

# | Designing for OTT Live Streaming:

## 10 Best All-round Practices

Television brought entertainment to our homes for almost a century, but it was no match for OTT's sheer range of diverse content, non-linear menus, flexible business models, and range of distribution options. Across the world, OTT adoption increased exponentially during the Covid-19 pandemic, as people stayed home, satisfied with a supersaturated range of content to choose from. The pandemic also saw live events move online, including classes, employee town halls, customer seminars, conferences, fitness sessions, music concerts, and major sports events like the Olympics and the Indian Premier League, a hugely popular cricket tournament in India. Although people who attended online events missed the social bonding and excitement of attending in-person, the world was introduced to new possibilities of interacting online, from shopping to studying or gaming. Whether for the excitement of sports events and music concerts, or the purposefulness of learning, live streaming has become a new way to engage global and niche audiences alike.





## | Live streaming is the new kid on the block

Even prior to the pandemic, China had already begun live **streaming shopping** events, with Alibaba's Taobao Live shopping channel, launched in May 2016. Singles Day, a major shopping event in China, relies heavily on interactive live streaming. In fact, **as per a survey in 2020**, two-thirds of Chinese consumers said they had bought products via livestream in the previous year. The market for live streaming is definitely here to stay.

**While adoption of live streaming is lower in Western countries, there is potential.** Foresight Research projects that live stream shopping could reach \$11 billion in the United States. This is substantiated by consumer behavior – according to Gartner, U.S. viewers between the ages of 18 and 43 spent 63 percent of their overall TV viewing time watching on average on streaming versus cable, broadcast or satellite. In fact, predictions are that by 2026, the number of users for OTT video will grow to over **3.9 billion**.

Live streaming via OTT has immense possibilities, but companies would be unwise to approach creating apps or content delivery using the same set of principles as watching a series. The experience of an event is different from that of watching television, so the user experience must be reimagined from the start.

The next challenge is loyalty – despite the growing number of viewers, with innumerable choices and varied experiences available online, retaining customers is critical to keeping the business of OTT profitable. OTT platforms need to move from offering a static viewership to an immersive experience where the audiences are fully engaged. Live streaming offers this possibility – connecting users among themselves in real time and with the content like never before!

## | Interactive live streaming – a new set of user expectations



Interactive live streaming is the next revolution of OTT, where audiences can engage with the content and with each other during live streaming. Infusing content with interactive elements like predicting the show's outcome, chat, polls, sharing on social media, or giving alternative viewing paths keep audiences engaged, and create a sense of community and subscriber stickiness.

When it comes to interactive live streaming, the user's expectations are very different from what they want out of leisurely drama or family sitcom shows. Designing interactive elements for a live streaming event needs insight into what users really want – which is context-specific. For example, while attending a sports match, users want the excitement of the crowd, but while consulting a doctor, they want the privacy of a calm office. In this way, they expect a high-fidelity experience; one that is as close as it gets to real life.

## Best practices in designing for OTT live streaming personas

**#1 Simplified sign in:** While viewers may not mind taking the time to sign in or subscribe when they want to watch a movie, they don't want to be asked too many questions when it comes to live shows. The login process must be simplified and customized to the event. Much like in real life, if you were attending a live match at the stadium, you just want to get to your seat as soon as possible, so a quick OTP (short for One-Time Password sent via SMS, valid for a few minutes) login works. But while attending an art auction, for example, you may want to browse around before the auction begins, and like to be offered selections as per your personal aesthetic.

**#2 Content discovery and personalization:** There are differences in how users discover content on video-on-demand (VOD) versus live streaming. While OTT VOD providers use algorithms to suggest content based on viewing preferences, live streaming discovery is heavily influenced by social media and peer recommendations. Since time is ticking and no one wants to miss any of the highlights during any live streaming event, the content should be discoverable with a 'Zero-click' discovery i.e., the moment a user opens an app, the live content should be just right there, beaming!



**#3 Interaction with the content:** Audiences want to be able to have the power to influence the direction of the event or show. They want to participate. For example, reality shows may build in options for audiences to choose an answer or rate a contestant, while sitting at home instead of needing to be part of the studio audience to do so. For other events such as town hall meetings, polls and chat windows can source opinions and shape the dialogue. Live sports events offer fans the ability to predict the player's performance or score.

**#4 Going social:** Wanting to share an experience with others is an innate social need; all formats of live streaming build on this to create a longer-term relationship with participants online and expand their reach. Watch parties may be over-rated for movies and team bonding, but they work well for sports fans who are crazy about watching games with their teams of supporters. Creating seamless transitions to and from social media to live streaming events will not only add to the viewer's experience but also promote the channel and its content. Can viewers watch a match directly from their social media feed? Or can they share screenshots or sections of video online with their friends, with their own commentary? Similarly, while shopping online, being able to discuss and share purchases with friends, or while studying together, being able to have a private chat is much like passing a note in class.

**#5 Targeted advertising and merchandising:** Keeping the context in mind, OTT live streaming has the ability to partner with advertisers to create relevant and personalized approaches. Sports merchandisers could for example advertise your team's jersey to you, and allow you to directly order it in time for the match. A shopping live stream could advertise physical stores near the user in case they want to see the product if it is a high value purchase, or tie up with dealers offering test rides for vehicles.

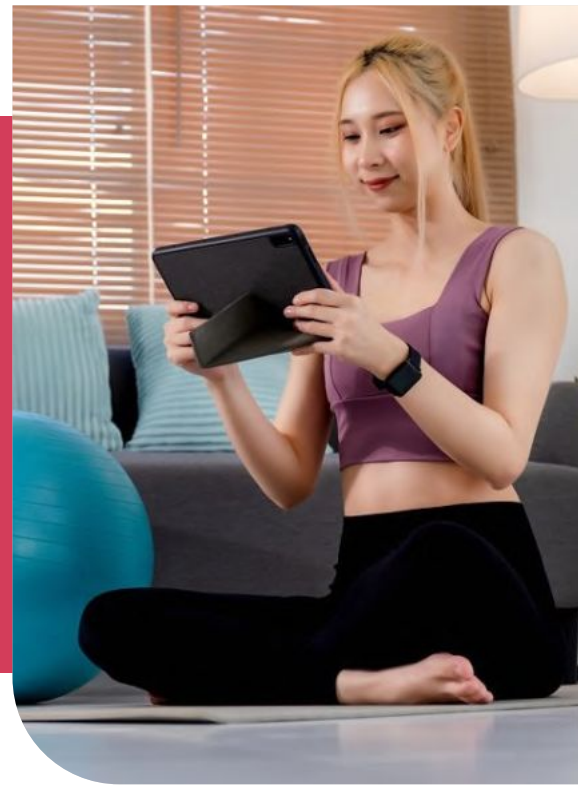
**#6 Nurturing loyalty through engagement and gamification:** Bringing interactive elements to live streaming keeps audiences engaged, and lays the foundation of a longer-term relationship. But after a while, audiences are still looking at what's in it for them. Predicting which player may hit a six in cricket or score a goal maybe fun for a while, but after that how does it help? Or for students in an online class, being interactive helps keep them engaged, but how do educators motivate them to stay engaged? This is where gamification comes in.

Brands and OTT channels have an opportunity to build loyalty using interactive elements, which again is context-specific. Overlaying a system of reward points, or tokens that can be awarded to the participant every time they interact can not only take the level of excitement up, but also keep them coming back.

The **Rugby Football League**, a new US-based rugby seven series plans to create a strong live betting proposition, working alongside leading technology companies to incorporate new innovations and gamification aspects. In India, **MX Player** introduced pure-play gaming through MX Coins. Users can win MX Coins that unlock premium content, earn discounts and avail offers on popular eCommerce platforms such as Paytm, Myntra and others.

Gamification can help build loyalty to brands and channels. In a **clever campaign, Under Armour launched a surprise trivia game at the NBA playoffs**. Whenever Steph Curry shot a three-pointer, the game Steph IQ would launch. There were prizes for those who could answer eight multiple-choice questions within the time window. A prize pool and the chance to enter a raffle to win the "Curry 5" signature shoe, playoff tickets, or Under Armour gear kept fans hooked, a win-win for the NBA's viewership and Under Armour's sales.

There are several possibilities to design and build a gamified approach, irrespective of the format of live streaming. What spells success is the depth of user insights and context relevance that goes into designing these loyalty programs. If an Edtech channel is trying to create an online community of students, badges that help peers identify the champions, quizzes, trivia contests, or competition leagues that are interesting for students. For an online shopping channel, calling out influencers with a unique sense of fashion or reward points for discounts may be more motivating.



## **Technology considerations to keep in mind, before going live**

**#7 DRM (Digital Rights Management):** An obvious aspect of live streaming is to secure the content rights to broadcast the event. These can be expensive and complicated, varying from region to region. Digital rights management (DRM) is a must to assure the OTT platforms and the content owners that their valuable content is distributed and consumed appropriately.

**#8 Live streaming technology stack:** Unlike a physical venue, a live event is watched on a multitude of devices available to viewers. How the event gets covered from the location and streamed to individual devices must be worked out in detail. Besides planning video production, and streaming bandwidth, you also need to support the universe of devices and platforms – from iPhones and iPads to Android devices using Chrome or Edge.



**#9 Near real-time experience:** In any event, latency is a critical factor in the live streaming experience – viewers expect minimum or zero buffering (imagine watching an F1 race but you hear about the outcome from a friend or on social media). If you are gaming online, low latency could cause the user to lose the game or actual money. These situations cause OTT players to lose customer loyalty. Low latency must be built into the streaming experience. A strong Content Distribution Network (CDN) dispersed across regions will help deliver the event to viewers at the same time, despite being in different parts of the world. Designing the video player with adaptive bitrate streaming (ABR) can reduce or eliminate rebuffering if the viewer's internet is slow or fluctuating by reducing the video resolution, keeping the stream live, and resulting in a seamless viewer experience.

**#10 Livestream analytics:** Interactivity is the main differentiator in live streaming – An important aspect is to consider how analytics can be designed for such events. Metrics on audience engagement and video playback experience are critical in understanding and continuously improving the live streaming experience. Tracking concurrent users, likes, and chat messages shared during a live interaction give an insight into audience engagement. Other metrics like rebuffering count/ratio, bit rate, EBVS (Exit Before Video Start), etc. offer insight into the quality of the video playback experience.





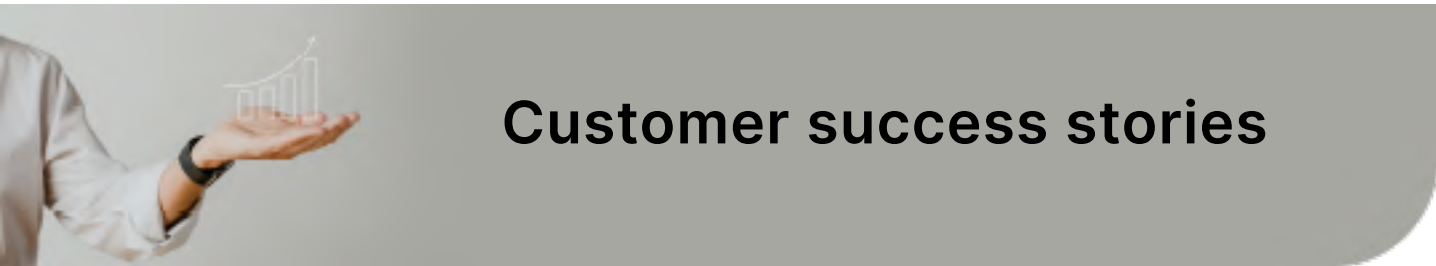
## **Interactive live streaming on OTT is re-shaping digital interactions**

Moving beyond TV shows, OTT is bringing the world into living rooms (and pockets) through interactive live streaming. Almost any industry can explore the possibilities that the medium offers – shopping experiences, sporting events and concerts, or entertainment. Besides the understanding of the technology involved, they need to also understand the digital journey of the user, and design an experience that resonates with the brand, which is as close to real life as possible. OTT is here to stay, and digital natives are hooked. Brands would be smart to explore the potential for loyalty and new revenue that it has to offer.

## **Robosoft: End-to-End Emotional Experience Engineering in Media & Entertainment**

At Robosoft, we have the expertise to understand the user's emotional journey to craft digital streaming experiences that captivate your audience. Our services include product strategy and design through development and continual service improvement. Our team of design thinking experts, designers and software engineers are proven and trusted partners in the media & entertainment industry having built highly engaged communities for brands such as Discovery, Viacom, Sony Entertainment Television and more.





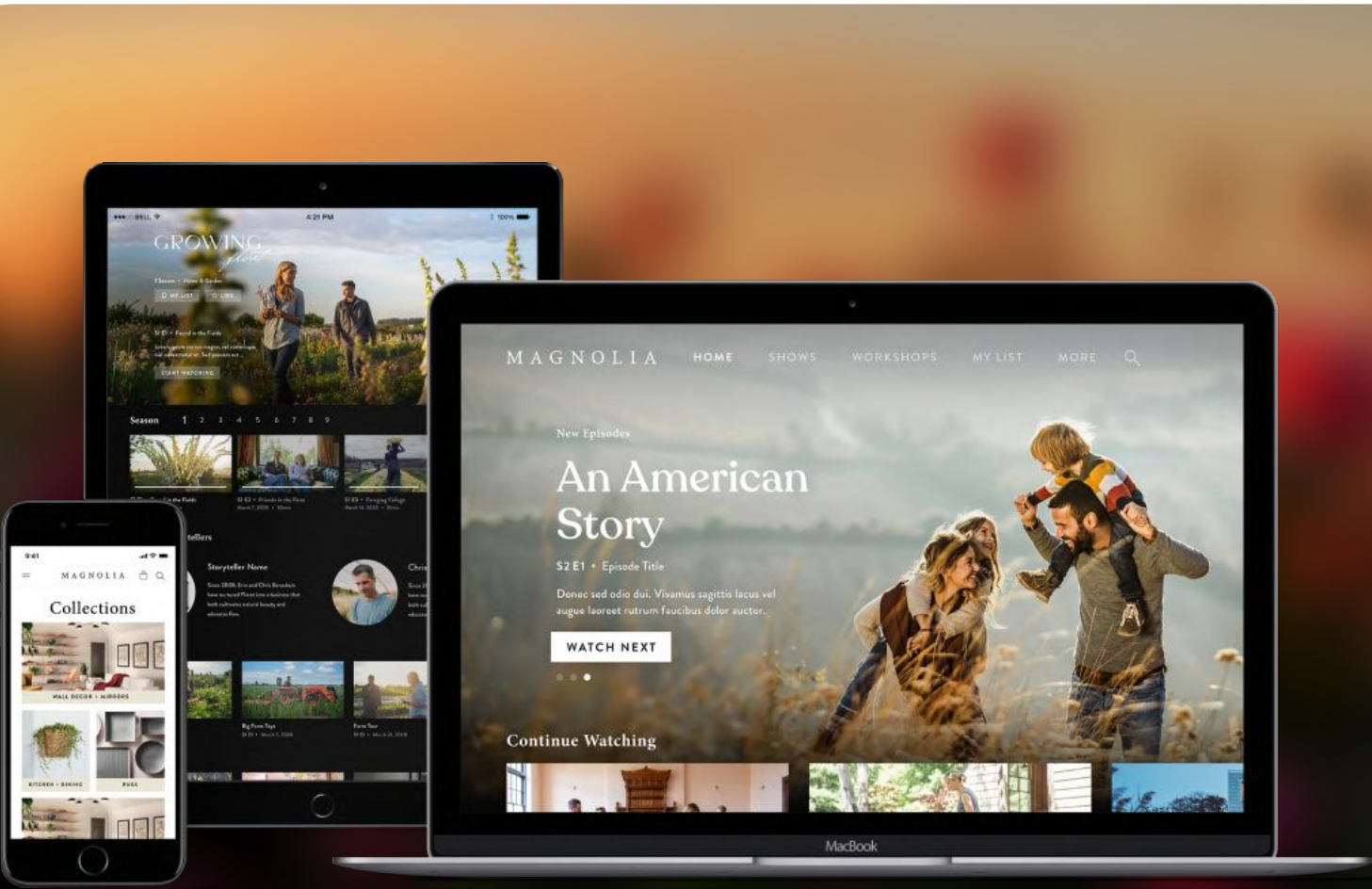
# Customer success stories



## Magnolia

In July 2021, the Magnolia Network - showcasing content from home renovation gurus Chip & Joanna Gaines was launched on the Discovery Plus streaming service. We built well-integrated apps for connected TVs, and mobile platforms across device types and form-factors. The app has received great response from end consumers and the customer.

[Know more.](#)





## Discovery+

Discovery, one of the leaders in the infotainment sector wanted to enter the Indian OTT market with a platform that offers a unified & seamless digital experience. We delivered an experience which took into account more than 4,000 hours of infotainment and lifestyle content across 40 plus genres and several languages.

[Know more.](#)



## Global Cycling Network

GCN is world's largest online cycling channel with more than 2 million subscribers. The client wanted to create an interactive platform, where the global cycling community can share and consume rich content related to cycling. We conceptualized the product through Design Thinking workshops, design & development of web and mobile (iOS, Android) based VoD platform for cyclists and cycling enthusiasts.



## Client testimonials



### MAGNOLIA NETWORK

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Robosoft's commitment to being a good partner is unparalleled. They've worked relentlessly to develop a unique experience for the Magnolia brand that has been well received by stakeholders and customers alike (both the Apple and Google Play app stores have consistently held a 4.9 star rating). Despite multiple pivots in the road to launch and an aggressive timeline, Robosoft has consistently delivered day in and day out.

Matthew Borunda, VP of Product - Magnolia Direct-to-Consumer at Discovery Inc.

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### discovery+

“

Discovery+ earlier this year, had a breakthrough launch in a cluttered OTT market like India with a differentiated product targeted at lifelong learners and passionate communities. Their team comprises an extremely dedicated bunch of folks with a keen problem-solving approach and under the stellar leadership of Ravi Teja, Jay Shah, Srinidhi Rao, and Pooja Bal, they have been the kind of dependable partners that a lot of brand would be fortunate to have. I wish them and their team the best for their future.

Issac John, Ex-Business Head, Discovery Plus, Discovery India

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