

CRAFTING DYNAMIC MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR SPORT SUCCESS

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Abstract

Marketing communication strategies are essential for sports organizations to establish brand awareness, engage fans, and drive revenue. In today's digital era, these strategies need to be diverse, utilizing both traditional and new media platforms to connect with various audiences effectively. A marketing communication strategy comprises a set of tools and processes designed to deliver the right message to the right person, at the right time, and through the right channel. This strategy is pivotal as it captures consumer attention and encourages them to engage with the business. Sports marketing, a subset of marketing, focuses on promoting sports events and teams, as well as other products and services through sports-related activities. The advent of social media has revolutionized the sports landscape, reshaping how individuals engage with sports. Social media has become a cornerstone for sports enthusiasts, offering instant access to sports content, allowing fans to follow their favorite athletes and teams, and facilitating community interactions. For sports organizations, social media presents numerous advantages, including building public relationships, reducing marketing expenses, and driving sales. Moreover, social media enables bilateral communication, fostering community engagement and allowing organizations to fulfill their mission. However, despite its benefits, social media in sports also poses challenges. Negative content can spread rapidly, players may struggle to use social media appropriately, and negative fan comments could impact athlete performance or team morale. In summary, while social media offers immense opportunities for sports organizations to connect with fans and enhance their brand, it requires careful management to mitigate potential risks and maximize its benefits.

Key Words: *Strategies, Sport Marketing, Promote, social media, Sports Events*

Introduction

"An effective marketing communication strategy for sports organizations must be dynamic, engaging, and multifaceted. By understanding the audience, leveraging multiple channels, and using data to inform decisions, a strong connection with fans can be built, enhancing brand loyalty, and driving success both on and off the field. Continuously evolving and adapting the strategy to the changing media landscape and fan preferences will help maintain relevance and competitiveness in the sports industry. Sports marketing, a subdivision of marketing, focuses on promoting sports events and teams, as well as other products and services through sporting events and teams. It's a service where the element promoted can be a physical product or a brand name. Marketers use sports to reach a certain segment of the population, typically targeting men, though there are exceptions; figure skating, for instance, attracts a large female audience. Products appealing to men, like beer, trucks, and snack foods, are heavily marketed during sporting events for this reason. The primary qualification for using sports marketing is having a product with wide appeal. The maker of highly specific business software would gain nothing from the wide net cast by sports marketing. A central point of differentiation between sports marketing and traditional goods /services marketing is how we view individual purchasers. Goods and services typically refer to customers, whereas sports marketing views fans as the target audience. Sports marketing is building a highly identified, passionate fan base such that fans, sponsors, media and government pay to promote and support the organization for the benefits of social exchange and personal, group and community identity within a cooperative competitive environment. Sports marketing is a "special case" of marketing, which means that there are theoretical and practical aspects of marketing specific to sports marketing. Sports marketing allows companies to associate their brands and products with the excitement, enjoyment, and admiration

that spectators ascribe to games and athletes. This industry derives its promotional techniques from fields such as advertising, public relations, and marketing (Career.opcd, 2016).

Here's a comprehensive guide to crafting effective marketing communication strategies for sports organizations. This guide provides a roadmap for sports organizations to engage fans, enhance brand loyalty, and drive success both online and offline:

1. **Understand Your Audience - Segmentation:** Divide your audience into segments based on demographics, psychographics, and behavior. This allows for more targeted and relevant messaging; **Fan Insights:** Use surveys, social media listening, and data analytics to understand your fans' preferences, behaviors, and values.

2. **Develop a Strong Brand Identity - Consistency:** Ensure that all communication reflects the organization's values, mission, and personality consistently across all channels; **Visual Identity:** Develop a recognizable visual identity, including logos, colors, and mascots, that can be used consistently across marketing materials.

3. **Leverage Multiple Channels - Digital Marketing:** Utilize social media, email marketing, SEO, and content marketing to reach fans online; **Traditional Media:** Don't overlook the power of TV, radio, and print media, especially in local markets; **Experiential Marketing:** Host events and fan experiences that allow direct engagement with the brand.

4. **Content Marketing - Storytelling:** Share stories of players, fans, and behind-the-scenes action to create emotional connections; **Diverse Content:** Produce a variety of content types, such as videos, articles, podcasts, and infographics, to engage different segments of your audience; **Fan-Generated Content:** Encourage and share content created by fans to increase engagement and reach.

5. **Engage Through Social Media - Platform-Specific Strategies:** Tailor your content and engagement strategies to the specific platforms (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook) based on where your fans are most active; **Real-Time Interaction:** Use social media for real-time engagement during games and events, including live-tweeting and interactive polls; **Influencer Partnerships:** Partner with influencers and athletes to expand your reach and credibility.

6. **Sponsorships and Partnerships - Strategic Alliances:** Partner with brands that align with your values and can offer mutual benefits, including product collaborations or co-branded events; **Community Engagement:** Work with local organizations and charities to build goodwill and community ties.

7. **Data-Driven Decision Making - Analytics:** Regularly analyze data from your website, social media, and other marketing channels to understand what's working and to optimize your strategy; **Fan Feedback:** Use surveys and feedback channels to gather direct input from your audience to inform future strategies.

8. **Crisis Communication - Preparedness:** Have a crisis communication plan in place to respond to any negative situations or PR challenges quickly and effectively; **Transparency:** Communicate openly and honestly with fans during crises to maintain trust and credibility.

9. **Accessibility and Inclusivity - Inclusive Messaging:** Ensure that your communication is inclusive, representing diverse fans and making everyone feel welcome; **Accessibility:** Make sure all marketing materials are accessible to people with disabilities, including website accessibility and alternative formats for content.

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The popular marketing strategies to set your sport club up for success are: (Freshbooks.com, 2023)

1. **Establish a Brand -** for customers and potential customers of a sport organizations to know what their club stands for; they need to have a clear brand identity. Once they have decided on their club identity, they need to match it with an appropriate name, appropriate logo, colors, and images that will convey their brand to customers. Once a sport club has its logo, it should put it on everything: advertising, business cards, website, envelopes, and email signatures.

2. **Know your customer -** Every business must cater to a different niche market and therefore every sport club requires a marketing plan specific to their goals and needs. Before deciding on tactics and strategy, sport club's owners should better understand who their target customer is, age, gender, place of residence, whether and which services they use, etc. Knowing these things about their target customer will help a business develop a targeted and effective overall marketing strategy that will focus on the channels that will deliver the best results.

3. **Create a Website -** Websites serve as modern business cards, offering clubs their first chance to make an impression on potential customers. They are essential for establishing an online presence and driving

traffic. Sport organizations can utilize their website to provide information, enhance search engine visibility, promote social media channels, and establish authority through valuable content. If your sport club lacks a website, it's time to create one. It's straightforward: (a) Buy a domain name: Choose your desired name, check availability, and pay the associated fee. (b) Sign up for web hosting, often available through the same company where you purchased the domain. (c) Get a Content Management System (CMS) to create and update the website efficiently over time.

4. Use the power of SEO - The most common way traffic is driven to a website is through a Google search. As Google's algorithms change, the sport club needs to make sure to keep the keywords on their pages optimized to make sure they rank highly in searches. Having a site appear on the first page of results greatly increases that website's chances of being clicked, so a sport club should do everything in their power to make sure that's where it is in Google search.

5. List yourself on Google - A useful tool for local businesses with local customer bases is Google My Business. When people in the same area as a sport club search on Google for a product or service provided by the sport club, the sport club will appear in the first searches. When potential customers see a business profile and it is accompanied by a good review or find the listing at the top of their list, the business gains credibility and people will be more willing to trust the business.

6. Advertise on Facebook - One of the best ways to target a specific group is by using Facebook ads. A business can focus its advertising on demographics such as age, gender, location, interests, online habits and more. Setting up Facebook advertising is easy and relatively cheap. It is a great way for a business to reach a maximum number of potential customers in a short amount of time.

7. Email Customers and Potential Customers - There are many advantages of using email as a marketing strategy. It is easy to do, can be automated, provides instantaneous communication, costs very little, and can reach many potential customers. Once email addresses are added to an email list, it is important that a business provides interesting, valuable, and relevant content to their list, so the emails get opened and not just merely diverted to spam mail.

8. Use Google AdWords - Remember, the key is for people to find you when they search on Google, and by using Google AdWords, you can greatly increase your chances of people seeing your name. Google AdWords is more expensive than other marketing tactics we have discussed here but should still be considered as it is a powerful marketing tool. The key is for people to find you when they search on Google and by using Google AdWords, a business can greatly increase the chance of people seeing their name.

Crafting an effective marketing communication strategy involves delivering the right message to the right audience through the right channels at the right time. This strategy is essential for capturing consumer attention and driving engagement with your business (Smallbusiness, 2021). Creating a communications action plan is vital for success. As the saying goes, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Strategic planning ensures that your efforts are aligned with your goals, saving time and money in the long run (Viasport.ca, 2021).

1. Assess Your Resources - Despite being a small organization, you likely possess more communication assets than you realize. Conduct a thorough inventory of all your assets, evaluating their current usage and determining if updates or changes are necessary. Certain assets, like social media platforms, require regular updating, while others, such as printed materials, may only need revising every few years. Additionally, consider the need for new assets if any gaps are identified. Your inventory should encompass not only communication products but also tools, equipment, human resources, and potential partners who can amplify your message or provide support in various forms.

2. Establishing a Budget - A comprehensive budget includes both financial and human resources aspects. Even with a strong financial plan, achieving goals may be challenging without well-trained personnel to execute strategies. Consider the following when creating your budget: Allocate hours for communications and marketing activities for the current year; Assess financial resources designated for communications and marketing initiatives; Identify individuals responsible for implementing the communication plan; Explore utilizing volunteers or temporary staff for certain tasks and consider securing donations for communication products to supplement the budget.

3. SWOT Analysis (Schooley, 2019) - SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is a strategic planning process that helps businesses tackle challenges and identify new opportunities. It entails assessing internal strengths and weaknesses, along with external opportunities and threats. The main aim is to gain comprehensive insights into factors affecting business decisions. Following the analysis, it's crucial to devise recommendations and strategies based on the findings.

4. Find your baseline (Viasport.ca, 2021) Creating a baseline allows you to measure the success of your communications action plan moving forward and make smart decisions to improve your plan. Metrics are also a valuable tool to showcase your success to sponsors, partners, donors, granting organizations and the government.

5. Engage Your Community (Viasport.ca, 2021) - While metrics offer insights, they only tell part of your organization's communication story. To gain a complete understanding, seek feedback directly from your audience. Create a brief survey with questions such as: How effectively did we communicate with you this year; How useful did you find our website/ newsletter/ social media; Do you follow us on social media. If not, why not; When you need information about our organization, where do you first look; If you could improve one thing about our communications, what would it be; Please rate the readability/accuracy/timeliness of our communications; What would you like to see more of on our newsletter/website/social media; What would you like to see less of, etc.. If you don't have the capacity to create a survey, target a few members of your organization and ask them to provide you with feedback.

6. Check your calendar (Viasport.ca, 2021) - Many sports communicators spend a large percentage of their working hours promoting programs, tournaments, leagues, and other events. Create a calendar that outlines when these events will take place. If you don't know the exact date, try to estimate what month the event will take place. Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. With over 3,6 billion current users and a projected usership of nearly 4.5 billion by the year 2025, social media is a powerful force for reaching the masses.

When used effectively, social media in sports marketing can have huge benefits for your brand. The average user spends upwards of two hours per day on social media, and that number is continuously climbing! Now is the time to make social media work for you. Social media is a fast-moving vehicle - make the most of this opportunity to connect with fans and customers alike by keeping up with trending strategies. Here are the latest trends in social media marketing for sports:

1. Real-Time Engagement (Jennifer, 2021) - With the rise of streaming platforms and social media channels, sports organizations must leverage real-time updates for maximum impact. Key strategies include: (a) Providing live content like press conferences and drafts to keep fans engaged. (b) Creating catchy hashtags to encourage fan participation. (c) Boosting engagement with interactive stories featuring polls, Q&As, and giveaways. Offering a real-time experience helps fans feel connected, especially when live events are inaccessible.

2. Behind-the-Scenes Stories (Jennifer, 2021) - Fans crave behind-the-scenes insights into their favorite athletes' lives. Instagram or Facebook Stories are effective tools for engagement because they: (a) Create a shared community experience. (b) Have a temporary nature, prompting immediate action from viewers. (c) Feel personal and authentic due to their unedited style. Stories drive high engagement and offer a glimpse into athletes' lives. Depending on your brand, use stories to showcase team action, athlete routines, product previews, or repost content from fans.

3. Community Engagement (Jennifer, 2021) - Athletes have a history of giving back, and social media provides a platform to showcase these efforts. From national to local initiatives, athletes can use their influence to serve the community. Broadcasting charitable events on social media isn't just virtue signaling; it's a call to action. It allows the audience to connect with your brand values. Keep your audience updated via email campaigns for sustained engagement.

4. Athlete Partnerships (Jennifer, 2021) - Collaborating with athletes for campaigns captivates passionate sports fans. Social media sponsorships leverage their star power to elevate your brand. For instance, Hulu's "Hulu Has Live Sports Again" campaign featured Damian Lillard and Skylar Diggins-Smith, utilizing "deep fake" technology, and shared on their social media using hashtags like #huluhaslivesportsagain.

5. Joining eSports (Jennifer, 2021) - eSports, competitive video gaming, gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies have invested in sponsorships due to its growing popularity. Take advantage by providing real-time coverage, behind-the-scenes content, and interacting with your audience.

6. Valuing Women's Sports (Jennifer, 2021) - Women's sports are gaining popularity, with athletes like Lindsey Vonn and Alex Morgan amassing millions of social media followers. Brands like Nike regularly feature women in their content, tapping into the growing market of women's sports. Nike showcases women's sports across its social media channels.

7. Memes and social media (Jennifer, 2021) - Connecting with your audience on social media can be both challenging and enjoyable. Humor, particularly through memes, is an effective way to engage with your audience. Memes create a sense of community and shared experience, fostering a feeling of belonging among viewers. Engage with trending memes, challenges, and aesthetics to tap into this communal feeling. Highlighting your brand's unique sense of humor and voice can help you gain attention and potentially go viral, especially on platforms like TikTok.

8. Aligning with a cause (Jennifer, 2021), Increasingly, major sports organizations and teams have aligned themselves with social justice causes. The NBA has been vocal about its support of Black Lives Matter. While these statements can be polarizing, knowing when to engage with “of-the-moment” causes can help you connect with your audience.

9. Highlighting authenticity (Jennifer, 2021), Ultimately, there is an increasing trend toward authenticity in social media in sports marketing. Viewers want to hear from athletes, see behind-the-scenes content, and connect with other fans in real-time.

The research in this paper aims to highlight the structure and prevalence of sport organizations in North Macedonia based on their utilization of social media. Here's a breakdown of the results obtained from the survey conducted for this study:

- A total of 60 sport organizations were surveyed, with a majority located in Skopje.
- Regarding employee count, 90% of sport organizations have up to 10 employees, while 10% have between 10 to 20 employees.
- When queried about having their own website, 95% of enterprises responded affirmatively, indicating a substantial online presence. However, it's noted that merely having a website isn't sufficient in today's business landscape, given the critical role of the internet.
- Similarly, an equal number of organizations reported having their own Facebook or Instagram profiles. However, it's important to note that there isn't a complete overlap between those with websites and those with social media profiles. Notably, 5% of enterprises without a website still maintain a presence on Facebook or Instagram, highlighting the growing importance of internet representation for sport organizations.
- Among organizations with Facebook or Instagram profiles, 85% engage in paid advertising on these platforms. However, the overall number of organizations advertising on social networks remains relatively low.
- Among organizations using paid advertising on Facebook or Instagram, only 40% allocate a monthly budget exceeding 100 euros, with the majority spending less than 50 euros.
- Despite modest budgets, 60% of sport organizations report positive outcomes from their social media advertising efforts.

Encouragingly, all surveyed organizations express intentions to continue advertising on social networks in the future and plan to increase their advertising budgets. This reaffirms the belief that future promotion is heavily reliant on the internet and social media platforms as primary communication channels.

Summary

Effective marketing communication strategies are essential for sports organizations to build brand awareness, engage fans, and boost revenue in today's digital era. Leveraging diverse media platforms ensures the right message reaches the right audience, capturing attention and fostering engagement. Social media has revolutionized the sports landscape, enabling instant access to content, fostering community interactions, and offering opportunities for brand-building and revenue generation. However, managing negative content and ensuring appropriate athlete usage are challenges to overcome. Key strategies include audience segmentation, consistent branding, multi-channel approaches, compelling content creation, active social media engagement, strategic partnerships, data-driven decision-making, crisis communication preparedness, and accessibility initiatives. Implementing these strategies helps navigate the digital landscape, strengthen audience connections, and drive success on and off the field. In contemporary sport management, "sport" encompasses a broad range of activities, businesses, and organizations focused on producing, facilitating, promoting, or organizing sport-related experiences. This includes fitness, recreation, sports tourism, and leisure, with the aim of meeting consumer needs and achieving organizational objectives. Social media comprises online communication channels dedicated to community contribution, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration. These platforms serve as valuable tools for engaging audiences and promoting sport-related content. Among sport organizations using paid advertising

on platforms like Facebook or Instagram, only 40% allocate a monthly budget exceeding 100 euros. Despite modest budgets, 60% report positive effects from their social media advertising efforts. Various social media platforms, including forums, micro-blogging, social networks, and wikis, play significant roles in connecting individuals and organizations within the sports industry, facilitating communication and collaboration.

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