

COVID-19 & Esports - Part 3 - Implications For the Future

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In Part 1 of this article, I noted the stark contrast between how the esports industry was reacting and adapting to the changes wrought on society and the economy by the COVID-19 virus in comparison to many other industries. In Part 2 of the article, I explained some of the attributes of gaming and esports, citing them as reasons that might support a strong affinity for participants that perhaps should not be underestimated in the longer term. In Part 3, I will suggest what such increased affinity may imply for the gaming and esports industry in the future.

While the post-COVID-19 world will undoubtedly largely mirror much of what preceded it, some changes are likely inevitable:

- Health concerns and issues will be treated as a higher priority, as will modes of behaviour that support safer health outcomes;
- People will be more comfortable with socializing online, and will have developed a greater familiarity with the online tools that foster such relationships;
- People will be more trusting of, and willing to accept, commercial matters transacted online;
- There will be greater acceptance of virtual activity than ever before;
- Commercial businesses will focus on online sales, marketing and relationships in an unprecedented fashion; and
- Social distancing, having become a norm for an extended period of time, will impact how people perceive appropriate personal space and privacy norms.

Gaming and esports, given the attributes cited earlier, are well-suited to these societal changes.

It is not, however, only the nature of societal change that is important to note, but its pace and breadth as well. In the past, societal change has generally occurred in a geographically uneven fashion, with changes occurring in one jurisdiction often taking many years, or even decades, to be taken up in another jurisdiction, if at all. The COVID-19 pandemic will now re-write societal norms around the world at the same time, as many jurisdictions, regardless of political affiliation, creed or level of affluence, adopt similar protective measures. This development is obvious when we realize the pervasive effect of these circumstances on a global level, with restrictions and requirements imposed on people and business at a speed that literally has been unmatched in history.

Accordingly, we will all be forced to re-evaluate how we interact with each other and what constitutes acceptable and favorable forms of activity. Inevitably, such a re-examination favours newer and more available paradigms, particularly if they have supplanted older forms of activity for a period of time. To use an analogy, it is difficult to return to watching black-and-white TV programming once one has spent a bit of time with the colour version. And while it may not be the case for everyone, gaming and esports will constitute colour TV for many.

The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly a health catastrophe for the world. It should not be taken lightly. This holds true beyond its obvious effects on people's health. It will engender a variety of societal changes as well. Some of these changes will ripple through peoples' lives with only passing effect. In certain areas

of activity, however, those favourably positioned to suit the restructured patterns of behavior and perspective, lasting change is more likely. We can expect that gaming and esports will likely be amidst this grouping of activity that is fated to experience such a wave of new prominence - and should prepare for it accordingly.

The Esports & Gaming Group at Aird & Berlis provides its clients with a multi-disciplinary team of professionals familiar with the esports ecosystem. Our lawyers, many of whom are gamers themselves, are active in the esports sector beyond simply providing legal services. They frequently write and speak on a variety of esports-related matters, with recent topics of note including the opportunities available within the Canadian marketplace, integrity issues and the relevance of esports to the gambling sector. They work with policy makers and legislators to formulate policies that will ensure the open and beneficial growth of an industry that continues to have unlocked potential. In short, we are fully invested in promoting the success of esports in every way.

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