

Module 2. Sports Marketing and Digital and Social Media

Imagine the following scenario:

Per Johanssen is starting his first day as social media manager for a professional hockey organization. Per is a recent college graduate, and during his college studies, he took several courses in social media and sport and believes in using social media as a relational tool. Per is a bit concerned however, because the hockey organization he works for has been using social media primarily to promote ticket sales, and during his interview Per learned that this strategy has not been producing desired results for the organization.

As Per begins to think about how to shift the organization's social media strategy, he gets an e-mail asking him to meet with the organization's Chief Marketing Officer, Debra Sandborn, and her team to discuss social media marketing strategy. Per views this as a positive sign and eagerly looks forward to the meeting.

As the meeting commences, Debra announces that Per has been hired to help the organization figure out, *this social media thing*, and Per notices that several of the marketing staff roll their eyes as Debra makes this statement. Debra asks Per to share his thoughts on what the organization can do better on social media. Per responds by telling them that the organization has been too sales-oriented in their social media posts. He emphasizes that a more effective marketing strategy for the organization will involve them sharing more content that will connect with fans and other audiences the organization is trying to reach. Per explains that as the organization does this, they will see people purchase, because they will associate positive feelings and experiences with the organization.

Per has barely finished speaking when Debra responds by asking Per where the return on investment will come from taking that approach. Debra reminds Per that her staff's job is *to make money* for the organization, and putting out *fluff* pieces will not get people to buy tickets.

Per thanks Debra for her comments and asks her to describe some of the sources the organization uses for advertising and marketing. Debra responds by telling him they send ticket promotions out to an e-mail list, and run promotional messages on billboards and city buses. Per acknowledges, that an e-mail list does provide value in terms of providing data that shows who opened the e-mail and who clicked on the link to go to the ticketing website, but he asks Debra what is the return on investment of advertising on billboards



and city buses. Debra responds that the organization tries to ask people when they purchase tickets where they heard about the organization, but the return on investment occurs through brand awareness.

Per responds that brand awareness can be achieved on social and digital media and emphasizes that social media is a primary way that people are constantly accessing via their mobile devices. Per further tells Debra that the return on investment with using social media as a relational tool will consist of increased brand awareness on social media and increased conversions in people buying tickets, but he notes the organization must change its strategy, or get left behind. As an example, he discusses another hockey franchise who has received lots of publicity for their engaging social media content.

Debra expresses skepticism but tells Per to work on a social media marketing plan and report back in one week. Debra assigns one of her team members, Marina Gomez, to help Per. After the meeting, Marina approaches Per and tells him that many of the marketing staff know the social media marketing efforts need to be re-configured, and she tells Per she shares his philosophy about using social media as a relational tool and understands the need to reach people via mobile devices.

Per and Maria arrange a time to meet later that day to get started. As Per goes back to his office, he feels excited about the opportunity in front of him.



Unit 2.1 Social and Digital Media Marketing Fundamentals

Social and digital media technologies have become a major social force. Initially, people used digital and social media to connect with others, and while this still occurs, social media has become a source people turn to for news, a forum for social commentary, and has become a strategic business tool. The growth of social and digital media is also influenced by cultural shifts in mobile consumption as many people now own smart phones and use these devices as a major life management tool. Indeed, people access their banking and shopping via mobile and use these devices to stream media and entertainment content. Given the growth of social and digital media, these platforms have become valuable tools for marketing. However, as social media is different from traditional media, some organizations struggle because they try to use social media in ways that resemble traditional media. For example, one key difference between social and traditional media is that with social media, audiences are more empowered with voice and can not only communicate with organizations via social media, but they can also spread negative messages about an organization via these platforms. Accordingly, some organizations do not account for this outcome and do not plan their marketing content accordingly and as a result, experience negative publicity along with not reaching marketing goals. For instance, consider an organization that tries to use a tragedy or natural disaster to promote purchasing. In these situations, organizations experience significant negative feedback from social media audiences as well as negative publicity. Social and digital media are more immediate than traditional media, and organizations must adjust their messaging to account for things like pandemics, natural disasters, and remember that social and digital media are participative and the organization is subject to a multitude of voices on these platforms.

For sports organizations, social and digital media have become valuable tools for communication, public relations, and marketing. Indeed, social and digital media are now major parts of the sports experience, as people can stream sporting events via these technologies; communicate with other fans, athletes, coaches and sports media members, and to engage sports organizations. Given the high visibility of social media and digital media in sports, these platforms are beneficial tools for sports marketing professionals. However, they must be used strategically and in a manner that is audience-centric. For example, most people do not get on social media because they are looking to buy something; they are looking for an experience. Thus, sports organizations need to match their content to the experiences that people are seeking on various social media platforms. This does not suggest that sports organizations cannot promote ticket sales or ask people to purchase via their social media content, but these messages should be balanced out by



other content that is more relationally driven. An old marketing adage is that people will buy from *those they like*, and that statement is true with social media.

2.1.1 Sports Marketing and Communication in Social and Digital Media

Social and digital media are essential elements of sports organizations' marketing and communication strategies. Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (2014) detailed that social media holds value for sports organizations in the following ways: (a) builds an audience of fans with whom the sports organization can interact with in real-time; (b) engages fans in ways they want to be engaged as sports organizations can provide a variety of content that meets the needs of diverse audiences and which enhances loyalty and affinity for the organization; (c) offers the organization a viable way to increase brand awareness and word-of-mouth through people sharing the organization's content across social media networks due to the viral nature of social media (d) influences behavior such as purchasing tickets, viewing the organization's games, and fostering connections with the organization's relational partners and sponsors; (e) motivates people to buy from organizations, particularly if the organizations is recommended by someone in their social network. Social and digital media, therefore, underpin virtually every element of a sports organization, but for the marketing function, social and digital media provide a tool to achieve marketing goals such as sales and brand awareness, image, and equity, but to do so, these tools must be used strategically. Additionally, sports organizations vary and have differing levels of resources, so it is important that a sports organization stays within their resource allocation and doesn't try and exceed their capabilities. For example, a minor-league baseball organization, due to staffing and financial resources, may not be able to actively maintain accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, whereas a major-league baseball franchise would likely have the resources to do so. Thus, each sports organization needs to determine what social media platform holds the most value, based on the audiences the organization is trying to reach.

Like many organizational functions, social and digital media require planning and should work in concert with other organizational areas. To be truly effective, social and digital media should not be seen as *something else* that the organization does, but should undercut every aspect of the organization. For sports marketing professionals, social and digital media must be employed in ways that foster positive associations with the organization as this will help maintain and enhance the organization's brand equity as emotions and experiences are something that people correlate with the brand of a sports organization (Mullin et al., 2014). Indeed, social media marketing strategist Gary Vaynerchuk (2013) notes that for social media content to be truly effective, it must compel people to engage with it, which involves providing content that matches the experience people are seeking when they go on a social media platform.



One question that often comes up with social and digital media and marketing is return on investment (ROI). While this is an appropriate question to be asked, it is important to remember that social media is different than traditional media, and thus, the standards we apply to measuring social media must be different than those used with traditional media (Vaynerchuk, 2013). For example, Vaynerchuk (2013) notes that to sell products, an organization needs to get their content in front of as many eyeballs as possible, which is why organizations have advertised on television, radio, billboards and other forms of traditional media. However, with social media, content that does not elicit a response (such as a *like* on Facebook, or a re-tweet on Twitter) does not get elevated, whereas content that gets shared sees significant visibility. Thus, to be visible, the organization must put out content that will compel people to engage with it, and as Vaynerchuk (2013) notes, that rarely happens in a sales-oriented post. Additionally, ROI can be answered through the information that can be obtained via social media. For instance, Facebook provides very robust data on users who engage with an organization's post, and sports organizations can integrate this information into their databases and can use this information to tailor messages that are specifically relevant to each individual. Finally, given the dominance of mobile consumption, sports organizations need to be reaching people where they are *at* and that provides ROI as well, because the sports organization is visible in a place where people are actively consuming.

2.1.2 Building an Audience

Given the importance of social and digital media to sports organizations, it is vital that an audience be built on these platforms. Certainly, many sports organizations benefit from the global presence of sport, and thus, there will be a natural attraction for many people to follow a sports organization without the sports organization exerting requests for fans and others to subscribe to their social and digital media content. However, what might be termed *automatic following* due to inherent interest in sport, only generates an initial audience, and not all sports organizations share high visibility. Thus, a franchise in the English Premier League (EPL) may generate a bigger initial audience than a Division III intercollegiate athletics program in the United States. Consequently, sports organizations must be diligent in building and growing audiences on social media, and there is a variety of ways that sports organizations can do this. Mullin et al. (2014) noted that there are several venues that sports organizations can explore here including: (a) in-game and in-event advertising; (b) in-broadcast; (c) through online, direct and digital marketing; and (d) shared-optimized content. With in-game advertising, many sports organizations now actively promote their social media accounts on playing surfaces, in visible areas in the venue, or as part of in-game events and promotions. This is a great way for fans and others to *notice* the organization's social media profiles, and as many people come to games with their mobile devices, they can instantly follow the organization's social media accounts.

Social and digital media are major parts of sports broadcasts, and some media outlets show announcers’ social media handles and integrate social media commentary during broadcasts. Additionally, game recaps via social and digital media have become very popular and through features like 360-degree video, many sports organizations are putting out compelling graphics that generate significant responses which speaks to the principle of creating compelling content that people want to engage with.

Sports organizations also can merge social and digital media into their other advertising and marketing efforts. For example, an organization could feature a social media promotion in an e-mail to season-ticket holders and many sports organizations have created identifiable brand hashtags that are featured in their advertising and marketing via traditional and digital channels. Additionally, some sports organizations have gone so far as to feature their social media accounts and hashtags on concession items such as cups. Shared-optimized content is a great way to build audiences as sports organizations rely on influencers or run campaigns that encourage sharing to grow their audience. For example, some sports organizations have used social media to encourage fans to share a picture of fans displaying their fandom, or have offered a limited time campaign where the organization will follow fans on Twitter if they respond to the tweet in the designated timeframe. Moreover, sports organizations should be looking at social media influencers who the organization could feature in social media content to enhance their exposure and build an audience. To help you better understand this concept, complete the following table for your own organization and identify ways that your organization can build its social media audience:

Table 1: Building a Social Media Audience

Building a Social Media Audience		
Source	Assessment of Current Efforts	How can strategy be maintained or improved?
In-game and In-event		
In-Broadcast		
Online, Direct, and Digital Marketing		
Shared-optimized content		

Source: prepared by the author.

2.1.3 Promotional Mix

One of the challenges for sports organizations is determining how to strategize their social media content. In other words, how much content should be sales-oriented or promotional in nature? How much should be relationally-oriented, or should not *ask* the audience to do something? There are many perspectives on the correct ratio, but is



important to remember that each organization is unique and has different audiences they are trying to reach, so what might work best for one organization, may not work for another organization. However, if an organization skews too much one way or the other, it can hinder the effectiveness of social and digital media in marketing efforts. For example, if an organization only posts social media content that asks people to buy things, they will likely lose the audience, yet, if they never ask the audience for a purchase, then social media may not generate a sufficient return to be sustainable. One helpful way of looking at the promotional mix is the *jab/hook* analogy used by social media marketing strategist Gary Vaynerchuk (2013). Vaynerchuk likens social media content to boxing punches by equating *jabs* with relationally driven content that does not make demands or ask the audience to do something. He then equates a *hook* with a social media post that is sales-oriented or which asks the audience to take some action. Vaynerchuk (2013) describes that just as a boxer throws a series of jab punches and then lands a hook, organizations should prime their social media audiences by throwing a series of jabs and then coming in with a hook that asks the audience to do something. The promotional mix is also influenced by what Vaynerchuk (2013) classifies as *native* or *micro content*, or said differently, content that is specific to the social media platform. Thus, there is content that works best on Twitter, and other content that works best on Facebook, and again, content that is best-suited for Instagram.

For sports marketing professionals crafting their promotional mix on social media, they must determine: (a) what social media platforms the organization uses; (b) what experiences or expectations people have when they use those platforms; (c) how the organizations can then deliver content on that platform that matches those expectations; (d) how that content will compel audiences to engage with it; and (e) measure the response and evaluate their strategy accordingly. This last component is very important as social and digital media platforms provide a variety of analytical tools that can be used to measure performance, and thus, a sports organization can assess the degree to which their promotional mix is working, and if there is a lack of engagement, sports marketing professionals can adjust the promotional mix. Keep in mind that while snap judgments should be avoided, sports organizations need to be responsive and reflexive to audience feedback, and remember that social media audiences will not wait 90 days for compelling content, and therefore, there must be consistent evaluation and adjustment with the promotional mix on social and digital media.

2.1.4 Mobile Marketing

Mobile technology is a major societal and cultural force. Mobile devices are very accessible and it is difficult to go to a public place and not see people accessing their mobile devices. As mobile technology has increased, consumer usage and demands have introduced some compelling changes. For example, many people now watch media and

entertainment on their mobile devices through streaming platforms such as Netflix and Hulu, and therefore, no longer subscribe to cable television. Additionally, people now conduct much of their banking and shopping through their mobile devices and there are a host of applications for mobile devices that allow people to participate in social media, manage their finances, turn their home lights on and off, and measure their fitness, exercise, and nutrition. In short, mobile consumption is a dominant global force and organizations must adapt their marketing efforts to reach people on these platforms.

In addition to reaching people in a place where they are spending a good portion of their time and attention, there are some other reasons why sports organizations should be focused on mobile marketing. First is that through mobile marketing, sports organizations can enhance the relevancy of their message. Keep in mind that most people consume social media from their mobile devices and this generates significant data that sports organizations can use to tailor messages to ensure that their messaging is as relevant as possible. Second, sharing is a major function that people perform on mobile devices, and as people share content to their social media followers, this helps grow the sports organization's brand awareness. Additionally, many people also turn to social media when they are looking for recommendations (Facebook has a specific post for recommendations for example) or information about something and sports organizations that engage people in compelling ways via mobile marketing are likely to see positive word of mouth, which in turn, increases brand awareness. Finally, people are constantly checking their mobile devices and sports organizations that are active on mobile can increase their visibility, given the frequency with which people are checking mobile devices, including social media content.

Whereas there are certainly benefits to mobile marketing, if sports organizations do not put out compelling content that is mobile *friendly*, their marketing efforts will be hindered. For example, some videos and images have a different resolution on a desktop as opposed to a mobile device and sports organizations need to ensure that their content is going to have a clean, visible, appearance on mobile, as that is where most people will be accessing the organization's content. Sports organizations must also invest in graphics and strong digital content if they hope to engage audiences on mobile, as most people expect some visual content in a social media post. In other words, very few people will engage with a text-only post. While these can certainly be used periodically, sports organizations, again, need to make sure that the content they put out matches the experiences and expectations people have for mobile content.



Unit 2.2 Strategic Application of Social and Digital Media in Sports Marketing

Social and digital media are a necessity for sports organizations to employ in their marketing efforts. However, like most things, to be effective, there must be strategy behind social and digital media. Sports organizations cannot just outsource social media to an intern and hope they do a good job with social media. There must be a plan in place for how social and digital media will be a strategic marketing tool. For example, what platforms will be used? What kinds of messages will be put on those platforms? How will feedback be responded to? Of course, those questions also require the organization to think about the marketing goals for social media. What is the organization hoping to achieve? Do they want to see social media help increase ticket sales by 20%? Do they want to drive more traffic to the organization's website? Do they want to increase brand awareness? Do they seek publicity for their social efforts? Understanding marketing goals will help sports organizations ensure that there is strategic application in their social and digital media content usage. Sports organizations must also think about engagement and the role it will play in their application of social and digital media. For example, how can the audiences the organization is trying to reach be engaged on social media? Engagement often manifests in two ways: through compelling content that will make people engage with it (Vaynerchuk, 2013) and responding to comments and interaction from the audience. Social and digital media work best as a two-way communication tool. While some sports organizations have extremely large audiences, it is still important to look for ways to interact with them. Doing so creates a positive emotions and experiences that audiences will associate with the sports organization's brand

Strategic application also requires sports organizations to measure their performance. Social media platforms provide a variety of data that sports organizations can use in their marketing endeavors, and thus, sports marketing professionals should routinely be assessing how social media and digital is working to achieve goals. For example, if one of the goals is to drive people to the team's website to purchase merchandise, and initial results are underwhelming, sports marketing professionals need to adjust the content associated with people being asked to take this action. Perhaps if the sports organization featured ran a contest asking fans to submit pictures of team merchandise and featured those photographs in a social media post that had a link to the team's website, more effective results would be obtained. Finally, strategic application of social and digital media also requires sports organizations to be continually learning and to apply the experiences of other organizations. Social and digital media are not static but are continually changing and therefore, sports organizations should be aware of emerging trends, best practices and positive and negative outcomes other organizations have experienced with their marketing efforts. There is a wealth of collective intelligence

available with digital and social media marketing, and sports marketing professionals should take advantage of these resources.

2.2.1 Managing Multiple Platforms

Social media is a major element in sports, and sports fans and others consistently seek information from a variety of social media platforms. Thus, one of the challenges for sports organizations is determining what social media platforms they will use, and once those have been selected, how they should manage them. Every sports organization is unique and has varying levels of resources, and so the decision about which platforms to use should be tailored to the needs of the sports organization. For example, which is the audience that the sports organization is trying to reach? Whatever the answer is, the sports organization then needs to determine what social media platforms are most likely to reach that audience, and then what content will most resonate with the audiences.

In most cases, a sports organization is going to need to be on multiple social media platforms because they have multiple stakeholders and audiences they are trying to reach. Again, it is important that sports organizations don't exceed resources here, as if resources are spread too thin, some of the social media accounts will not be updated, and will not be active on a social media platform by consistently posting significantly hinders sports organization's marketing efforts on social media. Social media audiences are routinely checking social media for content, and if sports organizations are not delivering consistent content, they will lose the audience. Sports marketing professionals should understand that posting frequency varies by the social media platform. For example, a platform like Facebook, where longer-form content can be used, may be sufficient to post 1-2 times a day, whereas a platform like Twitter, which has a 280-character constraint may require 8-10 posts per day. Again, the frequency will vary by the audiences the sports organization is trying to reach on the platform, so sports marketing professionals should pay attention to engagement rates and other metrics that can help inform posting frequency. Managing multiple social media platforms can certainly be time-consuming, and there is a number of content management platforms such as HootSuite, Sprout Social and Buffer that can be used to manage multiple social media platforms from a central dashboard that can be accessed via a desktop as well as a mobile. Another tool that can help sports marketing professionals manage multiple social media platforms is social media content calendar. This tool helps in the planning of social media content by listing out content for a designated period of time (e.g., one week, two weeks, one month) so the content is planned in advance. This tool can help sports marketing professionals ensure they are posting diverse content and keeping content fresh for audiences. Keep in mind that separate content calendars may need to be utilized for each social media platform and/or each audience the sports organization is trying to reach. Finally, one tool that sports marketing professionals can employ in managing multiple social media platforms



is a feature to schedule posts in advance. This feature certainly helps save time, but must be used cautiously. For example, if a national tragedy or disaster occurs, it is important that planned posts are checked, so the organization does not send out a ticket promotion social media post in the middle of people responding to a tragedy.

2.2.2 Integrating Relational Partners

Sports marketing is a relationally-oriented process and this aligns with the relational nature of social media. Sports marketing professionals can look for ways to integrate corporate sponsors into the organization's social media content as part of sponsorship packages. For example, some organizations use a sponsor's name in a tweet re-capping a game or to promote something a player does that has a natural connection to a sponsor. As another example, a sports organization may feature a player's pre-game music list by integrating a music company's name into the tweet announcing the playlist. Additionally, sports organizations can examine how their corporate sponsors might be involved in community efforts that align with the values of the organization, or in which the sports organization is partnering with a sponsor on a community initiative and feature this in their social media content. Moreover, corporate sponsors and other relational partners may receive recognition for a positive achievement, and this news is something that sports organizations can feature in their social media content as well.

While social media offers viable ways to strengthen relationship with corporate sponsors and other entities, sports organizations need to be careful that the integration of these partners is not perceived as being *forced* on fans and other social media audiences the organization is trying to reach. The more seamless the integration can be the better. That is, sports organizations would not want to overtly tell fans to go buy something from a corporate sponsor. However, by integrating the sponsor into a tweet that re-caps a game, or for which there is a natural connection such as a music company and a pre-game playlist, sponsors can creatively be made visible to the organization's social media audience. Additionally, as brand equity is often associated with experiences and emotions (Mullin et al., 2014), sports organizations should be careful about integrating sponsors in negative situations, such as following a loss or if the team has just traded away a popular player. While these risks need to be managed, social and digital media are great tools to strengthen relationships with corporate sponsors and can enhance sponsorship packages that sports organizations can offer to corporations and other potential partners.

2.2.3 Measuring Effectiveness

Like many organizational areas, the use of social media in sports marketing must be consistently measured and assessed to ensure effectiveness. Of course, to evaluate effectiveness, the sports organization must define goals against which performance can



be measured. Additionally, these goals and methodologies for evaluating performance can be included both in the organization's formal marketing plan, as well as in the organization's social media plan. One benefit of social media is that it provides a wealth of data used to measure effectiveness. For example, sports organizations can obtain data on how many people engaged with a post (e.g., opened a Snapchat post, re-tweeted a tweet, liked a Facebook post) along with seeing demographic information associated with those who engaged with a post-They also can measure things such as conversions by seeing what actions people took based on a social media post. For instance, an organization can put a link to the organization's merchandise site and see how many people clicked through from the social media to the post to the website and purchased something, and obtain demographic information for those individuals. Moreover, an organization can use a hash tag as part of a promotion (e.g., use a hash tag to get 10% off a ticket purchase) and then see how many people used that hash tag in their ticketing consumption.

Social and digital media are constantly evolving and thus, sports marketing professionals need to be continually vigilant in evaluating their effectiveness on these platforms. These assessments should be data-driven, and social and digital media platforms offer an abundant repository of data that sports organizations can use in their evaluations. For example, if a particular post on Facebook is generating more conversions to the organization's website, then the organization should evaluate what is contained in that post, and continue to put out similar content. Additionally, they should be simultaneously monitoring feedback and engagement, as consumer preferences and attitudes change very quickly on social media.

2.2.4 Pitfalls to Avoid in Social and Digital Sports Marketing

Social and digital media, while valuable tools for sports organizations, do contain risk and sports marketing professionals need to be mindful of these concerns as they use these platforms to execute marketing initiatives. One pitfall to avoid in social and digital media marketing is to ensure that the content the organization is putting out on social media matches the experience the audience is seeking. For example, there is a certain kind of content a person expects when they go to Facebook or when they go to Snapchat, and sports organizations need to make sure they are delivering platform-appropriate content. Second, sports marketing professionals need to be cautious about using outside events, such as national holidays, days of remembrance or other tragedies to market the organization. In general, when an organization does this, they receive significant negative feedback and end up creating a public relations incident. Said differently, sometimes the more effective marketing strategy on social and digital media is to say nothing and to know when to go silent. A third pitfall that can occur with social and digital media pertains to audience interaction and response. Sports marketing professionals should be reminded

of the *social* nature of social media and understand that no matter how well-intentioned a marketing campaign, there is likely to be negative feedback, and arguing with a social media user is not going to help the organization. Instead, there should be a plan in place to manage feedback.

Some additional pitfalls to avoid are provided by Mullin et al. (2014) and include:

- **Manage access to accounts** – make sure that the people responsible for the organization's social media content are trustworthy. It can also be helpful for a policy to be in place that outlines the organization's philosophy on social media and instructs these individuals on protocol for things like responding to feedback.
- **Keeping personal and official accounts separate** – social media provides the ability for users to navigate back and forth between accounts, and there have been issues where something has appeared on a sports organization's social media account that the person running the account thought they were posting from a personal account. Having clear delineation place can help prevent this issue from occurring.
- **Delete with caution** – While it can be acceptable to delete a negative comment that is abusive, sports organizations need to be careful about deleting negative feedback as this appears that the sports organization is not receptive to feedback. Additionally, while a sports organization can delete one of their own posts, this should be done with care, as the post has likely been captured and shared across social media.
- **Own mistakes** – Although it can be problematic to experience the fallout from a social media miscue, transparency and honesty can help mitigate these effects. Sports organizations that admit their mistakes and outline a plan to prevent future occurrence, are better suited to endure the fallout and build goodwill with social media audiences. Attempting to shift blame or deny what happened tend to only exacerbate negative attention already focused on the sports organization.

References

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