

The San Jose Sharks Distribute Digital Media to Players to Thrill Remote Fans

Overview

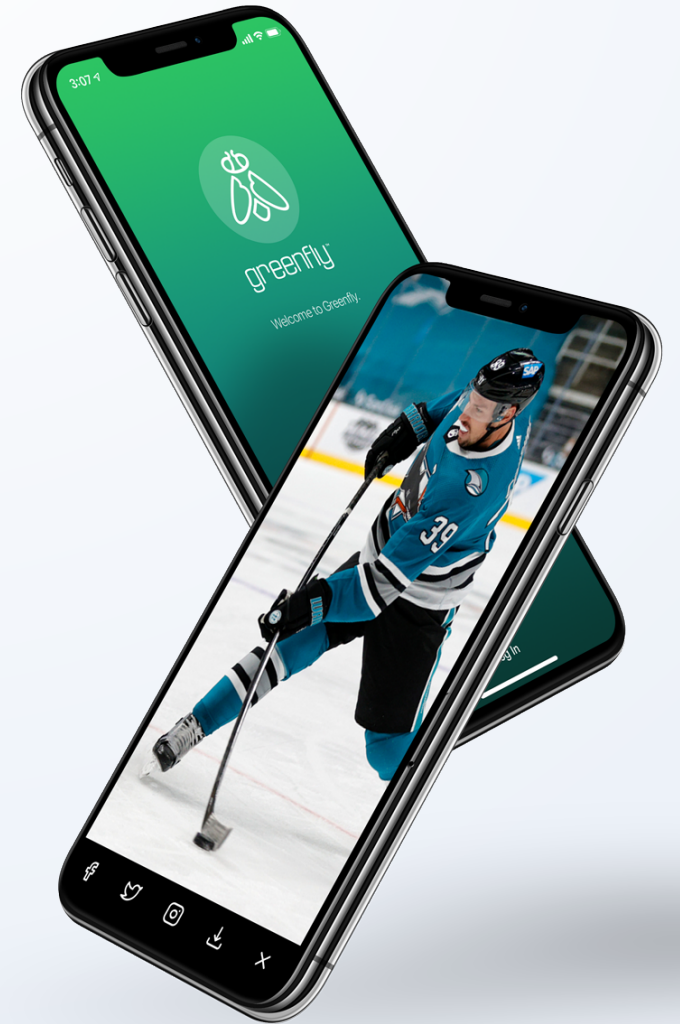
The San Jose Sharks have built one of the most engaging franchises in the National Hockey League (NHL). The Sharks digital team knows distributing original short-form digital media to new players and established stars for their social channels is a winning strategy. Direct athlete-fan social interactions boost activation and revenue opportunities with younger Sharks fanatics.

The 2020-21 NHL season tested and expanded this approach. The global pandemic forced the first virtual NHL Draft. It also severely limited season play and revenue opportunities. The Sharks accelerated their efforts to keep fan engagement and brand partnerships thriving through digital, athlete-driven content. Greenfly's digital media flow management system enabled the Sharks to automate content distribution to players, bolstering those relationships and both team and player brands.

Opportunity

More than other sports, hockey culture is fundamentally team-oriented; individual player brands are harder to develop. But digital-first fans really want to engage with athletes directly on social media. The Sharks digital team recognized that one of the best ways they could make a bigger impact was to give their players access to better content to share on their social accounts. They could expand their collective fanbase as well as lift sponsor returns by helping their athletes grow their own social profiles. The staff found that giving athletes personalized photos, videos and graphics to share created deeper bonds and built long-term loyalty. When the 2020 NHL Draft went fully virtual, the Sharks decided to double-down on this player-driven, digital-first approach.

The staff sought an easy way to speed the delivery of custom media to draftees to share while the live event was still happening. Their existing processes couldn't keep up with this velocity. The Sharks found a technology platform that could efficiently automate the distribution of near-live digital media as well as manage and scale the collection of content from multiple sources.



“Greenfly improves our ability to share content in two directions, and it also makes it so much faster through automation.”

— Patrick Hooper, Director of Integrated Marketing

Partnership

2020 DRAFT

In advance of the NHL Draft, the team spurred fan excitement by onboarding select players to share media through Greenfly’s mobile app. During the live draft event, they immediately onboarded the new draftees, giving them custom congratulatory graphics to share on their social accounts (with themed branding featuring corporate partner SAP). Greenfly orchestrated these planned and real-time activities, showcasing the ease and value of automated digital media distribution to bring players and fans together in a new way.

2020–21 SEASON

The Sharks started the 2020–21 season with a penalty kill: Pandemic restrictions forced them into a remote training camp ‘bubble’ and early on-the-road play, with only a skeleton onsite crew. They had limited ability to drive ticket and merchandise revenue, fan engagement or sponsor exposure, except through digital interactions. Based on their draft success and having Greenfly already in place, the team expertly and quickly adapted. They maintained their fan connections by distributing personalized media galleries to the athletes’ phones to share during training camp and season play — optimized for immediate app delivery through Greenfly’s Getty Images and PhotoShelter integrations. Players even created their own authentic photos and videos for the club to use, expanding team coverage and thrilling fans with exclusive access to their remote experiences.



The pros loved how the easy-to-use technology gave them ample support to grow their social profiles and limit their valuable time spent on content — with no complex text or email chains needed to receive or share media. The Sharks staff valued that onboarding athletes was a very smooth process, and they could track social content performance.



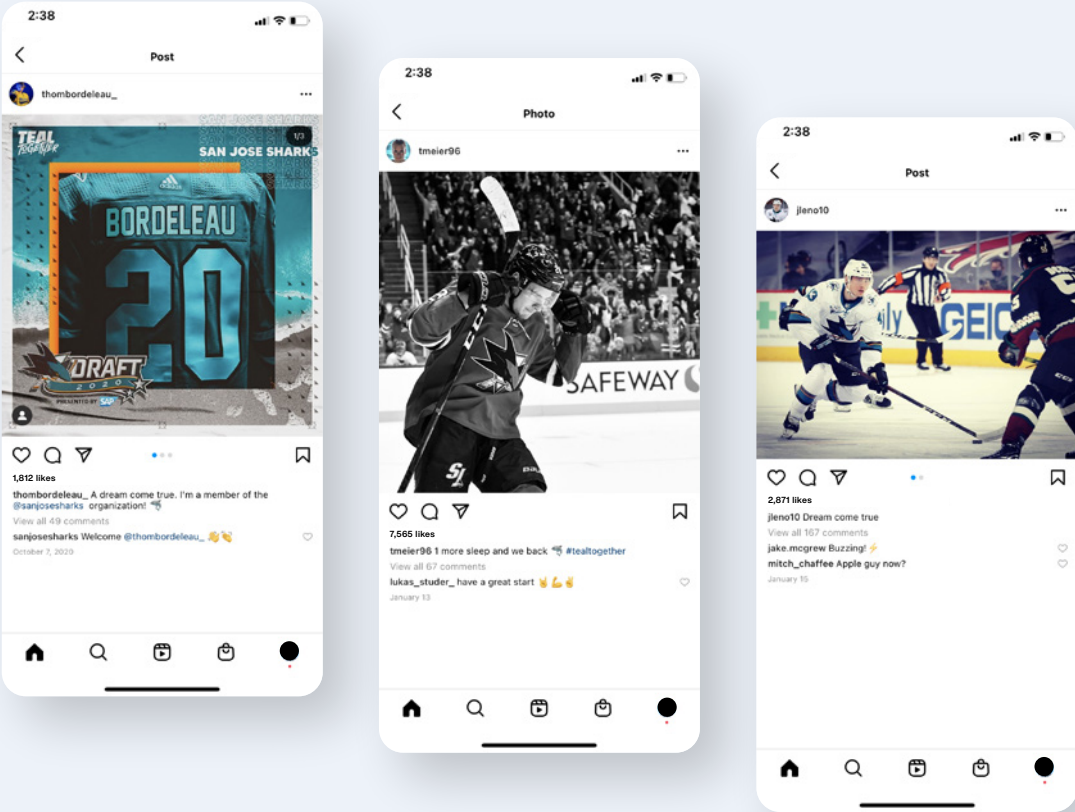
Impact

Greenfly enabled the Sharks digital staff to automate digital media distribution supporting their athletes’ social profiles and team business objectives.

Extending content beyond the Sharks’ social channels has allowed the staff to amplify their brand and partner programs and engage fans more deeply. The team distributed over 4,400 unique digital assets to more than 20 players on the Sharks roster during the truncated 2020-21 season. Sharks athletes significantly expanded their personal brands by posting social content consistently throughout training and during the season. They even outpaced NHL player averages in Instagram follower growth (170%) and interaction rate (17%).

With this success, the Sharks digital team hopes to expand athlete-driven content more fully to sponsor initiatives. Many activations that have homes on social or digital platforms are potentially strong fits for their partnerships, giving digital media a clear line back to team revenue. They know that with Greenfly, they can seed high-value content to partners seeking ways to engage more with their brand.

This digital strategy promises to continue bringing “the Teal” closer to Sharks fans everywhere.



Results

20+

Sharks players

4,400+


unique assets sent to players*

+170%

Sharks players Instagram follower growth (vs. other NHL players**)

Sources:
*Greenfly, Jan 14 – July 26, 2021;
**CrowdTangle, a public insights tool owned and operated by Facebook, during NHL Regular Season: Jan 14 – May 14, 2021.
Photos page 1 and 2: Courtesy of San Jose Sharks

About Greenfly



The Greenfly software platform enables sports teams and leagues to collect, organize and distribute non-live digital media and transform their partners and athletes into their biggest promoters.