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ecch:

"Fubles.com is […] one of the most active sport communities in Europe: started in 2007 it became a company in 2009 now boasting over 25.000 users and more than 7.000 matches already played."

Techcrunch, 2011

"Fubles.com is intelligently simple. Just choose what, when, where and who you want to play with."

Forbes, 2011

FUBLES

The birth of a Sport Social Sharing Platform

Soccer is the world's most popular sport. Crowds of people watch professional Soccer and practice it at amateur level. In Italy, it is considered the national sport. However, every time Vito Zongoli, an engineering student at Politecnico di Milano, wanted to wear the soccer uniform and his shin guards to play, he had to go through a real quest made of onerous phone calls and heavy persuasion in order to find enough people to play.

Organizing a simple game with his friends was always a big deal. It was time consuming and not always successful. Furthermore, there is a saying among engineers: "if you have to repeat an action more than three times, you have to find something that can do it for you." Vito must have looked for it without success and that's why he made it himself. In April 2007, Vito started the design of an online tool that was meant to solve his problems in organizing these games with his friends. He created a website right on the wave produced by the emerging social networks *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

The website was pioneering a new way to consume sport. It basically created the segment of "pick up" matches. That is, it enabled casual players to join a match even without any prior knowledge or friendship tie with the other players. The only endorsement needed to

This case was prepared by Andrea Blasco and Kevin Boudreau

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play was to be enrolled through the website and therefore being part of the Fubles community.

After a while, without any real marketing promotion, the number of users and games started growing, even though the website was really basic. In few months the website evolved into a community and attracted many people among which three of the four future co-founders of the company: Mirko, Stefano and Giuseppe (see **Exhibit 1** – for a more detailed time line of the events). They all had in common the same passion for sport and the feeling that Fubles had a chance to become a great company. In a short time, they formed a small team, all under 31, sports fans and players but also business and tech whizzes who started thinking bigger.

In October 2009 they established the company Fubles S.r.l. and, few months later, they launched a complete new version of Fubles much more functional and appealing (see **Exhibit 2** – for the website's homepage and a number of other screenshots).

The 2.0 version of the website was a mirror of their shared vision of a business running on two sides of the market. On the one side, Fubles aimed to become the place that consumers rely on to manage and share their sport activities and achievements. That is, offering the chance to save money and time while increasing their satisfaction and engagement. On the other side, Fubles was building a marketplace where the other "players" of this field have interest to stay to obtain visibility and establish a direct and constant relationship with their target customers. Indeed, one of the interesting aspects of sport is that it connects with its consumers on many different levels. For example, an individual could play a league, coach his son, attend games, and watch Champions League on TV.

The working idea for the new website was to combine some of the most popular social network attributes with specific team sports features such as managing rosters, scoreboards, player rankings and statistics. Hence, Fubles core functionality was apparently that of a platform helping people play or organise sport matches. However, this was something that can be done, and people do, with many other means (emails, phone calls, instant messaging) or platforms (Facebook, Google calendar, Evite). What Fubles was providing in reality was different. It was a whole bunch of functionalities and experiences that players perceived as value adding and worth being preferred.

"Sport is a game that people like measuring and winning" – says Fubles S.r.l. CEO Mirko Trasciatti. "Besides organizing matches the website offers players' ratings, scorecards, feedbacks, or rankings which are features far from being added in Facebook groups or similar platforms."

In less than a year, Fubles went from one thousand players in Milan to 25.000 users, 7000 matches around Italy (Milano, Bologna, Firenze, Bari, Roma, Torino, Taranto etc.) and many thousands of sport centres stored in the database (see **Exhibit 3** - for some more recent stats about its growth). In November 2010, Simone Gallace, the founder of *Bizoona* a competitor website, joined the team and the website was eventually merged with Fubles. In the same period, the website obtained national and international awards in the web

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innovation scene and media and newspapers started writing about its network of users. (see **Exhibit 4** – for some examples).

Main challenges

In March 2011, several angel investors understood the value and the potential of the young team and financed Fubles with a 300.000 € seed investment. Suddenly Fubles had enough capital to invest in its growth and an outstanding board of directors (see **Exhibit 5** – for more information about the current company structure).

Even so, on several fronts, real uncertainty marked the future direction of Fubles.

First, in Mirko's view, "while marketing initiatives and advertising sales appear to be easier revenues streams to pursue at a seed stage level, partnerships and commissions from sport centers and intermediation in payments are likely to increase their incidence and offer a better financial cycle when reaching a critical mass of users." The challenge comes from understanding to what extent sport centres would support Fubles' social network model and how the management will possibly encourage them to adopt it.

In principle, there are enough good reasons to welcome the services from Fubles. Specifically, it increases the engagement of players in a given area, it reduces the costs to set up matches and therefore it raises the overall number of potential players, it provides rewards and incentives to players that can facilitate the management of pitches and time slots. However, the change required in adopting a more Fubles integrated managing system could fail or be too expensive and unworthy if there's not enough penetration and therefore not enough potential customers for the sports centres.

The relationships with sport centres directly connect with a second crucial issue for Fubles. That is, the management needs to spread Fubles as fast as possible so as to benefit from a large population of users and matches while establishing a solid revenue model.

Indeed, while at the end of 2011 Fubles was boasting over 60.000 users and more than 12.000 matches already played, the global penetration of Fubles was risible (worldwide) but its metrics at a local level showed promising performances. Milan, for example, had a degree of adoption of about 10% of the population target (150.000 potential soccer players). So the challenge for the management was to produce a simple diffusion model out of the successful cases of Milan and some other large Italian cities.

As explained by Mirko: "Fubles is social. It is not a standalone service that can be accessed individually. It needs players and matches. Starting up Fubles in a new city needs the reach of critical mass of players in a restricted area, a "flywheel" of matches that ensure constant playing opportunities and the establishment of a trusted environment of participants that adopt the right code of conduct."

As their past experience suggests, Fubles entry strategy in a new city or territory must ensure the foundation of a first colony of at least 500 players (in a range of 5km or 20

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minutes commuting) that plays an average of 6 matches per week. To take care of matches, within this colony there must be at least 10 frequent organizers.

If these conditions are met the colony is set to grow organically by word of mouth and viral dynamics at a 15% monthly growth with an average of a new monthly match every 50 new players acquired.

At this point, the management believes that the best strategy to pursue in order to spread Fubles is to focus on Pick up soccer matches colonizing the major soccer cities of Europe.

THE PLATFORM: AN OVERVIEW

Fubles is a Social Sport Sharing Platform that helps users to organise pick-up sport matches of all types. In other words, it courts distinct user groups that use the SSP to interact with each other. The following are the typologies of "players" that can take advantage of using Fubles.

- **Casual Players:** People who like playing team sports and look for more playing opportunities in a safe environment reducing time and money spent to arrange matches.
- **Casual Organisers:** The ones that generally organise groups to play matches by booking the field, calling together the players and managing the roster of participants.
- **Team Leaders:** Those who manage a team organising challenges against other teams or enrolling them to competitions and leagues.
- **Sports Centres:** Sports centres interested in a more efficient management of their available pitches and time slots.
- **Organised Leagues:** Groups of people that organise sports competition or leagues, they look for visibility and the channels to collect subscriptions and memberships.
- **Sport related brands:** Companies willing to promote products by reaching their target population and establishing a special relationship with it.

Broadly speaking, Fubles provides services to three distinct groups of users. First, there are sport fans and players mainly interested in finding or booking a pitch in sport centres next to their place. Second, there are sport centres; and third, sport related brands interested in reaching their target audience.

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Players

Players who want to join Fubles can freely create an account and sign-in to the website.

The relationship with subscribed players can be broken in three different phases strictly related to the "life cycle" of a match. First, Fubles helps users in the organization of a match. Once a match is set up, Fubles add this to the list of the available matches working as a search engine to all users. Finally, after the match has been played, it gives the possibility to rate and obtain feedback about the performance.

Sport centres

A Fubles match can be played anywhere. However, organizers have the possibility to select one of the more than 4,500 sport centres stored in Fubles online database. There is a search engine page where users can look for sports centres in their geographical area by filtering by sport type, ground or covering.

To gain visibility, sport centres can choose to sign a partnership with Fubles s.r.l. that gets a 10%-15% commission on the end consumer price for the matches that are organized.

To encourage partnership agreements with sports centres, Fubles is providing a set of tools and functionalities to attract customers.

Fubles offers a managing system to sport centres. This software is meant to take care of booking, subscriptions, client records, reporting, statements, and also gives the opportunity to display the availability of the sports pitches in real time. The software itself may represent a stream of revenues as it charges monthly fees for each sport field managed.

Brands and advertisers

Since from the very beginning, Fubles has been designed as a place to run live and unconventional marketing events. For example, Fubles has recently launched a marketing initiative with Adidas that will be restricted, as a fidelity prize, to the best and more engaged players on Fubles (see **Exhibit 7** – for some other examples).

Building a reputation and eliminating any possible concern for adopters are the main reasons to maintain a hold on heavy ads banners. Nevertheless, the company gets 30% of revenues from advertising on the website. Every 1000 players there are 5.000 visits and 30.000 page-views (impressions). The average price at which advertising spaces are sold within Fubles is from 3 to 7 Euro every 1.000 impressions (see **Exhibit 8 –** for some online metrics).

WEBSITE'S KEY INGREDIENTS

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Fubles adopted a twitter style social graph and functionalities among its users. Players can follow or be followed by other players. Following a player allows his followers to know about his activities in Fubles.

Fubles players can form public or private groups called 'clubs'. Managers of a club can arrange matches for their clubs. They can arrange trainings (for their club only), challenges (against other clubs) or open challenges (against a team made of free agents).

Fubles has designed a set of rewards and status providing incentives for its players to increase the value and satisfaction in participating in Fubles. The following paragraphs will show the main experiences that Fubles provides.

1. **Peer ratings of performances**

After the match Fubles asks players to indicate who won and to give a rating to each player. The ratings range from 4 to 10.

Feedbacks are done online and are easily enforced. If a player wants to see the rating he has received he has to rate the others players first. When the rating process is over all the rates become public and everybody can see them (see **Exhibit 9** – for the typical screen view after the match).

If an enrolled player does not take part to a match, it is reported as 'no-show' during the rating process. To guarantee the creation of trusted environment, players are allowed only a limited number of no-shows in a season (it can happen to anyone) otherwise they lose access to the functionality of the site and therefore will not be able to play through Fubles.

2. **Virtual currency (*fublis*)**

Fubles introduced a virtual currency reward system to incite good behaviours and active participation. Certain actions within the platform are rewarded with "*fubli*" (see **Exhibit 10** – for looking at the current rules).

The total amount of *fubli* collected is reported on each user's profile and it is meant to signal to other players whether one's profile is of an active player in the Fubles community both on and off the pitch or not.

Users will be able to spend their *fubli* on profile enhancements or on prizes provided by sponsors and partners.

3. **Ranking players (Rango)**

To rate players beyond the performance in a single match and to describe their career, Fubles uses the "*rango*".

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The *"rango"* is a ranking system that takes into account who participated to the match, the result of the game and the ratings given and received. *Rango* points according to the level of the teams. If the stronger team wins it will earn fewer points than if the weaker team wins (it is something similar to the Elo Rating in the Chess game).

The introduction of the *rango* has given a great impulse to the community as it increased the participation level of users and therefore the number of games played.

Perhaps this is due to the possibility to reach a status within the community. Fubles encourage the formation of a status by assigning different titles to players achieving a *rango* above some thresholds.

4. **Global ranking page**

The global ranking page (see **Exhibit 11**- for a screenshot) displays on the same webpage players ranked according to their *rango*, *fubli*, number of matches played, etc.

5. **The agent**

Fubles has introduced the role of "the agent", that allows some player to entrust another person to take care of their account activities. The agent can manage other players' accounts and subscriptions helping them join or withdraw a match.

FUTURE STRATEGIES

The Fubles team has many alternative routes to follow to expand and consolidate its business (see **Exhibit 12**). Here, we want to highlight few of them.

First, geographic expansion. That is, increasing the number of users subscribed and the partnerships with the sport centres (see **Exhibit 13** – for a brief listing of the steps composing the entry process of Fubles in a city or territory)

Second, online payments. Fubles will become an intermediary between sport centres and final consumers. That is, players pay online their participation fee and Fubles takes a cut.

Third, social network. In the future, Fubles would remain a strongly differentiated category from the Social Networks Service, e.g., Facebook or Twitter. However, there are many applications or additional services that could help Fubles to monetize the work of its community.

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EXHIBIT 1 -- Time line of the events

2010

Sept: Fubles 3.0 is released

July: 40.000 players, 9.000 matches played, 1.000.000 monthly page views

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June: Fubles release ---> Fubles Planner Fubles Managing Software for Sports Centres

May: Fubles iPhone App is released Apple awards Fubles App as best app of the week (Italian AppStore)

March: Fubles raises 300.000 € seed investment

February: First matches in Madrid and New York

January: Stefano and Giuseppe start working fulltime in Fubles.

2010

December: Fubles reaches its first 20.000 players

May: Fubles launches it own virtual currency

Fubles realizes 2 country wide tournaments in collaboration with Redbull and Betfair

March: Fubles reaches its first 10.000 players

February: A ranking system (Rango) is introduced

2007 - 2009

May 2009: Fubles 2.0 is released

Jennuary 2009: The team composed by Vito Zongoli (founder), Mirko Trasciatti, Stefano Rodriguez, Fabio Cancarè, Giuseppe De Giorgi, Nito Trasciatti e Giuseppe Calbi starts working on the new Fubles

September 2008: Fubles reaches its first 1.000 players

April 2007: Vito Zongoli publishes first Fubles page

EXHIBIT 2 – FUBLES 3.0 (home page)

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EXHIBIT 2 – FUBLES 3.0 (user's profile)

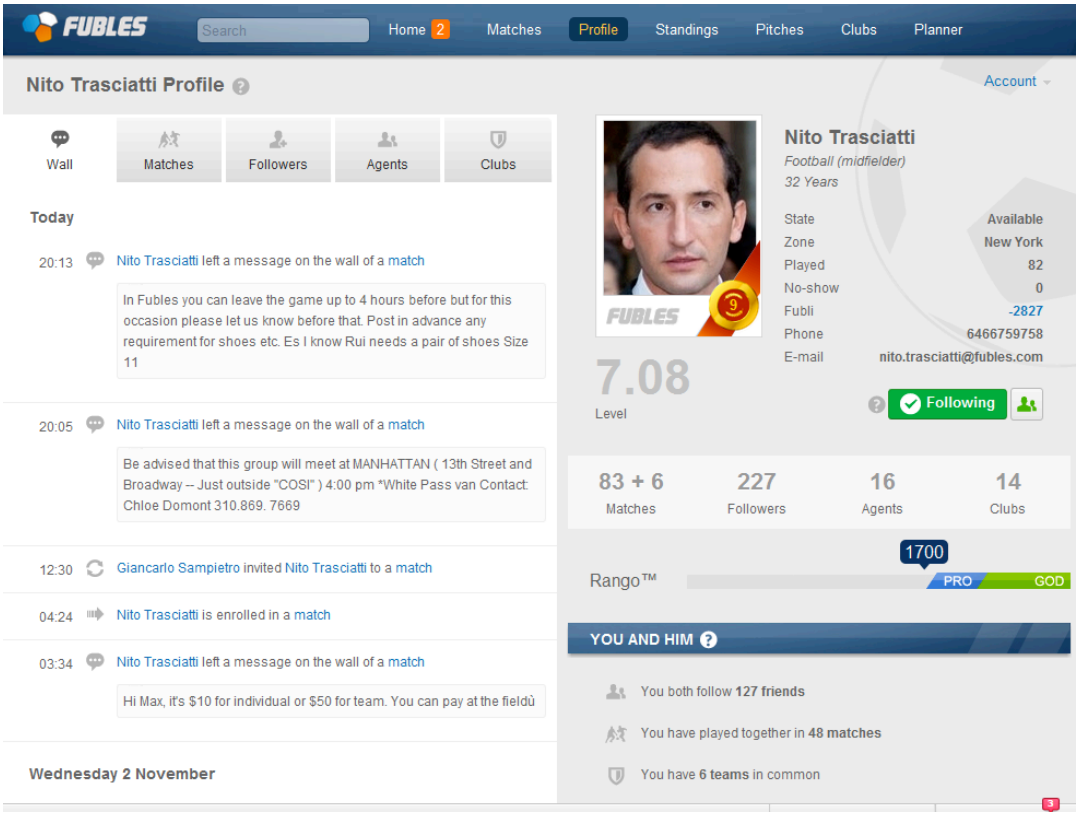

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EXHIBIT 2 – FUBLES 3.0 (sign up for a match)

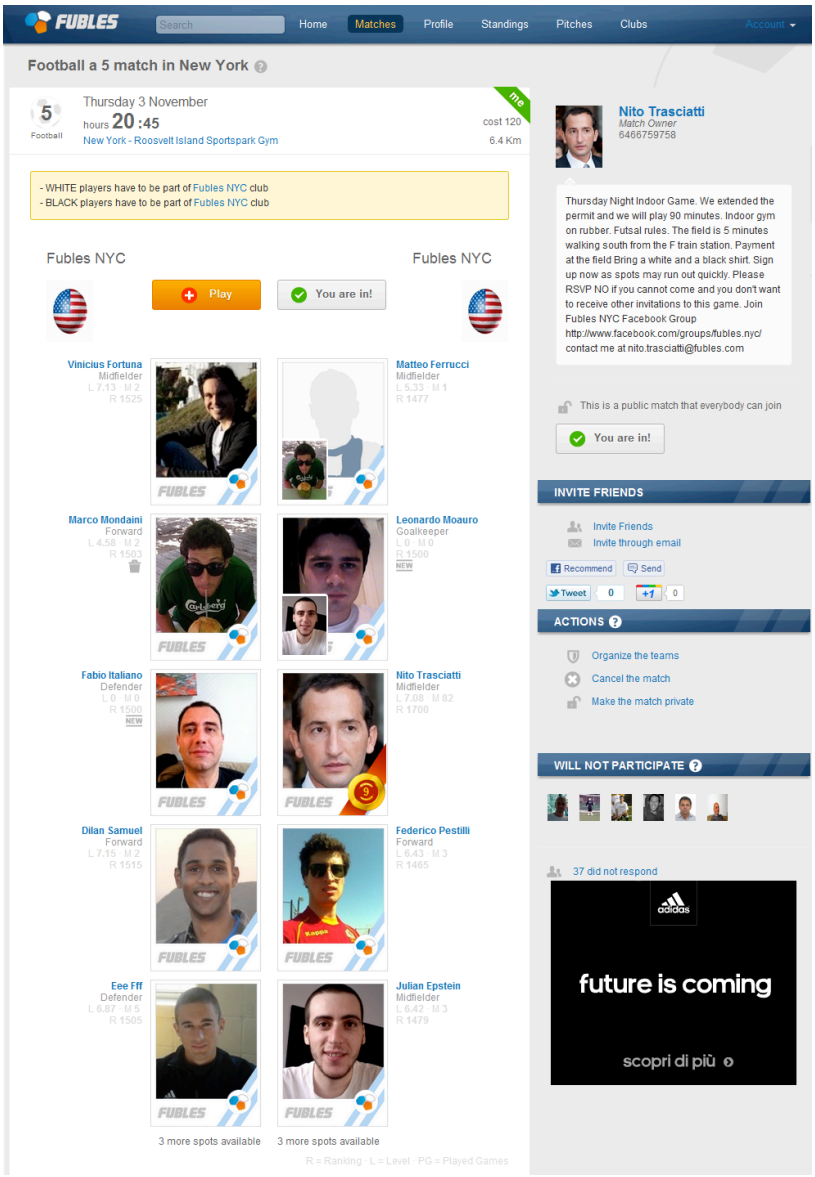

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EXHIBIT 3 – FUBLES growth in 2011

Cities	Active Users	Distribution	Monthly growth
Global	49856	100%	16%
Milan	14118	28%	15%
Rome	3618	7%	15%
Bologna	2829	6%	9%
Torino	1484	3%	14%
Madrid	563	1%	79%
Bari	542	1%	11%
Naples	536	1%	26%
Lecce	468	1%	7%
Florence	403	1%	36%
Padova	400	1%	31%
Genova	360	1%	25%
Parma	343	1%	23%
Barcelona	296	1%	124%
Palermo	293	1%	20%
Brescia	273	1%	16%

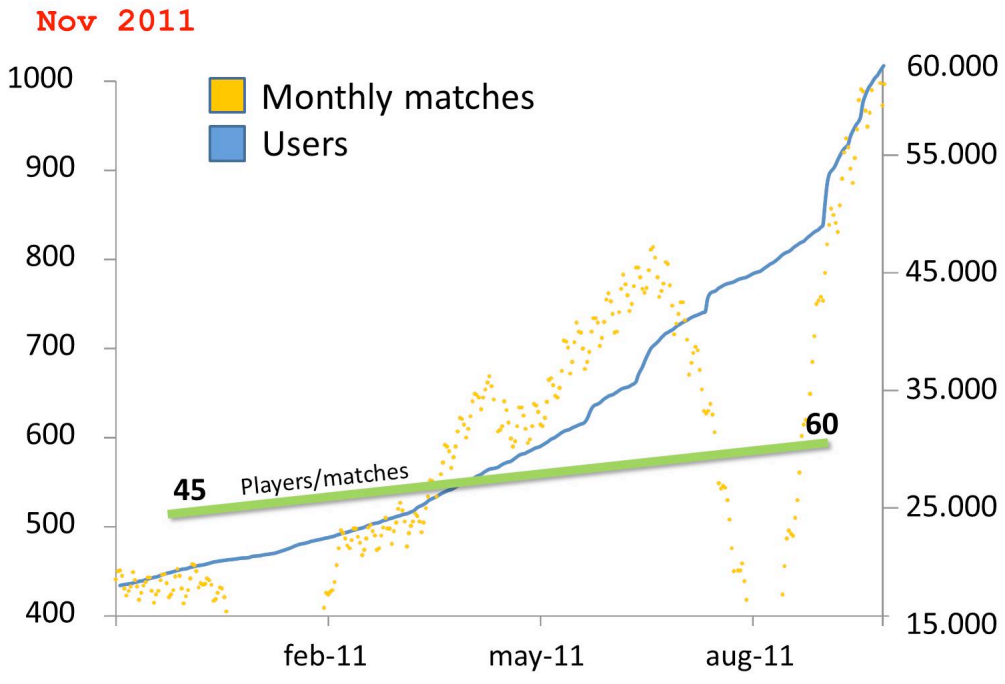

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EXHIBIT 4 – Press highlights

- web 2.0 SUMMIT

Innovation: New Ideas from Promising Start-ups

Fubles.com was the only European startup to participate at the Web 2.0 Summit, the largest conference in the field of web, held in San Francisco, that was attended by Eric Schmidt (Google CEO), Jeff Weiner (Linkedin CEO) and Mark Zuckerberg (FacebookCEO).

http://blog.web2summit.com/2010/11/15/innovation-new-ideas-from-promising-start-ups/

- Forbes

Milan's Fubles Says Go for the Game

"Fubles combines the social network features we have all come to love with specific team sports features such as managing rosters, scoreboards, player rankings and statistics"

http://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferhicks/2011/07/19/milans-fubles-says-go-for-the-game/

- Il Sole 24 ORE

Export Social Soccer

"Il sole 24 ore" the most successful economic daily newspaper ,and the fourth best selling information newspaper published in Italy, tells how some young and gifted engineers created Fubles.com, the site that reached "numbers that one doesn't expect from Silicon Valley and yet it happened in Italy".

http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/tecnologie/2011-03-17/social-calcetto-export-064518.shtml?uuid=AaD1T9GD

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EXHIBIT 5 – Company structure

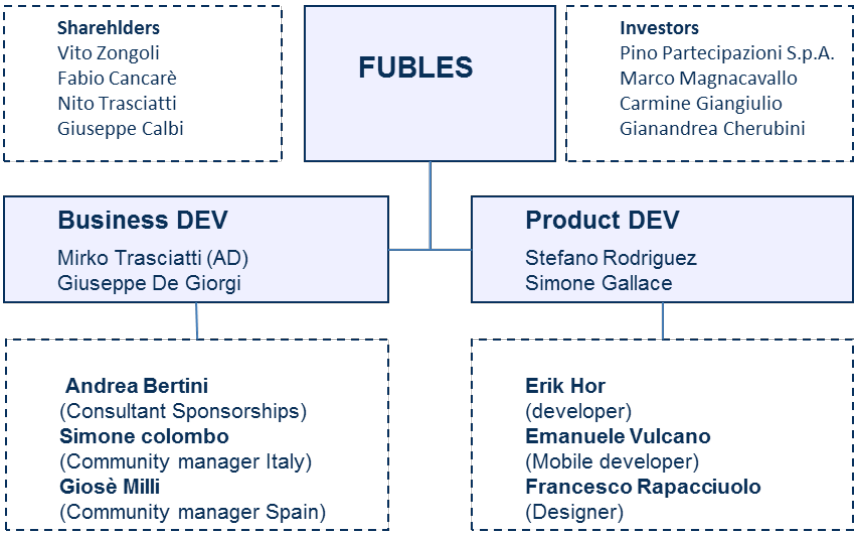

EXHIBIT 6 – How to arrange a match within Fubles

Arranging a match

An organiser who wants to set up a match in Fubles must first book the pitch and then set up the match in Fubles indicating:

- **Time** - date and hour
- **Location** - A Fubles match can be played everywhere. If the facility is not in the database it can be added in few steps contributing in a wiki like style.
- **Type of match (public or private)** - A public match is a match that everyone can join. A private match is a match restricted to invited users. It is always possibile to change the status of a match from private to public.
- **Type of match and number of players required**
- **Fees for the participation**

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EXHIBIT 7 – Some special marketing events on Fubles

Here are some example of brand and initiatives that have worked with Fubles

Betfair World Cup *March 2010*	*Red Bull Street Match* *May 2010*	*Oracle Football Tournament* *September 2010*	*Adidas Speed cel launch* *October 2011*
Managed all matches and player organization for 3,000 participants & 210 teams	Handled all player sign-up, coordination and results reporting for 1,000 people & 130 teams	Coordinated insciption to annual tournament for 300 players & 16 international teams	Fubles has been chose has been elected as the perfect place and community to launch a new tech product

EXHIBIT 8 – Online metrics (Sep. 2011)

91,263 people visited this site

- **221,124** Visits
- **91,263** Unique Visitors
- **1,531,189** Pageviews
- **6.92** Pages/Visit
- **00:06:17** Avg. Time on Site
- **32.38%** Bounce Rate
- **35.55%** % New Visits

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EXHIBIT 9 – Match screen view

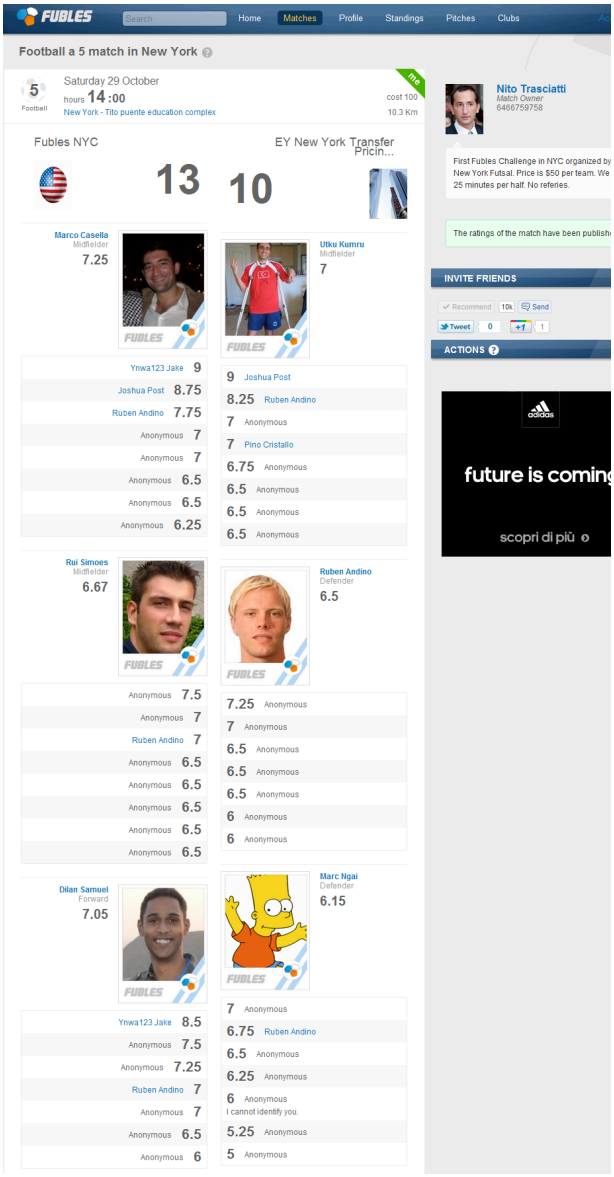

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EXHIBIT 10 – Rules to earn the virtual currency (*fubli)*

Here are the actions that help you earn Fublis

1 Play in a private match [2] 1 F

2 Play in a public match [2] 3 F

3 Join a match less than four hours before kick-off [2] 20 F

4 Play a match in Fubles Sports Centre [2] 50 F

5 Withdraw from a match within 16 to 8 hours before kick-off -25 F

6 Withdraw from a match within 8 to 4 hours before kick-off -50 F

7 Commit a No-show -10.000 F

8 Organise a private match [2] 10 F

9 Organise a public match [2] 50 F

10 Organise an open challenge match [2] 50 F

11 Organise a matche in a Fubles Sports Centre [2] 1.000 F

12 Invite a friend who is within the range of 30 km 800 F

13 Invite a friend who from a range of over 30 km 1.000 F

14 Add a new sports centre [1] 200 F

15 Add a field to an existing structure [1] 50 F

16 Install the app facebook (link) (for every notification)[3] 1 F

17 Commit an action judged fraudulent or harmful by the Fubles staff [1] -100.000 F

[1] *After review and approval by staff*

[2] *At least three players per side; Fubli credited after the release of final ratings*

[3] *Monthly final balance*

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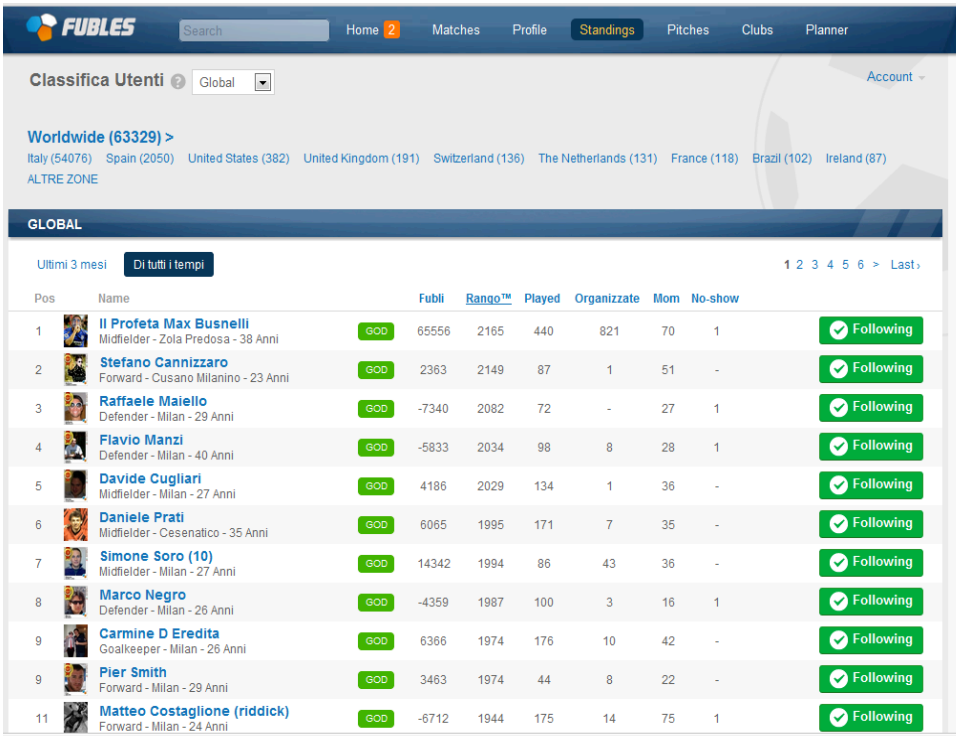
EXHIBIT 11 – Global ranking



FUBLES Search Home 2 Matches Profile Standings Pitches Clubs Planner

Classifica Utenti Global Account

Worldwide (63329) >

Italy (54076) Spain (2050) United States (382) United Kingdom (191) Switzerland (136) The Netherlands (131) France (118) Brazil (102) Ireland (87)

ALTRE ZONE

GLOBAL

Ultimi 3 mesi | Di tutti i tempi | 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Last ›

Pos	Name		Fubli	Rango™	Played	Organizzate	Mom	No-show	
1	Il Profeta Max Busnelli Midfielder - Zola Predosa - 38 Anni	GOD	65556	2165	440	821	70	1	Following
2	Stefano Cannizzaro Forward - Cusano Milanino - 23 Anni	GOD	2363	2149	87	1	51	-	Following
3	Raffaele Maiello Defender - Milan - 29 Anni	GOD	-7340	2082	72	-	27	1	Following
4	Flavio Manzi Defender - Milan - 40 Anni	GOD	-5833	2034	98	8	28	1	Following
5	Davide Cugliari Midfielder - Milan - 27 Anni	GOD	4186	2029	134	1	36	-	Following
6	Daniele Prati Midfielder - Cesenatico - 35 Anni	GOD	6065	1995	171	7	35	-	Following
7	Simone Soro (10) Midfielder - Milan - 27 Anni	GOD	14342	1994	86	43	36	-	Following
8	Marco Negro Defender - Milan - 26 Anni	GOD	-4359	1987	100	3	16	1	Following
9	Carmine D Eredita Goalkeeper - Milan - 26 Anni	GOD	6366	1974	176	10	42	-	Following
9	Pier Smith Forward - Milan - 29 Anni	GOD	3463	1974	44	8	22	-	Following
11	Matteo Costaglione (riddick) Forward - Milan - 24 Anni	GOD	-6712	1944	175	14	75	1	Following

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EXHIBIT 11 – Future possibilities of expansion

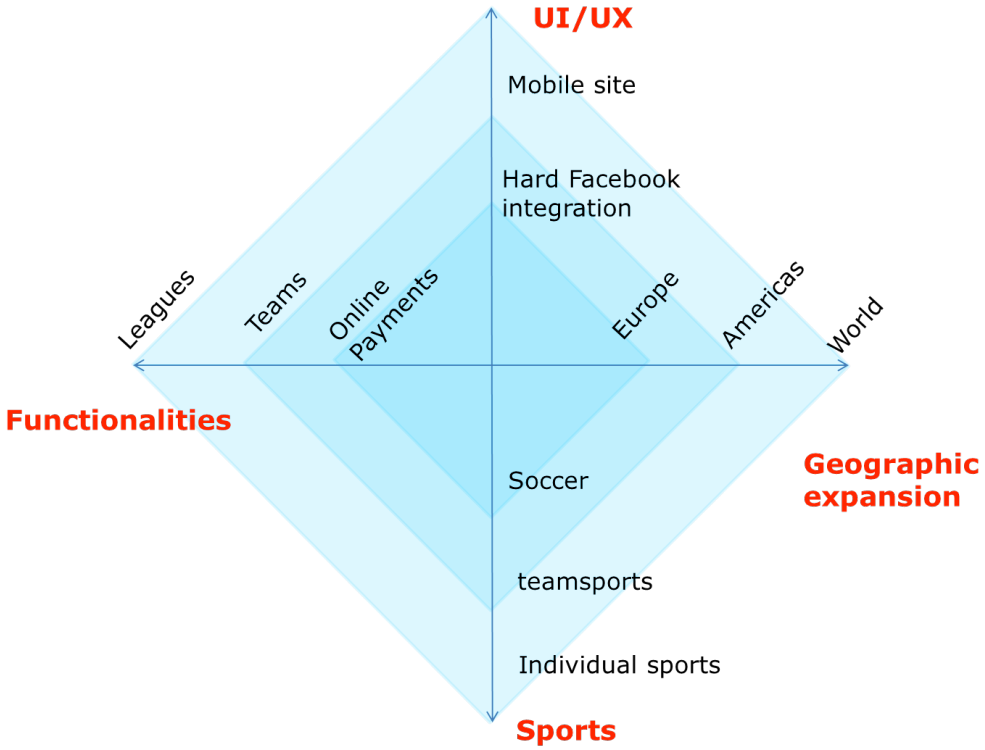

EXHIBIT 12 – Entry strategy in a new city

There are 3 phases in the colonization of a new territory.

1. Founding: 0-200 players
2. Establishing: 200-500 players
3. Colonizing: 500-2.500 players
4. Migrating: 2.500 - ∞ players

Each phase requires different roles and activities with the identification and appointment of different key persons.

1. Founding: 0-200 players

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- Identify a community founder able to provide and assist the first matches
- Launch a call to the community to spread the voice about a new territory target
- Create a Facebook group of pioneers (10-20 persons) asking them for help, train them and transmit a sense of mission.
- Map & Build the local sport centres database
- Map industry operators and players (who's who)
- Assess sport participation practices
- Establish contacts with first 1-5 sports centres
- Create first safe matches (filling them up with at least 50% of participants needed)
- Advertise online (facebook and adwords)
- Avertise offline (flyers and posters)
- Spread the word on facebook groups, google groups and local forums
- Look for free agents in competitors' sites or classifieds

2. Establishing: 200-500 players

- Design and launch incentives to push member to bring friends and set up matches
- Create launch events (one day tournaments, special matches) with prizes
- Establish contacts with other 5-10 sports centres
- Establish contacts local with big organisers
- Make first partnership with operators and sports centres
- Look for sponsorhips from brand or sports centres
- Launch call for first potential community managers
- Map, contact feed and update specialised or local influencers in news media and blogsphere
- Send a one-shot press release on mainstream media
- Explore and analysis potential local short term business model

3. Colonizing: 500-2.500 players

- Launch a contest for the community manager election (motivation based appointment)
- Identify a business model for a sustainable set of incentives for the community manager
- Draw and sign collaboration with the community manager based on tasks and objectives
- Sign partnership, sponsorships to fund local marketing initiatives (leagues, contests)
- Assist and manage local CRM

4. Migrating: 2.500 – ∞ players

- Discuss and agree new territories to colonise
- Train community manager to replicate autonomously the colonization in the new territory
- Plan and start up migration (see first phase)

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