to sitting (slouching, usually) in a chair.

PACING

Depending on the type of game you cover, controlling the pace of the commentary can also help your voice. Speeding up and slowing down not only helps the flow of the commentary but also aids you in gaining control over your voice. It can inject excitement at the right time and through not only speaking fast at the right time but also knowing when to not talk at all.

SAVING YOUR VOICE (AKA AVOIDING A SORE THROAT)

Over time and particularly during an event weekend or long period of broadcasting, it is inevitable that you will get a sore throat. Almost all of the commentators I have worked with, including me, have got a sore throat at some point during a long event.

You can avoid this most annoying of afflictions by adjusting your attitude towards the weekend of an event, for example:.

- **Avoid excessive work day after day**. Obviously the more you do, the more likely you are to stretch your vocal chords, so avoid overworking them, take a few days off during the week and try not to do seven days a week for ten hours a day.

- **Work on how you actually use your voice.** Most commentators, especially in the early days, will shout. You don't actually need to shout! You can learn how to project your

voice without shouting. You can also learn how to use your body better to complement this.

- **Learn how to use combined breathing**. This is the art of breathing through both your nose and you mouth at the same time. If you get a sore throat from commentating on a regular basis, it's likely you are breathing through your mouth more than your nose. Doing so leads to a dry mouth and scratchy throat, which in turn restricts your vocal chords. If you breathe through your nose exclusively, it means you can't take in enough air, which can in turn choke your vocal chords.

- **Understanding the dia-phragm**. Many singers understand how to use their diaphragm, and doing so as a commentator can really help when the pace of a piece of play goes through the roof. To understand this better and learn how to do it, read this excellent piece on how to sing from your diaphragm.

- **Avoid alcohol, smoking and parties!** I know it's boring, but I have lost count of the amount of times commentators (including me!) have lost their voice on the final day of an event due to being out the night before at a party with loud music. Attending such a party usually means you have to shout to be heard, and in turn strains already-strained vocal chords. I can't give you any empirical, scientific rea-

son as to why you should avoid alcohol and smoking, but logically and long term neither are good for your voice.

- **Medicate when required.** There are some special medicines you can buy, including clever throat sweets, which can help save you if you do suffer from a sore throat, but the best type of medicine is preventative. Using hot or warm water can help lubricate the throat and honey in tea (if you like that kind of thing) can also do a lot to help prevent cracking and scratching in the throat. I wouldn't recommend taking strong medicine during an event, however, and obviously you should seek medical advice when taking anything stronger than cough sweets. I've used VocalZone for a few years now, and they help a great deal if you do suffer a sore throat and need to get through the day.

NATURAL TALENT VERSUS HARD WORK

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, natural talent helps a great deal in esports broadcasting, especially as we have a very low entry level - you just sign up for a Twitch account and start broadcasting instantly.

I personally believe you do need at least some natural talent, but I also come from the school of 'not very naturally talented' broadcasters, and although it may seem odd now, I do have more than a dozen years of doing this and have had some amazing tutors along the way. I also worked bloody hard to be good at this!

Hard work is not going to make up for all shortfalls in your commentary, mainly because you will be judged by those in the community who both like or loathe you. There have been commentators in the past who worked very, very hard but didn't have an ounce of natural talent and eventually gave up. I've also seen some incredibly talented broadcasters do very little work to improve but be able to just turn up and deliver a great performance because of their natural talent and personality.

The perfect esports commentator is, of course, one who combines both, but despite this there aren't many of them in any game.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Hopefully you will have developed your own style by now and those who watch and enjoy what you deliver will have latched on to some of the more common things you say or do. Not all of these will be good, of course, but through genuine feedback you can work on the elements of your broadcast that aren't up to scratch.

That said, stamping your own personality on events and matches is very important, otherwise you're just another commentator and you won't stand out. Style is very personal, of course, and how you say certain things may be out of habit, but that doesn't mean it will always work.

You have to remember that, unlike almost any other sports broadcasting, esports is entirely international. Cracking a joke about a national soap star might be funny to you and your fellow countrymen, but anyone outside that sphere of knowledge (i.e. the other 7 billion people on the planet) won't have a clue what you're talking about. So first of all, ensure what you say and how you say it is relatively universal rather than locally specific. This isn't to say you have to be sterile about delivery, but just ensure that what you say is fairly universally accepted.

Style comes over time. Though most of your early success might be down to your personality, your progress will come from working on broadcasting skills, and this is what gives you your style - it's a perfect blend of your personality, experience and skills.

THE ART OF DEAD AIR

One of the most underutilized techniques in esports broadcasting is the correct use of dead air. As I explained in an earlier chapter, pacing is extremely important in helping to save your voice, but it's also important for the flow of the commentary. The art of dead air is controlling those spaces in the commentary that allow you to reset the story, pique intrigue and set up other parts of the broadcast. Used correctly, dead air can really make those amazing plays even more amazing.

Early in your broadcasting career, it's likely you'll fall into the trap of wanting to speak as much as possible and fill every silence with words. It's particularly difficult to avoid if you work with a co-commentator, too, as you're always waiting for your turn, but if you want to be a top commentator, you'll learn that dead air is one of the most powerful tools you can use.

There are a few different ways of using dead air, but first let me explain what it is, even though it may seem obvious.

Dead air is a choice. You decide when not to speak during the broadcast. It isn't something that can be taught directly, but if you understand some of the times it can be useful, you'll soon figure out when to use it for your specific game. Simply put, it's the time during a match in which you consciously decide not to speak about anything.

Obviously if there are a ton of things going on during the match and you suddenly decide to stop talking, that's going to be super awkward - the decision when to use dead air is critical to its success.

There will be times in almost every game or match when a lull occurs. It is during these times that you can use some dead air to help reset the commentary, start on a different track of thought or begin to build up hype for the next play you believe is just around the corner.

If you work on your own, it's relatively simple to choose when to do this. After a round in Counter-Strike, after a big fight in StarCraft when both players return to base, after a big team fight in Dota or League of Legends are all good times to insert some dead air. It calms the commentary down, resets everything and allows you to come back in with something else.

If you work with a co-commentator it's a little harder, but the same timing applies. I've found that hand signals work really well when you want to insert some dead air, with you asking your co-commentator with a hand signal not to talk until the time is right.

How long you leave it before coming back in is actually much harder to gauge and will need a little trial and error in each particular game. Obviously if the match kicks off again with some major action, you'll need to come back in quickly. If, however, the game is still in a lull, I've found that waiting anywhere from 5 to 15 seconds can work fine.

These dead air gaps will also prick up your audience's ears as they will subconsciously wonder what's going on because they can't hear anything - this is great for grabbing attention in a long match.

There are many times when you can use dead air but one of the most powerful is during the winning moment, especially when it's a grand final on a big stage. Let the pictures do the work. Let the emotions come through the screen rather than talking over them. It's unlikely you could ever do it justice, no matter how great a commentator you are, and all of the best sports moments have the perfect use of dead air at the point of winning a championship, cup or title.

The easiest way to deliver this perfectly is to, at the point of victory and with lots of energy, simply announce the team or player as the champion. For example, when Virtus.pro won the Counter-Strike

tournament on the grand stage in Katowice's Spodek arena, Stuart Saw ended the commentary with the phrase "…and your champions of EMS Katowice are VIR-TUS.PRO!" and then he laid out.

The layout is very important. He simply allowed the pictures of the team celebrating, hugging and jumping up and down as the crowd cheered to come through without talking over it and thus made it an even more epic moment to remember.

If you listen to sports commentators as part of your self-improvement program, you'll hear them do the same thing. You'll also hear how they don't fill every single moment of the broadcast with their voice.

Remember: you are there to guide the viewer and enthuse them, not talk them to death!

STORYLINES

Another area often underutilized in esports broadcasting (although this has been getting better over the last couple of years) is story-lines. Storylines are ultra-important to an esports broadcaster - they add more intrigue and interest to matches and tournaments, and are often easy to find if you know where to look.

Many of your storylines come from good preparation. You might find an interview with a player that reveals something interesting about them or that they are in a particular frame of mind heading into a tournament that could influence the way they play.

It could be a new player was recently added to the team - this can be used to come up with questions to build stories. Has the player influenced the team in a positive way? Did they replace a big-name famous player? How will they fill those shoes?

Many storylines also come from statistics. Stats on their own are often pretty boring, but achievement markers can be very interesting parts of the storyline. Is a team about to reach a landmark statistic? Are they about to win their 50th consecutive match? If they win this tournament, would it make them the most successful team of all time? Is the prize money for first place enough to make a player the highest earner in the history of the game? These are all questions you should be asking during your preparation and then turning into storylines.

Storylines can also be very personal, and in fact some of the great stories in esports come from exactly this. Although not nice, has a player recently lost a member of their family? Are they playing to support their family? Have they had hard times and a win here would change their life?

Style and the way someone plays can also be a story. Does the player always play the same way? If so, if they choose a different way to play during your commentary, you will pick up on it - if they win or lose, it's a story.

As well as tournament stories, you can also work on match stories. Stats can again help here, especially if certain matchups have occurred a number of times. Is there a trend? Has one player or team had a run of losses or victories? Is there a specific head-to-head statistic that sticks out (one player winning all ten matches they have played against another, for example)?

You should also remember that losing statistics are often even more powerful than winning ones. A player or team winning for the first time against an opponent they have never beaten in 20 attempts is a huge story.

Most of these can be worked out well in advance of the tournament or match, and you can write these up as potential storylines. Here's a sheet from my preparation for BlizzCon 2014 which contains statements that can lead to storylines for all of the players.

CHEMISTRY

You'll usually find yourself working alongside a co-host or co-commentator, and even as part of a trio on occasion. Regardless, it's important to know that you are only as good as your partner on

a broadcast. That means, above all else, you have their back and they have yours. You should, even if you don't get on particularly well with someone, never throw them under the bus, even if they do make a mistake.

Chemistry between the two (or three) of you is exceptionally important. Most partnerships that work are based on a long-standing trust that builds up over time, but you'll need to build that when you work with someone for the first time, and there is little room for mistakes in the high-profile world that esports broadcasting has become.

While trust plays the biggest role initially and is something you will need to ensure you have between the two of you, the key to achieving it is communication. Ignoring those who have worked together for long periods of time, communication before you commentate together will help enormously.

Initially chat and talk to your partner off air. Get to know them better, understand what they like and dislike, not only within commentary but in life in general. Do they have any habits that might annoy you? Do they want to work in a specific way? Is there anything they want to ensure they do during the broadcast?

As previously mentioned, I'll often agree a set of hand signals with my new partner right up front. This allows me to deliver the play-by-play side of things in the best way I know how. I'll often give my partner a few hand signals for things like "don't talk" or "talk more" as well as showing them what that looks like before we go on air. Most are common sense in any case, but it doesn't do any harm to know them up front.

I'll also ensure we have clearly defined roles during the broadcast. This is especially true if it's two play-by-play broadcasters as we will need to know when to come in and when to be quiet. Initially there will be mistakes as the two of you get used to each other. However, work on it and be frank and honest about what each of you can do better as well as debrief after each match you cover and you'll see improvements in your chemistry very quickly.

HOSTING AND PRESENTING

One of the most important roles for the flow of a show is that of the host or presenter as TV likes to call them. The role can be split in to various different parts. For the sake of this book, I'll call it simply hosting as the presenter role is much the same.

- Main stage host

- Desk host

- Interview host

- Co-host

These represent the most common host roles found in esport currently. That's not to say that one person may well cover several roles within one show, for example the main stage host is usually the interview host at events.

MAIN STAGE HOST

To the onlooker, this role may seem somewhat superfluous, but a great stage host will deliver a smooth show for everyone at the event and those watching at home. Generally speaking, the stage host gets very little air time, but the time they do get is extremely important. The usual parts of the show a stage host delivers are:

- Welcoming everyone to the event

- Introducing the event

- Updating everyone on where the show is (current position, what's up next etc.)

- Introducing the teams and players

When you look at it, it doesn't seem like much, but a great host really does add to the feeling of the tournament and the production. The main role here is to hype everything up without going completely bonkers. It will depend on what you are hosting, what type of game, which country, what the audience is and ultimately what kind of style the tournament organiser wants to portray on the show.

For me there are a few key ingredients for a successful stage host. Firstly, understand the audience you are going out to, both in the venue and at home. Understand and gauge the mood too. Overall, you should be focusing on many of the things you learned as a caster, preparation, professionalism amongst others.

For large tournaments in arenas, it's fairly likely that the gravitas of the tournament dictates that as a main stage host, you deliver that feeling too. There is no point in going out on the main stage and trying to crack jokes if you are in the opening ceremony of a $10million tournament, it requires gravitas, professionalism and a touch of drama to engage the audience and make them feel like they are part of something very special. Using dramatic pauses helps a lot and if you are smart, you can even get away with being a little cheeky alongside (if that's your character of course).

More than anything however, being a stage host is about having a lot of energy, being engaging and helping to add to the feeling of the event.

You'll need to be exceptionally strong on your throws to both videos and other members of the broadcast team, so practice and practice and practice. This is because as well as being the person who hypes up the stage, you are also responsible for knitting the show segments together.

A few pitfalls await you however. What happens if the crowd don't react? What happens if the production goes wrong? What if some lunatic jumps out of the crowd and starts giving you a hard time? (Yes, it's happened, trust me!) Almost all of these will happen at some point in your hosting career, but the mark of a good host is how you deal with it. Try and remain calm at all times and unflappable is a good way to describe the best hosts regardless of being in esports.

It's also extremely important how you interact with the crowd, especially if you have a large crowd in front of you. It's important to

allow them time to cheer or clap or react and avoid the impulse to come back in over the top of them when you deliver your lines.

Probably the most common error though is asking the crowd to cheer, specifically saying things like "Let me hear you cheer/clap/scream". This is absolutely not the way to do it!

Again, it comes down to how you use your voice, the poise with which you deliver your lines and the pace you use. All of these need to be right, but delivery makes a big difference. If you want the crowd to cheer, compose yourself, take a beat, and then deliver your line, ensuring you end on an upward inflection with higher projection. You can also use body language to aid crowds cheering too. By using your arm (the spare one without a microphone in) can be used in a raising fashion as you deliver the final part of your line. Both of these techniques work so much better than directly asking the crowd to cheer. They will cheer when they feel excited, it's your job to help them feel that, not tell them they should be excited.

DESK HOST

While ordinarily a large show might have a stage host and a desk host, more often than not the desk host will also be the main host for the entire show. In this instance, it's a lot of work and many of the things you would ordinarily do as a stage host, will also apply to the desk position, but there are some key differences, both in presentation and in delivery.

GRAPHICS AND STORYLINES

Up to this point and if you have already been a commentator, you'll be familiar with storylines and how important they are in the flow of a match or a cast. It's not too different as a desk host, but part of your job will be to bring the human side of the match to life. To do this, you'll need to pick out those human interest stories that pop up throughout a tournament, but also have some pre made as part of your preparation. It could be a milestone, a player about to complete in his 100th match for example or where a player has the chance to break a record, someone about to win his third major title that has never been done before. You'll need to feed this in to the panel discussion and things like this are an easy way to open the panel up to something high level and get their thoughts on it.

Be careful though, as opening it up to the entire panel can sometimes lead to loss of time and suddenly you'll have the producer in your ear asking you to hurry things along! Get a feel for the answers and interject when you need to or once you feel like the panel have

given some fair points in the story you raised. Once you've done this, you'll also need to bring in the hard-core audience with statistics or gameplay related chat. It all depends on how long you have of course and during a pre-show desk segment you may have a lot longer to "fill" so remember to keep some nuggets back from your preparation that you can bust out at a moment's notice.

Graphics should also support your stories where possible, but this needs more time with the producer of the show to ensure you are both on the same page regarding the graphics. Sometimes, graphics will appear on screen while the panel are discussing something else and that's fine, just don't be the rabbit caught in the headlights and think you have to discuss absolutely every graphic you see. Sometimes a cursory mention of them is good though, for example "As you saw there, Player A has an amazing win rate on this map, but let's talk about the matchup itself". A lot of this is about feel and gut instinct on when to move on and some producers are more flexible than others with the time you spend on items. Learn to judge the balance and you'll do well.

One of the other common problems with graphics is that a host will often feel compelled to read the entire graphic. This is especially true when it's a schedule or a fixture list or results from the day. In these cases, people can read it for themselves! You don't and shouldn't read it verbatim. Pick out one or two interesting points from the graphic and relay that instead of going through it in its entirety. Graphics should not be on screen for minutes on end while you read through them.

CAMERA USAGE

While being a commentator, you'll have likely gotten used to a single camera to look in to, the desk host will often have two, three or

even four different cameras to use. There are two things you have to remember when using multiple cameras that will save you time and again. Firstly, ensure you and the producer understand which camera is which. This sounds simple, but I've often heard a producer call a camera something like "Camera 2" and then realised I don't actually know where Camera 2 is! Sometimes the cameras are labelled, sometimes not (physically on the actual camera) and other times they are labelled one way in the control room and another physically. Ensure you and the producer agree what they are called. I often refer to them in simple terms rather than numbers, for example Front, Long, Stage left, Stage right, Jib. This helps me a lot when information is flowing in the ear constantly.

Generally on a desk, you'll have a wide or wide pan camera on the entire group most of the time and the switches will be between single and two shots on different people as they speak. Generally you will be addressing the panel members as part of the discussion and keeping eye contact with them, thus not worrying about which camera you should look in to.

When it comes to throws and when you need to address the audience however, you'll need to use the right camera. If the producer calls the wide shot, then use that and focus on the top of the camera as you look at it. If the single shot on you is called, then focus on the middle of the lens. You'll also need to agree up front with the producer when to switch. Usually, I have the producer tell me a single word, such as "middle" or "jib" and I will automatically adjust to that camera in terms of view. You can't do anything about a late switch by the production team, but don't drop them in it by mentioning it either!

FLOW

One of the most critical functions you perform as a desk host is the flow of the show. Think of yourself as the gel in the show, it's you job to knit all the different segments together and make it feel smooth. You aren't there to look good or be the brains on the show, you are there as a facilitator for others. Your role is to bring the best out of those on the show, be it experts, personalities, players or anyone else that happens to be on the desk.

The flow is critical to the success of the show and most of that will come from you. If a segment runs too long, the producer will normally ask you to move on anyway, but getting a good feeling for segment length is a huge advantage to a top host.

Flow isn't just about the length of each segment but also the length of discussions too. If there is a panellist dominating, you'll need to politely divert questions to others without alienating that person entirely. Likewise, if a panellist isn't speaking much, you'll need to find that killer moment to bring them back in to the conversation.

There is an old saying that you can only lead a horse to water, but as a desk host, you'll need to make them drink it too!

QUESTIONNING SKILLS

Another key area, often over looked and underutilised is the art of questioning. As a desk host, this is your bread and butter so get really good at it!

At first glance, it's not hard to ask questions, especially surrounded by fantastic and talented people on the panel. But, less is more, is never more appropriate than in the role of a desk host.

Your questions should be a real mix, but should also be short, snappy and sometimes challenging too.

One of the most common parts to avoid is trying to show the audience that you know as much as the panellists, something that happens when you host a game you love, play a lot or know a lot about.

It's actually easier when you know less about the game you host!

Your questions should be designed to bring out the best in others on the panel. Learn and research your panellists (if you have time and know in advance who they will be). This makes the chemistry with them happen faster and allows you to tailor questions in the right direction to the right people.

If you have a panel of 4 people and 1 is known for his statistical preparation, 1 for team fight analysis and another is a streaming personality who doesn't really follow the esports stuff, you'll need to make sure your questions are appropriate for each. You aren't there to make them feel bad or look bad, but the exact opposite, to get the best out of them.

The length of your question is also important, especially if you expect a long answer. Try and work on phrasing that allows you to ask the same thing, but in less words.

For example:

Long: "When you look back at the history of this game, it's obvious we've had a lot of champions come back and repeat victory again, but what is it that makes that happen so often, when you consider that in theory at least it's a really tough thing to do?"

Short: "Historically, a lot of players have won more than 1 championship, why?"

Not putting too much in to the question allows the panellist more room to answer in their own words and a little more time too.

Ask open questions. Too often, closed questions (where someone can answer yes or no only) are asked without a good follow up and

the conversation can often lead to awkwardness or simply dry up and neither is desirable. Instead, focus on open questions. If you intend to use closed questions (and they can be very powerful used right) then ensure you have the right comeback stored.

For example, a good closed question would be "Happy with the way you played?" – Answer is "yes" and you immediately respond with "Why?" which will in turn open up the discussion without prompting them. I've often heard questions like "How do you feel" asked of winners when it's obvious they feel great. Instead, reframe the question to be "You must be feeling great, but tell us what winning that match means to you".

There is also a trick on the panel if you are a panellist which is if you are given a bad question, simply use the phrase "Well, I think the real question is…" and then pose your own question to yourself! That should get you out of any trouble.

INTRODUCTIONS AND FUNNELING

When you start broadcasting at large events and on TV shows, you'll likely have a host take care of most of what I call 'the fluff'. That includes things like welcomes and introductions, but that said you still need to know how to do them and do them properly. If you have a host, they will often introduce you and therefore when it comes to you, you don't need to (and shouldn't) reintroduce yourself or your co-commentators. It's important to work with the host, too, and by ignoring what they just handed off to you with, you aren't working as part of a team.

If the host throws to you during your introduction with a question, answer the question when the hand off comes or at least acknowledge it. If, on the other hand, they have formally introduced you, there is no need to acknowledge them, and if you do it all the time it will soon get repetitive. The most common 'take' from a 'throw' is "Thanks, [NAME]", but it doesn't need to be.

The best takes are those that start with a statement and a story introduction for that particular match. For example:

"Its semi-final time in our championship, just one win away from competing in the grand final for $200,000 - welcome to the commentary desk."

If the first part of the show comes to you as either a host or commentator, you will need to open the show, introduce everyone and welcome the viewers and crowd. It's pretty standard stuff, but often fails to work.

The simplest and easiest way to do a show opening and introduction is by covering the basics:

1. Welcome everyone to the show (or welcome them back). You can do this by using the word 'welcome' or whatever you're comfortable with. The most important thing is to ensure you also use the correct nomenclature for the show, for example "Welcome to day two of Intel Extreme Masters San Jose".

2. I rarely introduce myself - it feels awkward to tell people who I am, especially with a lower third with my name on it. That said, there is no harm in doing so (although few TV personalities do on sports shows).

3. I will always introduce anyone I am working with, be it on a desk full of experts or with a player or team manager in an interview. Introduce them as fully as you can including a title or small titbit of information. "Alongside me is the top stat man in the world, Bruno" or, if it's an interview, "Joining me now is MC, who just won his semi-final 4-3", for example.

Once you have the basics done, the aim of opening the show or segment should always be to guide the viewer as smoothly as possible through what's going to come next as well as later on. Essentially, you're setting up the show for the viewer so they know what to expect. You could do this in many ways, but one of the best I've found is through funnelling - in other words, you start as wide as possible on the event itself with the ultimate goal being to get to the first match or the next match of the segment.

I've shown below an example of how we use funnelling to go from show opening and introductions through to the first match of the show.

- Welcome and introductions

- Rules and how the tournament works

- Schedule - explain how the day or event is planned (usually supported with graphics)

- Brackets or groups - talk through how players got to this point and how they progress next (supported by graphics)

- Specific first group or bracket - go from the entire tournament bracket or groups to the first one featured in your first match

- Talk about the first match overall

- Specifically talk about each team or player for first match

- Throw to commentators for the match

It doesn't have to be in this order and other items can be added to this line-up, but it uses the basic understanding of funnelling from wide (the event itself) to tight (the first match), and you can't go too far wrong if you use funnelling for your show introductions in any scenario.

THROWS

The art of throwing is one that is often underestimated in esports broadcasting. A 'throw' (you may also have heard a throw referred to as a toss or hand off) is the technical term for passing off to the next part - or segment - of the show. A throw is not always to another person, and the way in which you throw can change in many ways depending on who or what you are throwing to.

As a host or presenter, you will need to be extremely strong with throws and their many different varieties. While you won't need to be an expert on throws as a commentator, you will still need to know how to hand off properly, and with enough expertise to ensure that the show knits together properly.

One of the key aspects of a good throw is to pause just before you do the main throw. This allows you to slightly reset from whatever you were just talking about. You can literally count to two in your head and then deliver the throw - you'll be amazed by how effective this is.

I'll also use a lot of leading throws, particularly when going to a commercial break. This is simply teasing what's coming up after the next piece of content. It could be that you tease the next match within the throw itself.

REGULAR THROWS

A regular throw is one that goes to another person on the show. You can achieve this in a number of ways, but the first rule of throws is to never use the word 'throw'!

An alternative but not exhaustive set of words and phrases you can use instead are shown below, but make sure to come up with your own as they will feel more natural when you use them.

- o "Go over to…"

- o "Send it down/up/over to…" (Although some producers I've worked with hate these as much as 'throw'!)

- o "Let's go to…"

- o "Waiting to bring you the action is…"

- o "Heading back to…"

- o "Take it away, [NAME]"

- o "It's all yours, [NAME]"

- o "Let's go back to…"

- o "In the [LOCATION] is [NAME X] with [NAME Y]"

- o Here are a few examples of good regular throws:

- o "Let's head over to the commentary team for our first game."

- o "Our game is over and our experts are waiting to give their opinions over at the desk."

- o "Here is Joe with our winner in the interview area."

ENHANCED THROWS

Once you're comfortable with regular throws, you can start working on more enhanced throws that add to the show and make the segments knit together even better.

Most enhanced throws include story setups as part of the throw and don't necessarily throw to specific people (as regular throws do).

For example, when handing over to the commentators for the eighth time in one day, most people will be familiar with them and will have heard you use a similar throw for them before. As the day progresses and the tournament ramps up, you might be headed into the semi-final or the final, and it deserves a better introduction and thus a better throw.

In this scenario, using an enhanced throw works really well. Instead of using "Let's go over to your commentators James and Shaun", you could set the match up better by using "It's time to find out

which of our two players have a shot at $1 million with the grand final of the ESL Championship".

The key with these types of throws, however, is to use your voice properly. With a regular throw, it doesn't matter, but with the example I just gave, if you don't use your voice properly, the throw will fail. You'll also confuse your production team, who might not be ready to transition the camera elsewhere.

Ideally, you'll take a short pause before you deliver the throw. Once you start talking, focus on the final part of your delivery, which should be on a much-prescribed downward or upward intonation. The choice is yours, but whoever takes the throw needs to continue from the same pitch, so I usually take a downward approach so the commentators I send it to are able to come in at a reasonable pitch without having to immediately get hyped, especially if the match isn't starting right away. You really will have to gauge this yourself.

It's also worth mentioning that once you know your casters better and understand how they react to your throws, you can tailor the throw to them better using the inflections in your voice, either up or down, depending how they usually react. If a caster usually comes in with lots of energy after the throw, then use an upward inflection on the end of the throw.

THROW TO VIDEO

A successful video throw is not one where you introduce the video by saying "Let's take a look at this cool video". In fact, if you have to use the word 'video' in your throw, you aren't doing it right.

I almost always insist on seeing the video before I throw to it. This is part of your preparation as a broadcaster, but if you don't have time

or it hasn't been produced until you're on air, the very least you need to do is get a brief synopsis from your producer on what it contains - you can use this information to create a great throw to it.

There's nothing worse than introducing an amazing piece of content with a drab throw, so pick out a piece in the video that allows you to pull it into your throw. It could be a phrase from a player or it could just be a simple explanation of what the video contains. Again, it sets the viewer's expectations and makes them more likely to continue watching, especially if you're headed into a commercial break.

If, for instance, the video is a music video of the location, you can introduce it with "We are here in the beautiful city of New York with its stunning architecture - check it out."

Adding the "check it out" lets the viewer know that something else is coming, but as you get more experience you'll realize you don't have to use this last part if you utilize your voice properly.

For videos that contain players' views or opinions, picking out one of them and using it in the throw often sets the video up much better, for example: "Our match is moments away, but first Loda explains why he doesn't fear anyone in this tournament."

THROW TO COMMERCIAL BREAK

Throwing to a commercial break is something which is very standard but almost always done poorly. It's as if this is a bad part of the show - and arguably it is for most viewers - but you shouldn't be throwing to it in a negative way. One of the easiest ways to throw to a break is to use the throw as a setup for what's coming up after the break. In other words, the throw becomes a tease.

"We're headed for a quick break, but don't go far as when we come back we'll hear from the reigning world champion and head into our first of two semi-finals, live and exclusive on ESL TV."

I also avoid using the words 'advert' or 'commercial', although I have heard others use these in esports broadcasting. You won't often hear them in professional TV sports broadcasting, however, and I think they are best avoided.

COPING WITH NEGATIVE FEEDBACK AND ABUSE

Firstly, it's important to distinguish between feedback and abuse. Sometimes negative feedback can be used in a very positive way, especially if you notice a trend where multiple people are saying the same thing. This is not always the case, of course, because there does tend to be a 'sheep' mentality in gaming sometimes, so you will need to be selective and use some common sense. If possible, ask someone from the esports broadcasting industry for confirmation - most will be happy to help.

Most of the best advice I've come across regarding how to cope with written or verbal abuse tends to follow the rule of ignorance. In other words, if you can't do anything about it, ignore it. This doesn't mean bury your head in the sand, but rule out the rubbish before taking anything to heart.

As I said earlier, you'll need thick skin in this industry, especially if you choose to read all the threads and comments posted about you. I know that many of the top commentators do read forums, Reddit threads and other community sites, often tracking down comments made about themselves. There is a little ego and narcissism in doing this, but most will be looking for the negative feedback so they can improve (although I do know that some top commentators don't read anything at all). It's totally up to you, but early on, it will almost always help you improve if you're careful with what you read and how you take it.

You also need to remember that the mindless idiots are the smallest group of people posting - but (usually) the loudest as well. However, that doesn't make them right.

When filtering feedback, the best thing to do is put it into two categories. The first is feedback on your job, how you perform and what you've said. Some of this will be unreasonable and some of this you may want to respond to, but resist the temptation for now. Most of these will at least tell you something you can work on or you may just disagree with, and that's fine too.

The second category should be those comments that attack you personally - they may criticize your physical appearance, your sexuality or even your family. These are usually trolls and should be ignored completely. Even if they aren't trolls and someone comments on the shape of your nose, there isn't much you can do about it, so ignore it. Attacks on family are rare, but I have seen them and suffered from them in the past. It's not nice, but unless you think there is a serious threat, these are also best left ignored or at the very least reported via the site or social media service you use. Almost all sites and social media have ways of reporting abuse, so take them seriously. The mute button on Twitter is particularly useful as it not only saves you from seeing anything the person says but also doesn't alert them to the fact that you aren't.

It is widely accepted that most trolls are looking for attention - don't give it to them and eventually they will get tired of trying and stop.

If you do suffer from explicit threats then ensure you take it further, treat it seriously and do something about it, but never reply and don't attack back.

You can also talk to others in the industry who have struggled with or suffered from attacks and ask how they dealt with it. Geoff "In-Control" Robinson and Genna Bain were particularly helpful when I asked for help on how to deal with a relentless stalker troll and many of the lessons I learned from them are included above.

FINDING A COMPANY (AKA BREAKING INTO THE SCENE)

There's no strict time limit imposed on you to find one, but the sooner the better if you are serious about making a career or succeeding at this role. A year of covering a specific game is usually enough to give you the basics of online game commentary. For the next step, you need to be around like-minded professionals so you can build on your skills and adapt to new games.

I am often asked how to join an esports broadcasting team by those who have shown a little talent. The answer is simple: send in a demo and a short CV showing what you bring to the table and how you are serious about joining a broadcaster. You don't have to have TV ambitions to join one, either - every broadcast station worth their salt needs a wide range of talent on their books. If you get turned down, ask for advice on what you need to improve on. Video game broadcasters are few and far between, and all of those I'm familiar with have good people involved who will take the time to talk to you about how to improve.

With that said, there are limited places, and the top companies will want those who are already established or at least have the basics down and shown decent talent. So, if you do get turned down by the top broadcasting companies, don't get too disheartened. Instead, keep working hard and trying to get to as many events as you

can, even if they don't pay very well - exposure is the thing you need most in your first 18 months.

If you get turned down by one company, try others. There are many out there and they're all at different levels. If you aimed high to start with, try a clan station or one of the stations that cover online leagues only. One is bound to suit you, whoever you are.

It's also worth remembering that some are location-based, so if you live in the USA it might not work out trialling for a Europe-based broadcaster. The same can be said the other way round, too, especially considering time zones, though of course some have moved their homes abroad with great success, but usually only once they are established in the scene.

When you apply, think of it like any other job application. Produce a CV of your esports broadcasting exploits, include links to your best work (in video) and ensure it's as professional as it can be. Outline

your goals and ambitions and ensure the CV is as up to date as possible.

Finally, you could consider starting your own station with other up and coming broadcasters. This has the added advantage that you are stronger as a collective both for event broadcasting and being able to cover more on your channel for online tournaments.

HOW TO GET HIRED

There are many things you can do in order to raise your stature, improve your popularity and generally get yourself in front of more eyeballs (which in turn means you'll have more to offer a prospective broadcast company). These include:

- Learning and commentating more than one game

- Publicizing your Twitch channel via advertising and social media

- Running your own tournaments and streaming them

- Interacting with your Twitch channel on a regular basis

- Starting your own website

- Creating a show reel

One of the biggest misunderstandings people have is thinking they can be good or even great at one game and be hired by an esports broadcaster. While this is true of the elite few at the top, it's actually very rare to be hired by a broadcaster like ESL TV if you only cover one game. Many of those who were successful early on in esports

broadcasting and successfully made it their job did so because they could be extremely flexible, and the same applies today.

If you initially find it hard to secure a broadcaster, it may well be because you're only known to cover one game, and they may already have those games covered by experts. You improve your value to an esports broadcaster tenfold by being able to cover multiple games.

In the next part of this series we will cover how to learn new games in more depth, but for now, if you feel you have reached your potential in your chosen game and aren't getting the breaks, it might be time to learn some other games as well.

If you look at the commentators in esports right now, only a handful can claim they commentate or host just one game. The most successful commentators are those who can commentate on multiple titles.

Many of the newer commentators who have broken into bigger companies over the last couple of years have organized and run their own tournaments, usually on a relatively small scale but with great players or teams invited to play over the internet. This offers the commentator the chance to promote and stream their own content. It also allows them to interact with and ask other commentators to come and join them, ensuring they get further promotion in a (usually) much larger community. If you aren't proficient in running a tournament, find someone who is willing to help you - those in your channel or the community will usually be happy to help if it's a one-off.

Finally, start your own website. It doesn't need to be incredibly well coded or even unique. There are lots of content management systems (CMSs) out there like WordPress which can get you up and running in a very short space of time. Use the website to post news (cross-posted to your various social media accounts, of course) and keep it up to date with stream schedules, photos, YouTube clips and details of how to hire you (including a business email).

You can also create a page which explains who you are and what you do, as this way those who visit the site out of curiosity will get to know you better. With a website, you will also rank in Google for your name, especially if you ensure that the Meta title in your main page includes your full name and nickname as well as the words "esports broadcaster" or "shoutcaster" as the two main popular searches for the job role.

If you really want to do it properly, ensure you also put together a highlight reel. This is a short five to seven minute video that showcases your best commentary or hosting from events, tournaments or matches you have taken part in.

If you have the right voice, you may want to do some voice work too. Contacting popular video creators on YouTube and offering your services to narrate or commentate their frag movies or videos free of charge will allow you to reach a much larger audience. As it's free, insist on a credit in the video together with a link to your social media profile or website - most will usually agree as it hasn't cost them anything.

MONEY AND NEGOTIATING FEES

One of the least written about areas in esports broadcasting is money. A common question from newly popular commentators and hosts is "how much should I charge?" It's a really difficult question to answer as each one is specific to the person asking it.

I can, however, give some broad ideas regarding the money you should be asking for from tournament organisers and shows, but you also have to factor a few other things into the equation before coming up with a fee, including:

- The type of event (how big it is, who's running it, etc.)

- Is it mainstream TV (these guys have totally different budgets)?

- Is it a marketing campaign (it's important to understand which pot of money your fee is coming from)?

- Is it a traditional esports organizer?

- Are there any major publishers involved?

- How experienced are you?

- What do you bring to the event in addition to yourself?

- Distance/the amount of travel required

A big misconception newer broadcasters have is regarding prize money, or more specifically talent using what's being given away as prize money as a guide to how much they can ask for. Let me tell you it from both sides of the fence here: you cannot base your fee on how big the prize pool is, high or low. It usually comes from a totally different pot of money external to running expenses (under which you are certainly included) and is possibly provided by a mix of different sources.

Of course, the prize money does have an effect on how big the tournament will be or on what kind of stage it will be shown, but

don't use the prize fund as a fool proof guide as to how much money you should earn from the event.

One of the things you can do is determine how badly you want to be at the event and/or what game it's hosting. If it's a game you don't enjoy or an event you don't want to be at, then you can of course ask for a higher fee on the basis that it becomes your reward for the event beyond actually wanting to be there.

While you can have a rate card for your services, you should be prepared to be flexible with it - and in both directions of the pay scale. If a rate card seems too complicated, stick to one fee you

charge for all events on a daily basis and never waver from. Smaller events might not be able to pay you it but the larger ones will consider you a cheap option, which may lead to more gigs, ultimately balancing out what you may have earned from a wide-ranging rate card.

Alternatively you can hire someone to deal with all of this for you, and there are now plenty of 'agents' in esports who will look after your finances and help get you in front of potential shows or events. They will also take a cut of the fee they get for you, which can range from 10% to 60% depending on who you go with. All of them offer various levels of services, from simple fee negotiation to arranging everything for you from flights to hotels as well as taxation advice.

You also need to be honest about what you add to the broadcast and its team. If you bring a large following on social media, you can often ask for a higher fee than normal on the basis that your following will also lead to higher viewing figures (although you need a pretty substantial following for this to be the case).

Your popularity within the community of the game being broadcast is also something you can use to ask for a higher fee. However, be aware that the broadcaster will also know this, so don't try to bluff your way to a higher fee.

You also need to take into account your experience and how far you are into your career. While it may seem unfair that someone who's been around for 10 years earns more than you do, it's rarely different in any other 'real world' job.

You also need to ensure you don't price yourself out of the job. Unfortunately for you, there's usually a wide selection of talent available for most games, and the broadcaster will never be held to

ransom even by the top commentators if they feel they can get someone of a similar style or experience level for a reasonable rate.

Distance is also a consideration. If the travel involved is long haul (anything over five hours flight time), it will usually mean you have to lose a day either side of an event for travel plans (an hour to get to the airport, two hours waiting, a five hour flight, one hour the other end to hotel - so nine hours total). In this scenario, I usually charge a little higher than for a more local event, but unlike many commentators I do not specifically charge for travel days. This practice is not all that common in esports and even less so in TV land, but I have heard of those who charge half their daily fee for each day of travel, and as long as it's not unreasonable (like 12 hour

flights to China), it's possibly okay. However, I prefer not to do this, and many broadcast companies will not agree to pay for travel days.

I haven't touched on how much you should charge yet, and there's a really good reason for that. Over the last ten years, fees have increased substantially. However, esports broadcasting is still relatively poor in comparison to mainstream TV shows, which in turn means that the fees aren't aligned with those of TV just yet.

That said, a rough guide (and it really is a rough guide) would be to ask for anywhere from €150 to €750 per day based on all of the criteria explained in this instalment. I know this is a very wide range, but it really does depend on so many different factors. Experience

counts for the most in this respect, and if you start low but build up the fee over time and continue to produce a high standard of work, there's no reason why your fee cannot increase on a regular basis until you reach what you ideally want to earn.

I should also mention that some people need more money than others, and while that might not seem to fit into the criteria, we all know how much money we need to survive, and this will be different for those in different countries or with young families to support. In other words, alongside all of the other criteria, don't be afraid to ask for the money you think you need. If you find yourself constantly being rebuffed, ask for feedback, and ask specifically if it's due to the fee you're asking for. Most tournament organizers and companies will be honest and let you know if your fee is too high, and you can then decide if you can lower it in order to meet their budget.

Regardless of the fee you get, it's important to ensure you produce high-level results. This is especially true where you feel you got a much lower fee than you should have, which can often lead to underperformance or a "why should I bother too much if I didn't get paid properly?" attitude. This attitude will lead to failure - companies will not want you in their team if you underperform. You also need to remember that in some respects, while you may feel you're getting a low fee, the company you work for might think your fee is too high, which again can lead to misgivings.

Ensure you have no bad feelings about the fee and accept that sometimes you won't always get what you think you're worth, as unfair as that seems. However, you should always make sure you deliver high-quality work.

ADVERTISING & SOCIAL MEDIA

When it comes to advertising, you can never have enough, especially if it's free. I'm not only talking about advertising your stream here, but also yourself as a personality.

At the very least, you should have the full suite of social media accounts to post to, which in esports means Twitter, a Facebook page and an account on Reddit. There are other social media sites, but these three are key for you to manage and grow.

If you stream, post to Twitter first. If you have something unique or that you think the community would enjoy, think about posting on Reddit for extra reach, but be careful of respecting the posting rules. Facebook is good, too, but it's much more about things you have coming up or have already happened (such as VODs). Try not to post more than three items a day on Facebook (two spread out is better). However, Twitter can be used to share things much, much more regularly through the day.

You could also consider advertising on Twitter to gain more followers, and on Facebook it's relatively cheap to advertise your Facebook page in order to gain more fans. These are highly targeted adverts, too, so don't confuse this with the black art of actually buying fans

or followers. I can't stress enough how damaging it is to buy fans or followers for your accounts. It might look good initially, but trust me: it isn't worth it, doesn't bring any interaction to your account and in the worst case scenario could see you losing the account altogether (purchasing Twitter followers, for examples, breaks the Twitter terms of service).

Your goals for your advertising strategy are simple:

- Promote any stream you run

- Promote your website and social media accounts

- Gain new fans and followers

- Promote any tournament or show you might appear on

- Ensure any event that hires you uses your social media pages in the lower third graphics

There are other advertising routes, but without a substantial pot of cash these are not really viable early on as they don't provide the immediate returns you'd expect.

Interaction with fans and peers is the key to social media growth, not buying them.

COMMON MISTAKES (AKA THE GIBBS BROAD-CASTING RULES)

Some of the more common mistakes are made early in your esports broadcasting career, but some seem to hang around like a bad smell no matter how long you have been broadcasting. Below, you'll find a set of rules I put together to remind myself of the things I used to do (and sometimes still do!), and every now and again I revisit these rules to ensure I am mindful and continue to avoid making the most obvious mistakes.

These rules are not hard and fast, however, and do depend on what type of show you're doing - the ones below apply to a large-scale tournament or on-camera event.

If Leroy Jethro Gibbs were an esports broadcaster, these would be his rules:

1. Use of 'um' is never okay

2. Use of 'errr' isn't clever either

3. Don't use the word 'throw' when you throw

4. Tuck away in-ear earphones (and don't use the white ones from iPods - they stand out and look horrible)

5. Put the leads from headsets behind your back or inside your jacket

6. Never cross your body with a handheld microphone - put it in the hand on the same side as your interviewee

7. Never give your microphone away

8. Don't lean on desks with your elbows

9. Don't put your hands in your pockets

10. Don't keep touching your nose, covering your mouth, playing with your hair or eyebrows or rubbing your face

11. Leave your hair alone

12. Seriously, leave your hair alone

13. Stop fidgeting

14. Don't play with your headset/mic

15. Never adjust your headset without muting first and ensuring you aren't on camera

16. If you're the only one on camera (for example onstage), make sure you keep eye contact with the camera

17. Always use the right nomenclature

18. Use the cough button - never cough into the microphone

19. Don't cover the antenna on a handheld mic - it can cause interference and it annoys sound engineers a lot

20. Always let your stage manager know where you are if you leave the set or stage

21. Put the mic from your headset on the side of your face which is away from the camera (most broadcasting headsets are multi-way enabled)

22. No swearing - 'idiot' is fine, though ;)

23. Keep eye contact with anyone you interview

24. Mic in your left hand if your interviewee is on your left, and in your right hand if they're on your right

25. Make sure your mic isn't 'hot' before saying something you don't want the public to hear

26. If you host a lot, use your own professional in-ear earphones - less mess, more quality

27. Don't forget to breathe

28. Learn how to tie a tie or find someone who knows how to

29. Try and avoid stripes on clothing - it makes the cameras go weird

30. Pay attention to your producer - they will be your best friend when things go wrong

31. If you're a host onstage, insist on having a preview monitor (sometimes called a PGM)

32. Never highlight or bring attention to production errors while on screen or mic

33. Always double check your mic is turned on before your segment or interview

THANKS

This book would not have been possible without the contributions of many people, not just those of my colleagues over the years who I have worked with but those who also contributed small pieces of advice that remained valuable to this day. It is impossible to attribute every single part correctly in the book as most of the things I have learned are a mixed up, jumbled up collection of things I found out myself, learned from others on the job or got advice on.

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