

## New MLS Web site to offer live game package

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Major League Soccer this week plans to unveil a new Web site at [MLSsoccer.com](http://MLSsoccer.com) through which it will offer, among other elements, a new out-of-market live game package.

The new site is the centerpiece of a retooled digital strategy that brings the league's Internet rights and management in-house. [MLSsoccer.com](http://MLSsoccer.com) replaces the MLB Advanced Media-hosted [MLSnet.com](http://MLSnet.com) and arrives roughly five months after MLS team owners voted to assume control of the league and team sites.

The redesigned destination was developed with the aid of New York consultancy Rocket Fuel, which also recently worked with the NHL on its enhanced digital strategy. The site features a new video player, expanded editorial content, additional social and community features, and a new e-commerce partnership with Sports Endeavors Inc., the company behind soccer catalog Eurosport.

"Just as we recognized several years ago with the creation of Soccer United Marketing the need to build the pre-eminent soccer marketing destination in North America, so too do we recognize the need in the digital space to become the authoritative source of digital [soccer] content in the United States," said MLS President Mark Abbott.

The new video player was built with the aid of NeuLion Inc. and Microsoft's Silverlight technology. It features high-definition-like resolution and DVR-type functions and also will enable the new out-of-market game package, which will retail for \$39.95.

Sales projections for the package were not immediately available, but those video subscriptions are seen as one of the primary revenue sources for the new site, along with advertising and e-commerce.



Additional video offerings on the site will include on-demand and archival content, near-real-time highlights, and condensed games. Most of the additional video elements will be free to users, but some will carry a charge.

"There will be a very high degree of flexibility with this content in which we will encode something once and it will be able to go straight out to the PC, mobile and any other IP-connected device, which we think is very compelling," said Chris Wagner, NeuLion executive vice president.

The site's editorial coverage, meanwhile, is being led by newly hired editor-in-chief Greg Lalas and managing editor Jonah Freedman. Their goal is to cover not only MLS and the individual teams, but also international and amateur levels of the sport.

There's a Spanish-language component to the new digital efforts, as well. MLS, which believes that about one-third of its fans speak Spanish, hired Kristel Valencia to oversee online editorial content in Spanish at [FutbolMLS.com](http://FutbolMLS.com). In addition to having a link to that Spanish-language content available on the league's new home page, MLS plans to feature the Spanish-language content on its main page, alongside English-language stories.

That strategy of placing Spanish-language content on the primary English-language site stands in contrast to the more-common practice of not mixing languages on a single Web site.

As for the individual team sites, although they will reside on a common-technology platform, they will have an independent look and feel. Clubs have hired editorial managers to maintain the destinations and will have local ad inventory within their sites to sell.

The editorial teams at both the league and team levels have complete independence, Abbott said. The league expects the editorial coverage to touch on everything from sensitive issues like ongoing labor negotiations with the MLS Players Union to a potential extension of star player Landon Donovan's loan to Everton.

"We recognize for this to be a place where fans go to get content," Abbott said, "the site needs to have editorial independence, and it will."

MLS created the SUM Digital Network last year to serve as an online and mobile component of SUM, and MLSsoccer.com and the new team sites will become critical pieces of an effort to sell digital advertising across more than 70 soccer Web sites it has rolled up over the last year. Advertising sales are being led by Eric Krasnoo, who formerly worked at CBSSports.com.

Investment costs to relaunch the Web sites were not disclosed, though they were branded as "significant" by league officials. Abbott additionally declined to say when the league expects its investment in the new digital network to pay off, but he did say that the investment is "one we believe will build value strategically and financially."



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