

Q&A With Ryan “OpTic J” Musselman

OpTic Gaming Co-Founder

On How It All Started

Q : When did you start OpTic Gaming, and how did you decide to start an eSports team?

RM : OpTic was born in 2006, and the original intent was to compete online, primarily as a pick-up team who played together after work and school. The eSports scene for Call of Duty, our first eSport, was in its infancy. You would only find tournaments online, and it was mainly for bragging rights. In 2009, H3CZ [Hector “H3CZ” Rodriguez] and his brother started creating content, leading to a strong fan base and ultimately creating a desire to expand into eSports given that CoD was on the rise. 2010 became the year our professional CoD team first competed at a LAN, although in 2007 H3CZ and I competed at a small event in Florida (we placed third).

Q : What was the first thing you did to get the team rolling and make it official?

RM : Overall, it was truly paying attention to the eSports space: how it was developing, who the notable players were, how the up-and-comers were breaking into the scene, and so on. This is a mission and practice that will be core for generations to come, just as it is in traditional sports today.

Q : Can you talk about the process of recruiting players? How did you go about finding people to recruit to the team, and what kind of tryouts/auditions/interviews did you have?

RM : Gamebattles.com was a strong source for player recruitment. It essentially was our virtual database for tracking teams and players and getting to know who was on the rise.



Q : Who was your first team sponsor, and how did you get that lined up?

RM : Our first team sponsor was a competitive gaming website that is no longer in existence, known as NxGamers.com. They saw the early traction Gamebattles.com was achieving and ultimately wanted to compete. It's unfortunate it didn't work out, but we truly enjoyed our time with them. The sponsorship came about through the development of online relationships in forums and Xbox Live. In fact, we can attribute a lot of our OpTic friendships to Xbox Live and various online forums. If NxGamers.com was not our sponsor, we would not have met H3CZ . . . he was a referee on the site and quickly became a friend of OpTic because he was always available to help.

Q : Does OpTic have a home base where team members live and practice?

RM : We have two large houses for professional players and content producers to practice, live-stream, create

content, and curate relationships. Scuf Gaming was very supportive, like always, in helping us acquire our current CoD house, and as you can see from the many videos, it's served as the main stage for our media efforts.

Q : OpTic Gaming of course has several teams based on various games the organization competes in. When do you know that a new game warrants consideration for its own team?

RM : There's no ultimate formula so far, but the big indicators for us to consider expanding usually start with active community support: Is there an audience? Do they love it? Is there a steady and consistent rate of adoption? Next up is development: Is it built for competition? Does the developing company understand eSports? Is there an established infrastructure to continue to enhance the game for eSports? We also have to consider developer support: Is there an official league or commitment to work with an organization that runs leagues? Are tournament earnings large enough to attract top talent and justify the time and resources needed to becoming a professional? These things are just a starting point. It's very difficult for new games to spawn into fully supported and well-rounded eSports.

Q : At this point, eSports is clearly more than a fad. When you started OpTic, did you foresee eSports getting as big as it has?

RM : When we started OpTic, it was more about friends getting together after school and work to improve our craft and play for the love of

the game, as well as the competition. To this day, that core foundation still rings true, and I see it played out in all aspects

of our organization, from competition to content creation. That said, I don't think we really knew the full potential

of eSports, yet remained positive, hopeful, and active in helping it grow. Core to the development of OpTic is our commitment to support exponential eSports growth.

OpTic Sponsor DXRacer: What We Look For In An eSports Team

Ever wonder how gaming gear companies choose the teams they sponsor? We did, too, so DXRacer's Dan Leshock told us.

Q: How many gaming teams/organizations does DXRacer have formal relationships with?

DL: Our eSport presence is quite impressive, with over 30 organizations under our banner! We pride ourselves on partnering with the best teams in eSports.

Q: What kinds of things does your company do for eSports teams as part of its sponsorship agreements?

DL: Aside from supporting the team financially, DXRacer has a wide array of benefits for being under our banner, such as streaming opportunities on the DXRacer Twitch page, invitations to attend events with DXRacer, and quarterly activations on social media. However, one of the coolest perks that we provide to teams is the creation of their own custom chair. These are used to outfit their homes and streams, as well as an additional merchandise item for the community. It is a cool way to solidify and push the partnership.

Q: Do teams come to you and ask for sponsorship, or do you scout out teams to offer sponsorships to?

DL: It really is a mixture of the two. Many teams reach out directly, but we also scout around and keep tabs on specific teams. Part of my position at DXRacer involves analyzing upcoming games and where the company will want to have a presence. From there, we find teams that can fit that role and more.

Q: What criteria do you use when deciding whether to sponsor a gaming team, and how much weight does each factor carry?

DL: While team inquiries are handled on a case-by-case basis, we like to focus on three major factors for any evaluation: community size and growth, the games they play and their North American/global ranking for them, and their ability to push the partnership for both themselves and DXRacer. Each of these pieces creates the groundwork for team evaluation and holds equal weight on how we assess an inquiry.

Q: What's the best advice you have to offer teams that are out there right now looking for sponsors?

DL: Unique offerings are key. As sponsorships develop out in the space, they require more time and dedication from the team to make it stand out against the crowd. Be open to unique activations that are not typical of other teams. Continually innovate your processes and bring ideas on how to push the sponsor's brand further, while bringing overall benefits to your organization. And finally, always have a nice presentation ready for anyone you talk to!



Q: What's the over/under on years until eSports events outsell traditional sporting events?

RM: I don't have a specific number, but to speak in terms of numbers, we're already seeing the beginnings of this trend. There have been multiple articles over the past few years that show how League of Legends and Dota 2 have surpassed viewership over the World Series, BCS, and the NBA finals. It's not only impressive, but a true testament to the growing power of the supporting mediums like YouTube, Twitch, and more.

Q: What's your proudest moment as a co-founder of OpTic Gaming?

RM: It's a combination of two milestones. First, seeing the success of my friend Hector as he took something so raw in its early days and turned it into an organization with an incredible following. Hector and I met through competition on Xbox Live 11 years ago, and it was an honor to have him as one of my groomsmen when I got married in 2015. It's a testament to the unique relationships people are building in eSports. He is someone I have come to respect and has a hilarious personality that is so perfect for the gaming scene. Coupled with that, officially coming onboard in a full-time capacity to team with Hector on developing OpTic for future success and opportunity. I'm sorry, I can't just do one moment—there are three—but I feel they all sync. In 2010 at MLG Dallas, the term "Green Wall" was coined in response to a host of fans and OpTic members all wearing green, standing behind our players yelling loudly as they competed. That was my first MLG event, and to this day, it remains my favorite. ■