

Bachelor's thesis

Business administration

2025

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# Growing Esports events through sales and sponsorships

– Case: Elisa Masters Espoo



Bachelor's Thesis | Abstract

Turku University of Applied Sciences

Business administration

2025 | 36 pages

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## Growing Esports events through sales and sponsorships

- Case Elisa Masters Espoo

In this thesis the growing of esports events is discussed with a focus specifically on smaller Counter-Strike 2 events. The main goal is figuring out how to grow the event called Elisa Masters Espoo by creating sales initiatives and strategies to attract sponsors, partners, and attendees.

The thesis begins with the history of esports and the growth of the scene with looks into the future. Further on moving to the theory of selling events to sponsors and attendees, is gone through, from which the thesis moves on to specifically Counter-Strike 2 events.

In the case Elisa Masters is used as an example of a smaller but reasonably successful event. Firstly, the current situation and success of the event is looked at to build ground for the research conducted.

The research conducted was done by using semi-structured interviews. Most important finding was that it is truly difficult to grow an event from a lower tier tournament like Elisa Masters to a high tier tournament status. The interview questions found out that Elisa Masters is a successful tournament without the prestige of higher tier tournaments. Major steps with the attending teams, prize pool, and marketing of the event need to be taken. The theory gives good development ideas of how to sell the event to partners and attendees.

Keywords:

Esports – Electronic Sports

CS2 – Counter Strike 2

Opinnäytetyö (AMK) | Tiivistelmä

Turun ammattikorkeakoulu

Tradenomi myyntityön koulutus

5.2025 | 36 sivua

Matias Vilkuna

## E-urheilu -tapahtumien kasvattaminen myynnin ja sponsoroinnin keinoin

-Case Elisa Masters

Tässä opinnäytetyössä käsitellään e-urheilu tapahtumien kasvattamista keskittyen pienempiin Counter-Strike 2 -pelitapahtumiin. Työn päätavoite on löytää keinoja kasvattaa Elisa Masters kaltaisia tapahtumia myynnin ja markkinoinnin kautta ja saada tapahtumaan enemmän sponsoreita, yhteistyökumppaneita ja katsojia.

Opinnäytetyö alkaa käsittelemällä e-urheilun historiaa ja kasvua, siitä edeten tulevaisuuden näkyymiin. Työ alkaa tapahtumamyynnin teoriaan kumppaneille ja katsojille. Teoria tarkentuu Counter-Strike tapahtumien kasvattamiseen myynnin ja markkinoinnin keinoin.

Casessa esimerkkinä käytetään Elisa Masters tapahtumaa, sillä se on onnistunut, mutta pienehkö tapahtuma. Aluksi tämänhetkistä tilannetta arvioidaan, jotta pohja tutkintatyölle saadaan luotua.

Tutkintatyö tehtiin puolistruktuurisilla haastatteluilla. Päälimmäiseksi havainnoksi haastatteluista jäi, kuinka vaikeaa on kasvattaa matalamman tason turnauksia korkeatasoiseksi turnaukseksi. Haastattelukysymyksistä selvisi, että Elisa Masters on menestyksenkäs ja suosittu turnaus ilman korkealuokkaisen turnauksen prestiisiä. Tapahtuma tarvitsee vielä merkittävää kehitystä osallistuvien joukkueiden, palkintopotin ja markkinoinnin suhteen. Kirjoitettu teoria antaa hyviä kehitysideoita

siitä, miten kasvua voidaan saada myymällä ja markkinoimalla tapahtumaa yhteistyökumppaneille ja tapahtumaan osallistuville katsojille.

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis dives into the world of esports focusing on the Counter-Strike scene with the main goal of figuring out how to grow the event called Elisa Masters Espoo by creating sales initiatives and strategies to attract sponsors, partners, and attendees.

Counter-Strike has had steady growth, and it is still one of the most popular video games. It has the biggest player base in the EU, but it has grown in Asia and North America.

I have selected the topic, because I am a long-time enjoyer of the game, the community and the professional scene. There is a lot of fans from Finland, but Elisa Masters is the only prominent tournament in Finland, and it has not yet had the success I personally believe it can have. The success of the event would also create new jobs in Finland around esports and would grow the event further creating interest and, in the future, hopefully talented Finnish prospects for tier 1 Counter-Strike.

I start by looking into the history of esports and how the genre has grown so exponentially. Then I need to talk about the current state of esports. After that moving to the financial history and models and structure in events in general but with esports in mind. Next is the future trends and predicting the growth and the direction where esports are going to. Afterwards the theory about events in general is applied to esports events with more detail.

Then the sales and marketing for the event is reviewed in detail. Firstly, how to market the event for sponsorship and partnerships, then to the attendees and online spectators.

Moving on I apply the theory about events and esports events specifically in Counter-Strike events which then sets the ground for the case.

The case is about Elisa Masters and in the investigation, I interviewed professionals of the scene and asked the same seven questions from all the interviewees. The questions help me paint a picture of more financially sensible events with some milestones for the future and clarity for what's coming next.

## 2 Entertainment- and esports industry

In this chapter, history and general aspects of esports are reviewed.

### 2.1 History

The history of eSports and competitive gaming started with arcade games in the 90's. From there the industry has grown exponentially. In 1972 Stanford university students took part in a Spacewar! competition, where the winner would get a year's Rolling Stone magazine subscription. This was the first eSports tournament ever recorded. Afterwards in the 90's as the arcade games grew in population, so did the tournaments. In 1980 Space Invaders tournament got over 10 thousand participants. Formal eSports events started to appear in the 90's, but some individual companies like Blockbuster and Nintendo were held in the 80's. (Pinnacle.com, M. Moriarty, 2020)

### 2.2 Growth

Ever since the 90's the growth of eSports can be considered exponential. The number of players, spectators and prize money has kept on growing yearly. Today eSports and gaming as an industry are worth more than the music and movie industry combined. This mind-blowing fact has made massive movie and television companies invest in gaming. For example, Netflix and Disney have made investments into gaming. These financials describe the gaming industry, but it shouldn't be ignored as it shows the interest in gaming that for sure is there. (Pinnacle.com, M. Moriarty, 2020)

In the 90's the genre of games in a new category called FPS-games rose into popularity. FPS is short for First Person Shooter, and it is one of the most popular genres. The genre rose with games like Doom and then in 1999 the first Counter-Strike was published. Counter-Strike got immediate popularity, and it has had a consistent player base ever since the release. (Pinnacle.com, M. Moriarty, 2020)

Table 1. Esports revenue growth (Emre S. 2019, 15)

<i>Years</i>	<i>Revenue (Million \$)</i>	<i>Change (%)</i>	<i>Change (Years)</i>
2012	130	-	-
2014	194	+ 49.2 %	(2012/14)
2015	325	+ 67.5 %	(2014/15)
2016	493	+ 51.6 %	(2015/16)
2017	655	+ 32.8 %	(2016/17)
2018	906	+ 38.3 %	(2017/18)
2019*	1187	+ 31 %	(2018/19)
2020*	1488	+ 25.3 %	(2019/20)
2021*	1650	+ 10.8 %	(2020/21)

As seen from Figure 1. esports have been growing financially by incredible numbers globally. In total E-Sport revenues have grown 306,5% since 2012. It is difficult to find another sport, that has had similar growth in recent years. If the growth keeps going in a similar way, E-Sports will pass many of the more popular sports. (Emre S.2019, 15-16) Personally, I predict that it will keep growing since more of the younger generations will grow up with gaming and following esports.

### 2.3 Financials of a sports event

Sports events are a massive business that have a big impact on the local economy, the events create tourism, they bring together millions of people and create jobs. Many sporting events are big communal events that bring fans together to support their favorite players and teams. (Deepak H. 2023)

Ticket sales generate revenue when fans buy tickets to attend the event live. The revenue from the ticket sales goes towards covering the costs of launching the event and other expenses. Merchandise sales create revenue when fans buy their favorite players and teams' shirts and other merch to show their support to the team.

Sponsorships bring in a major part of the funds that an event uses to run things. Companies pay a lot of money to have their logos and branding shown to the many fans that are spectating the event. (Deepak H. 2023)

Broadcasting rights are for the people that can't attend the live event, but they want to spectate the event from home. Tv networks pay a lot of money to have the rights to

broadcast the bigger events to the people at home. Usually these networks profit from the subscription fees that they take from the fans. (Deepak H. 2023)

The event offered concessions like food, drinks, and snacks. These products have lower profit margins, but they sell at a high volume. It has been investigated that 78% of event/concert attendees ordered food or drinks. (Simplotfoods.com, 2023) For example, the Counter-Strike Global Offensive Paris Major tournament offered a pint of Heineken beer for 10€. At Elisa Masters Espoo 2024 a pint of beer cost 9,90€.

Betting partnerships are huge sponsors of e-sport organizations and events. Sports betting is massive around the world and the biggest sites now allow betting on e-sports events and this included Elisa Masters Espoo. Some sites even offer live betting during the game which is massively popular. (Deepak H. 2023)

Online spectators get to watch the tournament for free, but they will see multiple advertisements during breaks between the games, just like in other sporting events. In addition, the host can have their own overlay over the game that can include small advertisements, but these rarely affect the viewers' experience any more than a regular sporting event, personally I would say that they bother even less, since the advertisement breaks are much shorter and less forceful. (Lee A. 2021)

## 2.4 Future trends

The future of esports and esports events are looking strong. Massive growth over the last 10 years has shown no slowing down and esports are now considered to be a big reason for tourism. Bigger cities that host esports events can gain a lot of tourism during the off seasons with esports events. (Leon M. 2022)

The study found that 68% of the fans attending esports events are local and 32% are international attendees. Most of the attendees attended with a friend. 51.9% of the attendees came with one friend and 35.6% with 2 friends. (Leon M. 2022, 7)

The eSports market is the largest in North America, Europe and Asia. (Leon M. 2022) In addition South-America has been growing a lot and especially Brazil has a massive base of Counter-Strike fans.

During the Elisa Masters Espoo 2023, VisitEspoo advertised a lot of different things to do in Espoo to create tourism around the event. For example, they advertised accommodations with reindeers in Nuksio park near the event. In addition, they advertised a wilderness cabin that could be rented during the event. (Visitespoo.com. 2023)

For the future of Elisa Masters Espoo, the dream situation would be for the event to get a major tournament status. Counter-Strike major tournaments gain the most viewers, funds and prize pool. The PGL CS2 Major Copenhagen had a prize pool of 1,250,000\$ and the viewership numbers were incredible with peak viewers of 1,835,954. These numbers show incredible interest in a major tier tournament. (Šimić I. 2024)

Even the organizations and players get immortalized in the game with stickers that can be applied to the weapons in the game. The proceeds of the stickers are distributed between the teams and players and Valve. The money from the stickers is more than what the players gain from winning the tournament, since they are bought by the fans in massive numbers.

### 3 Selling events to companies (sponsors)

In this chapter B2B event sales are described.

#### 3.1 Sales process

Sales process is a step-by-step process which is shown in Figure 1. These are repeatable steps that can be used in different sales situations, but here applied to event selling.

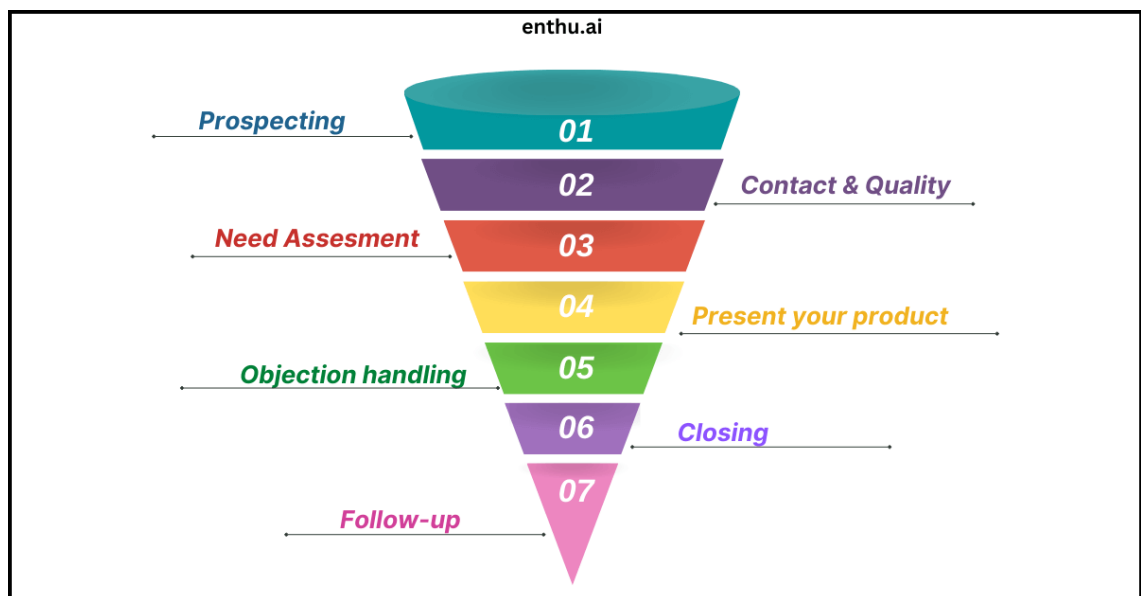


Figure I. Sales process (Sharma D. 2025)

The figure 1. shows a simplified sales process, it shows the process step by step, and as the process figure gets smaller so does the amount of importance and time that should be invested in each part. Sales process seen in Figure 1. simplifies the journey of a ticket buyer for an event. The sales process form show explains step by step how the customers thinking goes from unconcerned to approving the event and attending. Sales process steps are opened in following chapters.

#### 3.2 Prospecting

Prospecting is where the sales process starts. The phase is started with extensive research into the companies that could and would be interested in a partnership like

this. The larger the prospecting group is the larger the chance there is to find real prospects that can be later turned into leads. (Grieve P. 2024)

This step focuses on the customer segment that would be interested in taking a part the event. In prospecting the event organizer decides which people their marketing and sales will focus on. Prospects are different from the leads that the organizer might have from previous years or extended contracts. (Grieve P. 2024)

As prospecting is such an important part of the sales process it must be done right. The customer segment needs to be realistic. Prospecting is not only just the sales-reps or marketing people's job, but everyone in the organization. (Grieve P. 2024)

### 3.3 Contacting qualified prospects

Contacting the companies is the part where the organization turns prospects into leads and later into business partners. To qualify the prospect, you need to gather more information about the company. The organization must find out about the interest, financial situation, need and timeline. To simplify the salespersons job is to assess the interest and need for the publicity that they would acquire from the event. (Davies C, 2024)

LinkedIn is recommended to find the higher executives of the qualified companies with buying power and being in contact straight to them. After finding the right people and companies only focus on the ones that qualify to be leads. About 50% of the prospects turn out to be leads. (Eby K. 2018)

When contacting a qualified company, one can use multiple different ways of being in contact with the prospective. In event sales cold calling and emailing is a good way to get in contact with the company. In addition, social media is a good and modern way to be in contact with the right people in the prospecting company. (Davies C, 2024; Gordon W. 2024)

When contacting a prospecting company, a method called BANT, is a smart way to find answers to the most important questions. BANT stands for budget, authority, need and timeline. When the organizer can find answers to these questions they know enough to move on with the company with further negotiations. (Davies C, 2024; Gordon W. 2024)

### 3.4 Need assesment

If the qualification is done thoroughly, the next step is the needs assessment. The customer company has shown interest in the publicity and event, which makes them a high priority lead, and the organizer should move on with the customer and find out what kind of needs do they have. It is important to find out what kind of needs the customer has for you to have the knowledge of how the customer can be helped with their needs. (Yu V. 2024)

First find out what the customer is expecting the product or service to be; and how it will work then move on to identify what is the ideal price for the customer and how sensitive they are with the pricing. In addition, find out what kind of benefits the customer is hoping to get from doing business together. (Yu V. 2024)

The journey to understand the customers needs is a conversation, both parties should gain understanding of what is being offered and how both parties will benefit. (Showell.com 2023)

### 3.5 Present your product

At this point the sales-rep presents the event and demonstrates how the possibilities of different kinds of sponsorships that the company can do. Different sponsorships can be small advertisements shown during the game or grander sponsorships with separate segments during the event. The most important phase of presenting is to find a deal that fits the company with them being happy about the publicity they will get for the money they put in. The event organizer should present possibilities of personalizing the advertisements so that a compromise can be made. (Funk L. 2024)

The organizer should present the event as unique possibility for a partnership and try to create an impression that missing out would be a definite loss for the company. The organizer should use previous years partners as a reference and give examples of the long-term partnerships that they have had. Additionally, if possible, also show deals that have continued through multiple years and events. (Funk L. 2024)

The presentation needs to be engaging and informative. It is important to make the presentation personalized to show the company exactly how their company can be a part of the event. The organizer should present the gains and other proceeds that the

company would acquire with a partnership with the event. All the information should be backed with data from the previous events. (McPheat S. 2023)

### 3.6 Objection handling

After presenting the product to the prospect, there might be some objections and arguments for not buying the product or service. The person making the sale should be ready to answer the arguments with valid counterarguments. Objections and arguments can be good for later closing the sale, if you can provide sensible solutions to the arguments. (Sendpulse.com. 2023)

The arguments can be about multiple different things but the most common are arguments about pricing and a lack of budget. If the pricing is an issue, possibly offering a cheaper package can help the customer to get interested again. If there is lack of trust from the customer, then an open communication and other previous success stories can be helpful. (Sendpulse.com. 2023)

### 3.7 Closing

The final phase of the sales process. Closing should be easy when the previous steps have been done right and a compromise that makes both parties happy is achieved. In closing the deal is finalized. Some minor details can still be worked over, but otherwise the company should know what they are getting into and what they and the organizer will gain from the deal. (Eby K. 2018)

The organizer should show exactly how their company will profit from the event and the overall vision of the event with the partner included. This shows deep understanding of the deal that is about to be made. (Fredericks L. 2020)

## 4 Selling events to the attendees

In this chapter B2C sales are described.

### 4.1 Smarketing

Smarketing (sales and marketing) is done so that every potential attendee is aware of the event, the potential attendee needs to gain the knowledge of when the event is happening and where. They need to get interested in what is happening in the event and what the event has to offer. Knowing the right channels on which to reach the customer is important, and prioritising the most effective ones is helpful. (Saarinen K. 2025)

After a successful marketing campaign, it is important for the customer to have an easy experience purchasing the tickets for the event, or to find the event easily accessible online. In addition, after a successful branding and marketing campaign the customer's choice should be easy as they should know what they are buying and how much money they will spend. Being transparent about pricing and having different pricing options available is important to avoid losing the customer in the checkout phase. Convenience is very important for a b2c customer. (Bochicchio M. 2023)

### 4.2 Target market

To identify the right target market is very important for the success of the event. When the target market is defined well the event will be much more successful as there are more attendees, and the attendee's engagement is higher. In addition, the sponsorship opportunities can be maximised better with proper targeting. By having an identified target market focusing marketing and sales efforts correctly is much easier. (Leahy L. 2024; Rembacki K. 2024)

#### **How to identify the target market**

Analysing the customers and audience of previous and similar events helps to get a picture of the common characteristics of the target market. Characteristics such as gender, age, location, occupation, and interests are to be taken into consideration.

Conducting market research by gathering more information about the competitors in the industry can open up more specifics of the target market. To gather as much information about the target market using social media as a tool is very helpful. social media platforms offer a vast amount of data about the followers and people who engage in the posts. In addition, conducting surveys with the social media followers can give a lot of good data for identifying the target market. Additionally, looking at the data from the event website users and visitors might help to realize the target market. (Rembacki K. 2024)

### Creating an ideal customer persona

Developing a customer persona profile can help in finding out the ideal attendee of the event. Go through the previous identifying characteristics and apply the best possible qualities to your ideal customer persona. Consider what is the ideal customers age, income, occupation, hobbies, and values. (Leahy L. 2024; Sleekevents.com)

### 4.3 Customer journey

In this chapter customer journey is described.

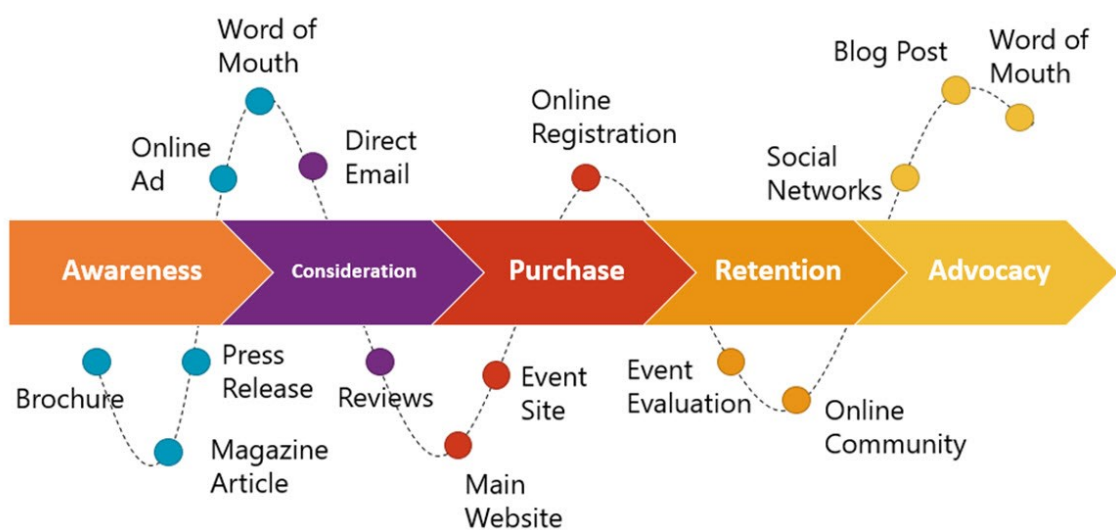


Figure II. Customer journey (blog.liveto.io. Anna. 2021)

The figure 2 shows an example of an event customer journey map. It is a simplified graphic to explain the road of an attendee in an event. These steps are explained further in the following chapters.

### **Awareness**

In this phase the potential customer gets the knowledge of the event. The customer can see an advertisement for the event in many places. For example, online advertisement, press release or a brochure. Overall, a well-done marketing for the event is important to create awareness. Word of mouth is when the customer hears about the event from a friend, colleague or a family member, most often a trusted persons recommendation goes the furthest. (Joosten D. 2023)

### **Consideration**

After a customer is aware of the event happening comes the second phase, which is to consider attending the event. Many things will affect the customers decision to go forward with planning on attending the event. In this phase the customer will research the event and whether the event is worth attending. (Joosten D. 2023)

Many things are out of control for the event organizer. By focusing on the things that can be affected the customers choice of attending can be altered. For example, having answers to the basic questions in the customers mind, like how much will the event cost, when is the event, how to get to the event and concrete things that will happen at the event should be clearly presented to the customer. (Joosten D. 2023)

### **Purchase**

The potential customer has now found satisfying answers to every concerning question and is ready to make the purchase. When making the purchase the customer does not want to run into any surprises in pricing or issues with the payment. By having an optimized checkout process you can help closing the sale further. (CIM Team. 2022)

### **Retention**

The retention step's goal is to retain the customer for the long term, this is accomplished by making sure the customer has a good experience at the event. A satisfied customer will attend again in future events. Good experience comes down to many things when events are considered. For example, a good customer service, efficient check in, smooth operations during the event and everything starting on time without technical issues. (awork.com)

**Advocacy**

The most difficult part of the customer journey. The goal is to turn the customer into an advocate for the event. The customer needs to have such a good time at the event, they will make a social media post and give word of mouth recommendations to their friends and family. To gain even a small percentage of attendees to turn into advocates of the event can be huge, because they might inspire multiple people to come to future events. (lodigital.com)

## 5 Counter-Strike events

In this chapter, Counter-Strike events are described.

### 5.1 Counter-Strike 2 events

There are levels of size for Counter-Strike events that are called tiers. The level of a tier is determined by the number of teams attending, prize money and the rating of the teams. For example, Elisa Masters Espoo is considered to be a tier 2 tournament. This thesis dives into why it is important to grow from tier 2 to tier 1 status. In addition, Counter-Strike majors must be taken into consideration. Majors are the biggest tournaments in Counter-Strike and they take place only twice a year and the major tournaments are sponsored by Valve which is the company behind the Counter-Strike franchise.

To summarize, majors and tier 1 tournaments are vastly more viewed and cared about in the community and therefore are financially and overall more successful.

(Liquipedia.net. S-Tier tournaments)

In order to grow a CS event from tier 2 to tier 1 it comes down to the money involved. To attract as many, tier 1 -teams as possible the prize money has to be grand enough for the teams to be willing to spend their time playing the qualifications and attending the tournament itself. It is a double-edged sword since to attract sponsors, they want the viewership to be high, but it is only going to high if as many as possible tier 1 - teams attend. There is a significant difference between tier 1 and tier 2 tournament viewership, which is why it is difficult to obtain sponsorships for tier 2 tournaments.

In addition, the event calendar must be taken into consideration. The calendar of teams and events is stocking up quickly. There is only a certain number of tournaments teams want to take apart of in a year. There are 2 major tournaments a year, for which every team wants to attend. In addition, there are tournaments with pre-existing symbolic status that teams want to win. Unfortunately, for example Elisa Masters Espoo does not have any special meaning to teams outside of Finland. There are tournaments with bigger prize pools and a lot of history behind them that mean more to the teams. (Rawat S. 2023; hltv.org/events)

### **Counter-Strike event structure**

The events in Counter-Strike are structured like many regular sporting events where teams have to qualify for the main event. Teams compete in online qualifiers where the games are played usually in best of one format, but in later stages the games will be best of three formats. In Counter-Strike the games the teams choose which map of 7 possibilities will be played by banning maps one by one. In best of one games, only one map is played and obviously in best of three games, three maps are played. Usually, big tournaments have finals where the game is best of five maps. Counter-Strike has a leaderboard system where teams are placed according to their recent performances in bigger tournaments. From the leaderboard teams can be invited straight to the pay off stage of the tournaments where they start competing against the teams who have qualified through the qualifiers. The play-off stages are played in LAN format which means that the teams will be in the same place to avoid any networking problems and to gain equal fighting grounds for each player. (Baker.edu; Kaustavmani C. 2024; Hltv.org)

### **5.2 Financials of a Counter-Strike tournament**

CS-events financials work similarly to many of the general sports events, expect that there is a majority following online for free instead of paying per view or regular tv format. The online shows do show some advertising during game breaks, but generally the games run ad free. The forementioned sporting event financial structure applies to CS-events in most ways mentioned. (Van De Graaf M. 2019)

## 6 Case: Elisa Masters Espoo

In this chapter, the case of Elisa Masters is described.

### 6.1 What is Elisa Masters

Elisa Masters is a Counter Strike 2 event that has been hosted in Espoo Finland for 3 years in a row. The event was attended by over 8000 spectators onsite and online in 2023 it had over 270k viewers. It is the biggest CS2 tournament hosted in Finland.

Elisa Masters Espoo in 2023 was a success full event. The winners of the event was an organization from Brazil called Furia, they won the grand price of \$100 000, this was out of the \$200 000 prize pool. The event won a SPOT award in Finland for the success that the event created. The award put it as follows: “Elisa Masters Espoo set a new standard of what an esports event in Finland can be”. (Palonkorpi S. 2.2024)

The head of Elisa Esports Olli-Pekka Villa decided not to comment on the financial success of the Elisa Esports Masters 2023, which indicates that it didn't necessarily make a financial profit. He mentions that it is very difficult to make a profit since the majority of the viewers are online and they watch the event for free from either Twitch.tv or Youtube.com. (Hartikainen N. 11.2023)

Elisa Masters Espoo 2023 got many big Finnish and international sponsors for the event, which certainly made the event financially somewhat viable. To mention a few of the bigger companies that took apart in the event there was: Monster Energy, Atria, KotiPizza, Vilpe, Keenetic and Skinbaron.

Elisa Masters Espoo 2024 had gained more sponsors for the event with huge companies like Monster Energy, Blåkläder and Noblechairs taking a part of the 2024 event.

At the 2024 Elisa Masters Espoo tickets for Saturday and Sunday cost 90€ for floor seats near the stage. The price is reasonable, but on a little high side for a tier 2 tournament.



Figure III. Event picture (Elisaesports.com/masters)

In Figure 3 is seen the stage and audience at the Elisa Masters Espoo 2023. The event was held at Espoo Metro arena. At the stage are the computer setups facing the audience. Above them are large screens from which the players' point of view in-game can be seen. (Elisaesports.com/masters)

## 6.2 Elisa Masters Espoo financials

A detailed list of income sources at Elisa Masters Espoo. The financial structure is very typical for esports events of tier 2.

Table 2. Income sources of Elisa Masters 2023

<b>Income source</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Ticket Sales</b>	Multiple seating options and VIP passes (19-90€)
<b>Sponsorships and Partnerships</b>	Sponsors include Monster Energy, Blåkläder, Elisa Asus ROG and others
<b>Merchandise sales</b>	Esports related clothing, PC accessories and team merchandise
<b>Food and Beverages</b>	Provided by the venue and the sponsors Monster Energy and Maku Brewing
<b>Broadcasting</b>	The event was available online on Twitch, YouTube and Kick
<b>City and Regional support</b>	The city of Espoo and the local taxi service

As can be seen in Table 2., Tier 2 tournaments like Elisa Masters Espoo earn their money from multiple sources that vary in model. Ticket sales for the attending spectators included options from floor seats to VIP seats. Sponsors got their advertisements shown during the breaks between the games and some smaller static advertisements next to the stage. Merchandise could be bought during the event from the stands outside the stage in stands next to the food and beverage stations. The broadcast was available online on twitch.tv, youtube.com and kick.com. (Palonkorpi S. 10.2024; Gosugamers.net)

### 6.3 Financial expenses

Financial expenses are also vast. These include rent of the event space and all the aesthetics that make the space fit the theme. Also, utilities like electricity and internet are not necessarily provided within the rent of the event arena. In addition, the accommodation of the players, casters, teams, and staff is most likely provided by Elisa. The casting of the event was done in English and Finnish, and the flights and salary of the casters and staff must be taken into count. According to Olli-Pekka Villa there were over 100 hired workers and approximately 40-50 volunteers working for the event in 2023. (Hartikainen N. 12.2023)

In addition, a lot of special equipment is needed, which is not necessarily provided by the arena. These include the massive screens that show the screen to the onsite spectators. Also, the event showcased some pyro technics and an immersive audio experience.

Broadcasting is essentially free since it's done on Twitch.com which is a streaming platform where anyone can stream almost whatever they like within the terms of service. Twitch takes a cut of the advertising money that Elisa earns from advertising to thousands of people that are online watching the tournament. (Van De Graaf M. 2019)

The major expense is the prize money. The winner of the tournament got 100 000\$, second place got 40,000\$, third place got 15,000 with the fourth place, fifth and sixth place got 10,000\$ and the seventh and eighth place got 5,000\$ out of the total 200,000\$ price pool. (Guaraldo A. 2023; Mundia K. 2024)

### Elisa Masters Espoo 2023 viewers

In 2023 the event got over 8000 spectators on site during the 3 days of stage games. Online there were 227 000 viewers during the best moment. Interestingly most of the online viewers were from the super popular collaborating Portuguese streamer called Gaules, who casted the game in Portuguese to the Brazilian fans that supported the winning team called Furia, which is from Brazil. These numbers are good and according to the head of Elisa Esports some parts of the tournament were financially successful.

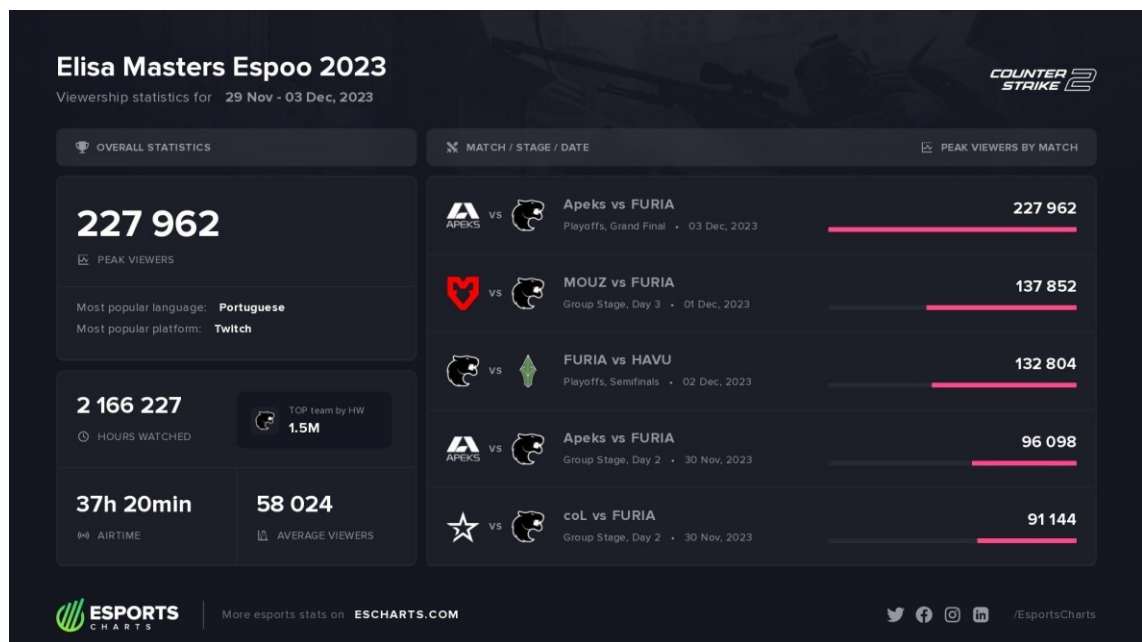


Figure IV. Elisa Masters online viewer numbers in 2023 (Murko D. 2023)

As can be seen from the figure 4., the viewer numbers of the 2023 Elisa Masters event. On the left of the figure the peak viewers can be seen and on the right the viewer numbers during the final games. (Murko D. 2023)

Gaules' stream got a peak of 175,000 viewers and the ElisaEsports Twitch channel got 41,000 peak viewers. The number difference is massive but understandable since Furia was expected to win the tournament, and the Brazilian streamer is extremely popular and the fans in Brazil and really invested fans. (Murko D. 2023)



Figure V. Screenshot of the steam as seen by an online viewer.

(Youtube.com/elisaesports)

In Figure 5., a screenshot of the tournament game between a European team called Apeks and a Brazilian team called Furia. The screenshot is taken from the point of view of an online spectator. On the top you can see the current score of the game which is 2-0 for Apeks. On the left and right of the screen you can see all the players of each team and currently only 2 of each team is alive due to the situation in the game. At the bottom of the screen, you can see the current player who is being filmed in the game and below him you can see rolling advertisements of the sponsors of the tournament. (Hartikainen N. 12.2023; Murko D. 2023)

## Elisa Masters Espoo 2024 viewers

The onsite spectator numbers are not disclosed at the time of writing this. Instead, the online numbers are live, and you can see a major decline in the viewers, but this was predictable since the previous year had an exceptional number of viewers because of a popular team attending.

The numbers declining is not very alarming, because if the viewers of Gaules' stream is deducted a slight rise in "regular" viewers can be seen.

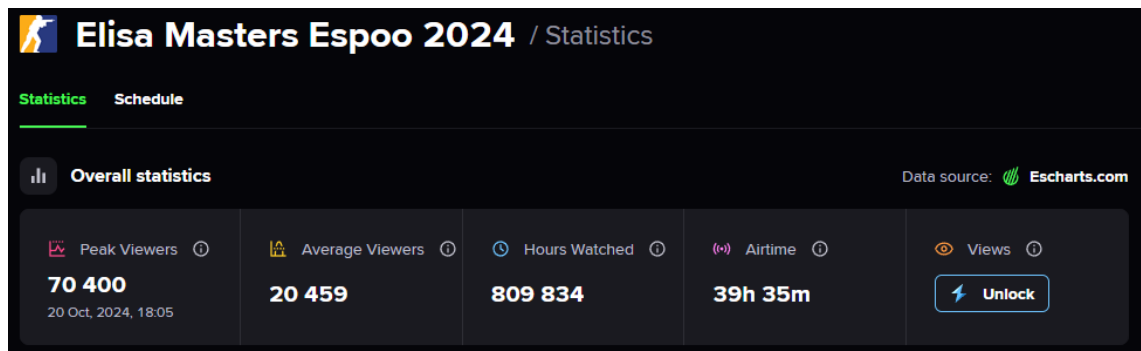


Figure VI. Elisa Masters online viewer numbers in 2024. (escharts.com. 2024)

As seen in figure 6. The peak viewer numbers are on the left and other not as essential numbers can be seen to the right.

## 6.4 The Elisa Masters Espoo 2024 experience

The event was overall a good experience, the viewing experience was enjoyable, and the team introductions were done well. The onsite and online spectators and players had to endure over two hours of technical timeouts during the weekend due to issues with the players' computers. This was annoying for the viewers and players. Technical timeouts are common in other tournaments as well but not to this extent. It is important that in the future the problems can be fixed faster.

The seats were free to choose on the ground floor so arriving early and taking front seats was smart. In between the games the analysts would go through the game details. Outside of the stage there was free to use computers with CS2 running and some of the sponsors offered deals of their products. For example, Elisa was selling cell phone plans.

## 7 Conducted research

In this chapter conducted research is presented.

### 7.1 Conducted research

The research was conducted as semi-structured interview research during end of 2024 and at the start of 2025. The interviewees were a diverse group of knowledgeable people of the CS2 scene. Totally 5 interviewees were interviewed online, by using the Teams application and the interview questions were not sent beforehand.

The answers to the seven questions were typed up and arranged thematically. The results are shown in chapter 7.2.

### 7.2 Results

The results reflected the materials that were collected for the thesis and my own personal thoughts to the answers were similar to interviewed professionals.

The reasons why interviewees said that a CS-tournament is successful is: "Strong team participation, high production quality, and good audience engagement." This is in line with the theory, and my personal opinion.

The question related improving Elisa Masters Espoo provoked good conversation, and some good ideas came up: The first interviewee mentioned: "With enhanced international marketing, more attendees from outside of Finland might attend." The third interviewee mentioned that adding more unique side events could help.

The interviewees answered the question about would a bigger price pool attract more tier 1 teams unanimously, yes. Interviewee 2 was a bit more critical and stated: "It helps, but guaranteed ranking points, prestige and LAN experience matters more." Personally, I disagree as the biggest motivator is the money for the team organizations, but prestige and ranking points is a good point.

The questions about the space in the yearly calendar of the teams was answered with unsure statements like: "it is a lot more difficult in the foreseeable future." In the conversation we discussed the prestige of other tournaments like Blast, ESL Pro

tournaments and major tournaments, and how it does mean more to the CS2 teams. So, the teams will prefer to attend a tournament with more prestige if they overlap.

The question about increasing income provoked conversation that fits well with the theory. Ideas like: Expanded sponsorships, increased ticket sales and even ideas about VIP experiences or improvements in the online viewer experience came up. Clearly the theory matches the investigation as sponsorships and ticket sales were such a big part of this thesis.

The question related to the rating got an average of 6 out of 10 rating among the interviewees.

To summarize the answers and the rating, the event was done in good quality with high tier talent involved and the games were enjoyable to watch. The rating was brought down by the lower tier teams attending and a big problem to basically all the interviewees was the technical issues during the tournament. They made the tournament hard to follow as there were so many technical timeouts during games. I personally would rate the tournament with a score of 7, since the technical timeouts didn't bother me too much.

## 8 Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, thesis conclusions, recommendations and evaluation of reliability are discussed.

### 8.1 Conclusions

The thesis started with going through the history of esports and how they have grown in the last ten years. Afterwards going through event financials and how money is made generally in sporting events and the future trends in sporting events including esports events.

Next in the thesis dives into general event sales with a step-by-step guide for selling and marketing, firstly to sponsors and also to the end customers who are the attendees at the event and online spectators.

Then the general event selling and marketing tactics were applied to esports events with a focus on Counter-Strike 2 events. From selling the esports events the thesis moves on to the case which was about the Elisa Masters event in Finland. The event was evaluated financially and viewer wise.

The investigation for the case was done by interviewing professionals of the CS2 scene and asking them all the same questions. The interviews were successful, and the answers related to the theory, with some new perspectives added.

### 8.2 Recommendations

Elisa and the tournament organisers have simple goals, but the steps to get there are hard to achieve. The tournament would be watched and cared about more if there were more tier 1 teams attending. For the tier 1 teams to attend Elisa Masters needs to get a bigger price pool and create more hype around the tournament as it has not yet gotten a prestige event status. In the ideal world Elisa should try to get a major tournament to be hosted by them, but it seems to be unlikely in the foreseeable future.

For the short-term improved marketing, more smooth viewer experience and high-quality content around CS2 would improve the viewer experience and there forth be more interesting to an average viewer.

### 8.3 Evaluation of reliability

Repeatability of the thesis depends on who are being interviewed, but the interviewees were a diverse group of professionals from around Europe, North America and Finland. The answers of the interviewees were predictable and mostly reflected the theory materials of the thesis.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview questions**

1. What is the biggest reason a CS-tournament is successful?
2. How would you personally improve Elisa Masters Espoo?
3. Would a bigger prize pool attract more tier 1 teams to the event?
4. Is there space in the event calendar for teams to attend Elisa Masters Espoo?
5. Why is there no space in the event calendar?
6. How to increase income of the event?
7. How high would you rate Elisa Masters Espoo as an event? 1-10?