

Module 4. Communicating about sustainability

Unit 4.1 Understanding the potential of sports and athletes as advocates for sustainability

Introduction

"I just couldn't breathe," she said. "I couldn't walk so I just went down (onto the floor) because I couldn't stand up straight."

"After that I had a panic attack because I couldn't get air. It was very hard, I have to say. It was one of my hardest matches". (Ramsay et al., 2020, para. 6)

These were the words of Dalila Jakupovic, explaining that she was forced to retire when bushfire smoke brought on a coughing fit at the 2020 Australian Open qualifiers in Melbourne, after a footage that reached millions of spectators, not only tennis fans.

Figure 1: Jakupovic resigning



Source: Screenshot by author of *Dalila Jakupovic hits out at Australian Open organizers after bushfire smoke forces her to quit*, CNN, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/14/tennis/australian-open-air-quality-spt-intl/index.html?utm_source=twCNN&utm_medium=social&utm_term=video&utm_content=2020-01-14T17%3A00%3A09

But Jakupovic was not the first athlete to have to resign to compete. Before her, in 2008, Beijing smog forced Gebrselassie to withdraw from the Olympic marathon, starting a movement.

Climate change-driven air pollution is putting pressure on sports, and the governing bodies and event organizers are integrating athletes as the advocates for raising awareness about sustainability.

These athletes, as advocates, work in the intersection of sustainability strategies, corporate social responsibility initiatives, communication and commercial campaigns, sport medicine protocols, ethical committees, public relationships, sponsorships campaigns, and events organization.

Different ways in which athletes have taken the lead in the fight for more sustainable sport participation are:

- Marathon legend **Eliud Kipchoge** is now helping **World Athletics** and UN in their quest to raise awareness of the sources of pollution and the effects on human and

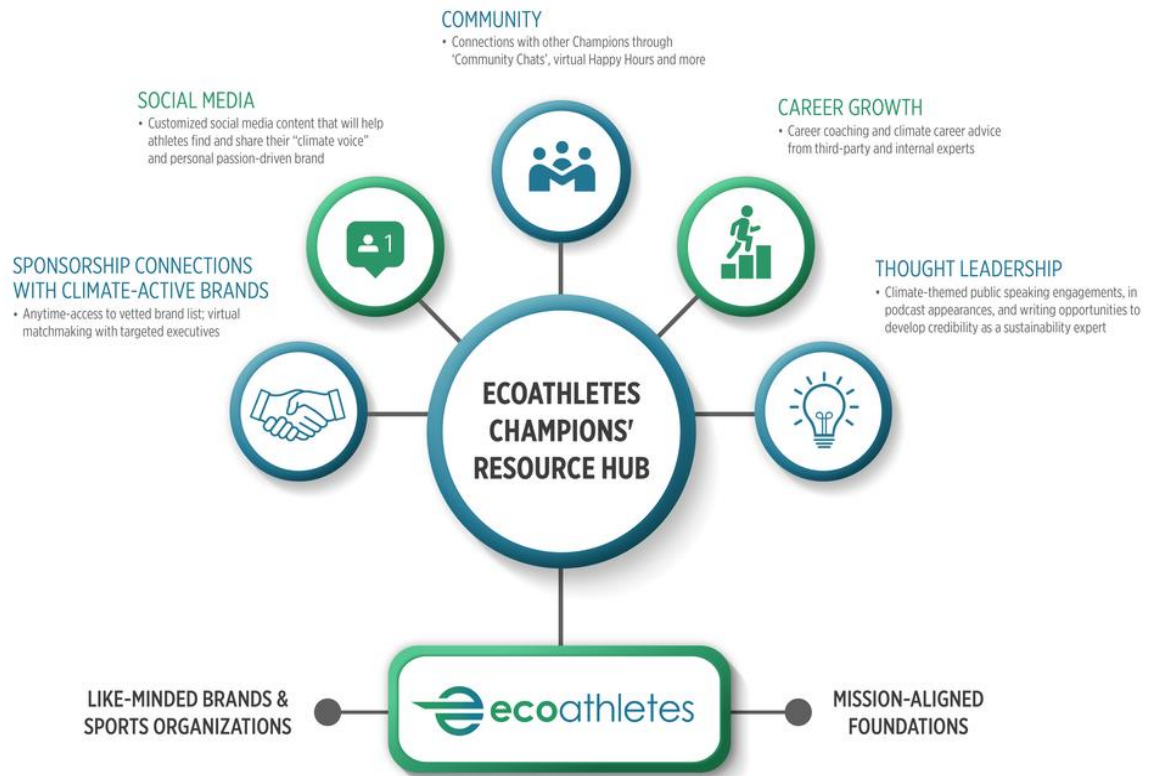


planetary health, bringing together different stakeholders and mobilizing a community of young followers towards more sustainable practices (Annibali, 2021).

- Former **Formula 1** and **Formula E** driver **Luca Degrassi** took the role of UN ambassador for clean air in 2018, and promotes electric mobility to help combat the rising levels of air pollution. In the documentary *The Race for Clean Air*, the former champ takes a trip to the heavily polluted metropolis of New Delhi to meet with people who are most severely affected by poor air (FIA Formula E, n.d.).
- The British world record sailor **Ellen McArthur** founded, in 2009, one of the most famous organizations for the protection of the environment. **The Ellen MacArthur Foundation** (<https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/>), which works to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. It develops and promotes the idea of a circular economy, and works with businesses, academia, policymakers, and institutions to mobilise systems solutions at scale, globally.
- **EcoAthletes** has identified some of the key challenges that athletes face as advocates for sustainability. For example, while many athletes had spoken out about social matters during the 20th century, it seemed that many modern athletes see climate change too science oriented or political. Overcoming these obstacles became the mission for Ecoathletes.

Ecoathletes is managed by an experienced team of athletes and academics, climate scientists and ecopreneurs, green business leaders and journalists, devoted to identifying and equipping the Jackie Robinsons and the Megan Rapinoes of the climate crisis to lead climate action <https://www.ecoathletes.org/>

Figure 2: Ecoathletes champions' resource hub



Source: Screenshot by author from Ecoathletes (<https://www.ecoathletes.org/resource-hub>)



Unit 4.2 Benefits of sustainable purpose-driven communication for the sports organization

Why is communication strategy important?

Sustainability,

beyond the popularity of the word itself is a business strategy. Companies and organizations can benefit by mapping the objectives of their sustainability strategy with the expectations of the stakeholders – mainly investors and customers. Although for a sports organization, the definition of a stakeholder goes above and beyond investors and customers and also includes players and fans. Sustainability strategy is largely a top-line plan, has a healthy influence on the bottom-line growth of the company.

Sustainability communication is an approach to engage stakeholders in order to showcase progress on sustainability commitments. It is understood to have a positive influence on the shareholder value when one can showcase how they drive business value with ESG & sustainability. Sustainability communication effectively engages all the key stakeholders and aligns well with the company's overall strategic objectives as defined by the sustainability action plan. Any action plan should define the role of communication in sustainable development.

A thorough sustainability communication strategy is mandatory to have the desired benefits – both non-material and material. Sustainability communication strategy, like any other strategy, has to start with a data-driven understanding of an audience and the stakeholders. It is imperative that we map out the motivations with messages that resonate. The right mix of communication channels can then accelerate the delivery of these messages forward. (...)

As an example, Institutional investors will look for sustainability (or ESG) factors which are likely to have an impact of a company's financial performance, while a customer will be interested in non-material factors such as sustainable sourcing or sustainable products. Hence, a thorough sustainability communication strategy is mandatory to have the desired benefits – both non-material and material. (Bhatia, n.d., para. 1-4)

Sustainability community strategy



Sustainability communication strategy starts with a thorough understanding of your audience. The audience is the stakeholders, who can vary according to industry as well as the nature or size of the organization. Players and fans are stakeholders who are unique to a sporting organization and play a very crucial role in success or failure of their sustainability strategy. In addition to this, many sports organizations use their sporting history and legacy as a supporting tool to disseminate their initiatives to their fans. Many football clubs around the world enjoy support of a large fanbase that passes on from one generation to another. These clubs have been using this fan loyalty as part of their communication strategy to strengthen their fanbase globally. Mentioned below are some of the key stakeholders for a sports organization and the role they play in their sustainability communication strategy.

Customers

No business can survive without its customers. As customers are becoming more aware of responsibilities towards protecting the environment, it is bringing a change in their buying habits and customers are shifting their attention towards products that are more sustainable and environment-friendly. Therefore, it is imperative that organizations also adapt to this changing customer behaviour.

Investors

Sustainable investment is another area which has gained significant momentum in recent times. ESG investment which refers to analysing environment, social, and governance performance of an organization has become an important benchmark for investors. Whether it is an existing business or a new venture, business owners must develop communication plans that highlight their sustainability approach to attract the attention of potential investors.

Employees

For any organization, employees play a crucial role in developing a connection with the outside world. Like customers, employees are also increasingly associating themselves with companies that are aligned to their personal vision and mission. Individuals who are themselves involved in promoting sustainability naturally feel more inclined to work for organizations that engage in sustainable practices. Therefore, organizations should seek actively to engage their employees in their communication strategy and encourage them to contribute to their sustainability strategy. Another way in which a company can win more support from its employees is through a reward scheme where employees are rewarded for their efforts in promoting sustainability programs.

Players



Players are considered as the face of the sport they play, and therefore for any sports organization having support from their players is of utmost importance. Communication strategy for an individual sport can be significantly different from a team sport. For example, where a tennis player can drive his own personal agenda through his own communication channels, a football player is often restricted by the policies and ideologies of the team he/she plays for. Football clubs are frontrunners in these practices. As these clubs becoming more and more global, they actively engage their star players as part of their communication strategy to increase their visibility and connect with their fans.

Fans

In a way, fans can be considered as customers for sports organizations, as they are responsible for driving the business of the organization. From buying tickets to watch the sport to buying merchandise, fans are the lifeline for any sport. In these changing times, if an organization fails to effectively communicate their values and strategy to their fans, it will be extremely difficult for them to continue in the long run.

ESG and Sustainable communication

One of the most important advantages of sustainability communication is that it helps improve the company's ESG rating. ESG factors (Environmental, Social, and Governance factors) are used to measure the sustainability or ethical impacts of a company. ESG ratings or an ESG score, in many cases, can act as a tangible indicator of sustainability performance.

It is widely used by investors to foresee any financial risks posed by the company's operational or non-operational activities as it relates to ESG factors. Investors and other stakeholders are always keen on looking at the company's ESG score and improvements within. While transparency through media and other channels drives customer retention and affinity, sustainability communication impacts the shareholder value.

Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) champions and sustainability teams

The teams that manage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or sustainability programs are a very important vertical in any organization. Apart from the many benefits that the CSR or sustainability teams brings in - management of reputation risks is a very important responsibility of CSR professionals. ESG scores, among

many signals, also looks at a company's sustainability profile (including any CSR program). Since CSR and sustainability teams are heavily involved, these teams can positively influence the company's ESG score.

Investors regularly look for indicators to gather confidence in companies progress towards their sustainability commitments. Hence, well-formed communication efforts are impactful when engaging with your stakeholders. A well-funded CSR or sustainability team can be dedicated to (or with a help of a dedicated partner such as us) activate channels for access to capital through investor (sustainable investing) out-reach. (Bhatia, n.d., para. 7-11)

World Athletics – sustainability strategy 2020-2030

World Athletics (WA) is the global governing body for the sport of athletics. Boasting 214 national Member Federations, World Athletics has significant global reach, and is responsible for the worldwide development of the sport of athletics. World Athletics is committed to ensuring that its athletics events, which are held all over the world, and its headquarters, based in Monaco, are fully aligned to the principles of sustainability. Sustainability within athletics is defined as driving the practices and behaviours of individuals and organizations developing the sport in such a way that it: • accounts for the needs of future generations; • provides a fair and level sporting platform based on sound ethical principles; • actively involves interested parties, and is open about decisions and activities; and • ensures actions take a balanced approach to their social, economic, and environmental impact.

To embed sustainability behaviours and practices across the sport requires attention to what individuals think, feel, and do, as well as making practical changes to governance, systems, and processes. For this, World Athletics has developed a communication and engagement strategy that will set out how it will inform and inspire individuals to take individual and collective action on sustainability and influence others to do the same, building momentum for change.

To achieve this goal, implementation of the strategy will need to set out a framework of programme level communication and engagement activities and processes, as well as addressing the communication needs of individual projects. The success of the programme will rely on the buy in, or required actions, of a broad number of individuals. Sustainability is about behavioural change when it comes to delivery and there are different levels of engagement that can be identified, namely:

1. lack of knowledge

2. knowledgeable, but not engaged
3. knowledgeable and engaged, but unwilling to change their operations
4. knowledgeable and engaged, but unsure of actions to take
5. knowledgeable and engaged and taking effective action

A communication and engagement plan should focus on moving people towards level 5 - knowledgeable, engaged, and empowered to take effective action. The output can be likened to a coaching programme where individuals are motivated by their own interests and gain knowledge and start to act in manageable, achievable steps, building on incremental successes.

Outward facing communications and engagement should be focused on building up a movement to support global achievement of the high-level objectives. The power of an international sports federation is the reach and scalability of impact, building the capacity of individuals to take personal and collective action to create better environments and communities in the short, medium and longer term.

A communications strategy should look to align the messaging with the corporate, hosting, and delivery partners. This can be done throughout the year, but areas where messaging will be maximised will be around the flagship events from fans visiting, though it is as importantly to communicate through the social media and broadcast channels.

Developing high-profile ambassadors will also build the following. Finding those athletes who are passionate about a certain aspect of the strategy and have a real drive in their message will certainly help the programme. Whilst there may be some coaching needed in the specifics of the issues that is of interest to them, the engagement and support needs to exist.

Summary

World Athletics is just one of many organizations where the executive board has identified the importance of a well-defined communication strategy in their long-term sustainability strategy. As sports organizations look for new avenues to foster a strong relationship with their stakeholders, developing communication campaigns that clearly highlights the company's vision and mission in implementing sustainable programs will play a key role in the future. Similarly, as consumers and fans become increasingly aware

of their own responsibility towards adopting sustainable practices, communicating that their favourite player or their favourite club is also taking similar steps will only contribute to developing a positive image for the organization. Every sport organization should embrace this change and make efforts to adapt with the changing consumer's demand. Moreover, as consumers become increasingly reliant on new modern communication platforms, the need to develop well-thought communication strategies has never been as high.

Unit 4.3 Creating your sustainability communication plan as a function of an integrated sports marketing plan

How are marketing and communication interlinked?

The expression "marketing and communications" is often used to denote all facets of a company's marketing process, including communication. In reality, marketing is an umbrella concept and communication is a key component of it, along with market research and customer service. Companies use market research to understand customers and then prepare benefit messages used in communication.

The Four Ps

Marketing communications, or "marcom" is the final part of the marketing mix of product, price, place, and promotion, also known as The Four Ps. Promotion, this definition includes advertising, public relations, social media, promotions, native advertising and other product or service messaging efforts.

Audience selection and messaging

Before business owners can effectively promote or communicate benefits, they need to understand the audience. This is why the research element of marketing is critical. When companies develop a marketing plan, they identify particular customer segments with potential interest in products and services.

From this list, one or more target markets are identified for emphasis in promotional campaigns. Research within targeted customer groups allows for better understanding of customer needs and buying motives and helps guide the creation of targeted marketing and communications.

Message development strategies

Establishing marketing objectives and developing messages are another key part of a marketing plan. Objectives include increasing marketing share, growing the customer base, creating more favourable brand attitudes, encouraging brand switching, and generating sales.



With the objective and audience in mind, the next phase of transition into the communication side of marketing is message formulation. Companies need to impress targeted customers with a valuable mixture of desired benefits and a reasonable price.

Methods of communication

Marketing communication or promotion typically focuses around three major elements: advertising, public relations, and selling. Some companies use all three communication approaches, while others focus on one or two. Using more than one type of messaging channel creates an integrated marketing communications strategy. Advertising includes paid messages presented through media. Public relations is unpaid-for or "earned" media coverage.

Companies that sell high-end or complex products often use sales professionals to assertively present product or service benefits to customers. Picking the right methods of communication, as well as the right media to reach the target audience, carries major weight in achieving communication objectives.

Customer service

Retaining customers is another function of marketing. This includes customer service strategies and techniques where service and support employees communicate with customers about their experiences. Follow-up communication helps ensure resolution of any problems and allows the business to learn about any common issues experienced by customers. Additionally, post-sale technical support is needed with complex products, such as technology, to enable customers to get maximum benefits. (Chron Contributor, 2021, para. 1-9).

What is a marketing communication mix?

Marketing is a broad business function that includes product research and development, merchandising and distribution processes and pricing, as well as communication or promotion. The communication mix refers to specific methods used to promote the company or its products to targeted customers. Some depictions of the promotional mix include five elements, while others add a sixth – event sponsorship.

The advertising element



Advertising is often the most prominent element of the communication mix. In fact, marketing and advertising are often misconstrued as the same thing. Advertising includes all messages a business pays to deliver through a medium to reach a targeted audience. Since it involves the majority of paid messages, companies often allocate significant amounts of the marketing budget to the advertising function. While it can be costly, the advertiser has ultimate control over the message delivered, since it pays the television or radio station, print publication, or website for placement.

Personal selling and direct marketing

Personal selling is sometimes integrated with the direct marketing element. However, many companies make such extensive use of a sales force that it is important to consider this component distinctly. Distribution channel suppliers use salespeople to promote products for resale to trade buyers. Retail salespeople promote the value of goods and services to consumers in retail businesses.

Selling is more emphasized by companies that sell higher-end products and services that require more assertive efforts to persuade customers to buy.

Discounts and promotions

Sales promotions or discounts are similar to advertising in that they are often promoted through paid communication. However, sales promotions actually involve offering a discounted price to a buyer. This may include coupons, percent-off deals and rebates. Along with ads to promote deals and coupon mailers, companies use exterior signs and in-store signage to call customer attention to the discounts.

Goals of this communication tool include increasing revenue and cash flow, attracting new customers and clearing out extra inventory.

Public relations and messaging

Public relations is sometimes somewhat similar to advertising in that much of it involves messages communicated through mass media. The major difference is you don't pay for the time or space for the message. A television or newspaper feature story mentioning a business, for instance, isn't paid for and can provide brand exposure.

The downside of PR is that you don't always control the messages. You can try to influence them through press releases and invites for media coverage, but the media could put a negative spin on the story.



Direct marketing to targeted customers

Direct marketing includes some aspects of both sales promotions and personal selling. It is interactive communication with customers where the company's message seeks or implores a response from targeted customers. E-mail and direct mail are common formats. These messages are sent to customers with special offers or calls to action, often promoting limited-time deals or new product launches. Mail-order clubs, online or print surveys and infomercials are other examples of direct marketing communication.

Event sponsorship and having a presence

Event sponsorship is the element sometimes left out of the five-element communication mix. Many models include it within advertising. Event sponsorship occurs with a company pays to have a presence at a sports, entertainment, non-profit, or community events. The sponsorship may include a mix of benefits including booth representation during the event to hand out samples, gifts and literature, name mention during the event and ad spots connected to the event. (Kokemuller, 2019, para. 1-11)

Sustainability ranking for football clubs: a communication strategy bring benefits to European leagues

In the past, many of the clubs have been criticized for their lack of efforts in adopting sustainability. In October 2021, Manchester United, Manchester United caused controversy when they flew to Leicester in October, a journey of roughly 100 miles with an estimated flying time of around 10 minutes. Something similar happened with Leeds United taking a 17-minute flight to Norwich City.

In contrast, in 2019, Ajax opted to take a train from the Netherlands to France for a Champions League game against Lille, with the club's chief executive Edwin van der Sar explaining that we live in a climate-conscious time, and it is important to set a good example as a club.

Flights produce greenhouse gases - mainly carbon dioxide (CO₂) - from burning fuel. These contribute to global warming. Emissions per kilometre travelled are known to be significantly worse than any other form of transport, with short-haul flights the worst emitters, according to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Apart



from using short-haul flights, there are many other parameters like consumption of electricity, water, wastage of food, mode of transport to reach the venue where clubs are being questioned and asked to adopt more sustainable practices.

Backed by United Nations,

Sport Positive Leagues highlights environmental sustainability initiatives of top flight professional football clubs. Launched with Sport Positive Premier League Sustainability Table in 2019, they updated Premier League twice, launched Bundesliga in 2021 and will launch Ligue 1 shortly in 2022. They are currently working on La Liga and Serie A as well as working on leagues for women's football, and other sports too.

Sport Positive systematically collates key environmental sustainability information for every football club into a league table matrix. The categories reflect the environmental impacts of putting on a sports match, and initiatives that are under way at clubs, put together in an easy and digestible format.

Their research process is intense, but uniquely, we always work in congress with the clubs themselves to verify information we have found and provide missing information for our rankings. When clubs launch new initiatives or progress their efforts, we update the leagues in real time. (Sport Positive, n.d., para. 1)

For measuring their performance, teams are asked to provide evidence of efforts in 11 categories. Two points are available for each category as well as two bonus points, making a maximum of 24 points. Mentioned below are the parameters on which points are awarded:

Points were awarded for:

- policy and commitment
- clean energy
- energy efficiency
- sustainable transport
- single-use plastic reduction or removal
- waste management
- water efficiency
- plant-based or low-carbon food
- biodiversity
- education
- communications and engagement



A **bonus point** is awarded if the club is certified to an internationally recognised sustainability management system or if a club track and report on percentage of fans taking various modes of transportation to games. (BBC, 2022, para. 8)

Tottenham and Liverpool have come joint-top of the 2021 Green League. These clubs have been using this ranking system as part of their larger marketing strategy to demonstrate their commitment to becoming more sustainable, creating a positive image for their club.

Tottenham executive director, Donna-Maria Cullen, said: "To have once again been named at the top of the Sport Positive League Table is fantastic recognition for the work that continues to be delivered across our organization - now we must challenge ourselves to go further.

Similarly, Liverpool's CEO Billy Hogan was quoted as saying "The environment is incredibly important to the club and only becoming more so. I think probably like all organizations we're all concerned about the impact that we have on the environment and on our local communities."

The top two - **Tottenham** and **Liverpool** - both use their players to engage via their own media channels and also in partnerships with other sustainable organizations. (BBC, 2022, para. 12)

For these clubs, this league-based sustainability ranking system is proving an easy and fast method to communicate their sustainability initiatives to the outside world. Through various social media channels like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, these clubs run communication campaigns with players to demonstrate their commitment to promoting sustainability. As fans continue to become more aware of their own sustainability responsibilities, seeing sustainability ranking of their favourite football clubs is proving an effective communication strategy (BBC, 2022; Stanton et al., 2021) and contributing in bring down the carbon footprints of the clubs as well as their fans.

Unit 4.4 Identifying challenges and opportunities to set your strategic goals, audiences, and channels

The growing awareness towards sustainability

The mounting public concern for environmental sustainability and the impact of global climate change has driven businesses to try and modify their daily operations. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is the possibility for businesses to reduce costs through a number of methods. Some have chosen to explore alterations to their supply chain to make the process more efficient and environmentally responsible. Others simply adopt company-wide policies to reduce waste and encourage employee action.

Corporations around the world are also beginning to recognize consumer support for businesses that take environmental stewardship seriously. A growing number of customers are choosing brands that offer transparency into their production practices over those that don't, preferring to understand the impact their purchase has on the environment. Slowly, the market is beginning to demand accountability. This is great news for the environment, but there are plenty of advantages to businesses that manage to adapt to the new shape of commerce.

That said, change isn't an easy process in any organization, and for major businesses, sometimes sustainable practices don't seem particularly cost-effective. The challenge of experts in sustainable business is to drive and oversee these changes to ensure safe, responsible impact on our natural resources. In that task, a number of factors frequently stand between ideas and execution. (University of Colorado Boulder, 2015, para. 1-3)

Lack of expertise, lack of funding, lack of public support, etc. are some of the common issues that business owners in every industry encompass to reach their goal. Since the beginning of the 21st century, as concerns about the climate have increased, the demand to become more sustainable has created innumerable opportunities for business owners. At the same time, as it is still comparatively a new topic which is evolving continuously, challenges are plenty. Some of the major challenges in implementing sustainable strategies are mentioned below.

Sustainability challenges in business – supporting the Triple Bottom Line



Any corporate sustainability initiative has to balance its impact on three things: people, planet, and profit. This concept is known as the triple bottom line, and it shapes the environmental efforts for many corporations worldwide. Here are 3 of the biggest sustainability challenges in business (The Economist, 2009).

Making the business case

Often, the rhetoric surrounding sustainability and “green” practices is associated with increased costs to businesses that get passed on to consumers. Sometimes, however, the opposite is true. Increased efficiency, whether in energy usage, operational resources, or at some point during the supply chain, can often result in decreased costs while creating a more environmentally responsible organization.

Making those plans can sometimes be a matter of understanding and impacting consumer behaviour more directly. However, sustainability can be difficult to value from a monetary standpoint, making it challenging for CFO’s and other executives to understand the importance of environmental stewardship. Data-driven metrics can help smooth this process, making it possible for finance and sustainability teams to work together to create new, cost-effective plans.

Developing metrics to assess initiatives

Providing those metrics, however, can be difficult. Measuring sustainability through a universally acceptable metric is proving difficult, as every industry has characteristics and operation factors that are unique. In case of sports industry, this becomes further complex as the resources that are used depend on the nature of the sport. In general, it can be said that winter sports have significantly more exposure to changing dynamics of climate change as most of the sports are dependent on natural resources like temperature, snow, and water. However, significant progress has been made, and each industry is developing metrics that are assisting the organization in measuring sustainability.

That said, once a program is in place, monitoring employee engagement and the effect on the company is simply a matter of watching the numbers in the right places. This is where the Triple Bottom Line comes into play. If targeting energy efficiency, the business should monitor monthly costs for a notable change. If you’re aiming to reduce solid waste generation, gather insights into your current levels and then compare to post-initiative data. Consider impacts on not just profitability, but also on the planet and the surrounding community. The central point is to create a clear picture for executives, leadership, and the finance team to illustrate the importance of sustainability and its positive effects.



Engaging management and colleagues

In a recent survey of 700 businesses done by sustainability consultancy 2degrees, 65% of respondents said that convincing senior leadership and management to stand behind sustainable practices was the greatest challenge in making a change. However, the survey found that once the central arguments had been made and the merit of sustainability established, leaders remained engaged in the mission of creating a greener business (2Degrees, n.d.).

Then the challenge becomes engaging colleagues and employees to execute on sustainable practices. 47% of respondents said this was their greatest challenge. Encouraging employee buy-in can be incredibly difficult, but it can be addressed through unilateral communication across the company, or even incentives to those that participate in new programs. Sustainability managers or internal employees might find themselves supporting new plans through employee education, the leading of cross-disciplinary committees, and the creation of effective internal marketing materials to drive home the company's objectives. All these activities need to be communicated in a way that both the top management and the employees feel fully engaged and anticipate benefits in the short or the long term.

Digital media – the way forward

The sports and fitness industry is a healthy sector that is also experiencing some major changes. There are new playing fields and new challenges that require new marketing and communications strategies. But how marketing and communications are changing for the sports and fitness industry?

The interest in sport and fitness has been on the rise for several years, with no hint at stopping, in all areas of the world. Cities are filled with crowded gyms and swimming pools, with people jogging, cycling, or participating in some form of exercise or as an audience to an increasingly wide and diverse range of sporting events.

In this sector, the digital world is also rapidly expanding with dedicated apps, wearable networked devices, and a growing space on social networks, forums, influencers, and then the first experiments in virtual or augmented reality. Moreover, sports today has a more diversified audience—by gender, interests, and age groups—than ever before.

Digital technology is unlocking unprecedented opportunities for growth in the sports industry, offering the potential to draw fans closer through innovative and



customized experiences. To capitalize on this opportunity, however, digital will need to be embedded in every aspect of the business, transforming people, processes, and technology.

Going through any kind of organizational transformation is not to be taken lightly. But given the significant opportunities that exist for sports organizations, the undertaking is well-worth considering. These opportunities fall into four categories. (Kem, 2021, para. 1)

Broaden content reach

Technology is playing a larger role than ever in the lives of fans, opening the way for sports organizations to create new, innovative customer experiences. Partnering with broadcasters and new distribution platforms can give fans the experiences they want, and capture viewership across multiple devices, including mobile.

The rise of the smartphone and the tablet may have contributed to an erosion in live game attendance, as more people switch to live-streaming. Attendance for the National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) is below 2007 levels, while both National Hockey League (NHL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) attendance has declined since the 2012-2013 season. At the same time, over-the-top (OTT) platforms are emerging as the new engine for growth: While the NFL has seen a drop in TV ratings, fans streaming NFL games increased 25 percent in 2017.

Sports organizations need to strategically leverage digital media to build direct connections with fans. One way is to partner with broadcasters to master content across multiple channels, which also allows for a wealth of real-time marketing opportunities. Ultimately, digital optimization of content across platforms will help broaden content reach for sports organizations.

Drive the fan experience

Many sports fans are no longer interested in the game alone—they crave the kind of exclusive and shareable experiences that can be amplified by technology. Sports organizations could grow stadium attendance by using immersive technologies such as augmented and virtual reality to create an intensely exciting viewing experience. They can also increase engagement by leveraging loyalty and customer relationship management data to tailor experiences to individual fan preferences.



Engage sponsors

Fans are interacting with media more than ever before—between 2014 and 2016, audio consumption, TV viewership, and application usage increased across the board. Couple this with the fact that sports fans are increasingly receptive to personalized engagement, and therein lies a world of opportunity. Targeted advertisements are reported to be twice as effective on average as non-targeted ads: 60 percent of millennials would willingly share their data for coupons or promotions, and 71 percent of consumers would rather see ads focused on their interests.

Digital analytics allow for a better understanding of what excites fans, giving sponsors insight into what types of ads and engagement models work for individual audiences. Digital tools can also provide sponsors with more information about fans so that they can tailor the timing, content, and delivery of messaging for greater effectiveness.

Generate new revenue

In a world where big data predominates, sports organizations can mine fans' data to better understand their habits, preferences, and demographics, ultimately unlocking new revenue streams by reaching fans in innovative ways—for example, by adding new services to existing offerings. They can also use data to improve core business operations, build and solidify partner relationships, and even develop entirely new business models.

But perhaps even more compelling is the direct monetization of anonymized data through external products and solutions. In fact, today, one third of all companies are commercializing or sharing their data to create new revenue streams. Ways that sports organizations can enter the game include:

- Selling raw data through an established exchange
- Trading information/pooling data into a shared utility
- Selling persona and device ID data on ad exchanges
- Media activation based on customer contextual data (in-home/out-of-home). (Deloitte, n.d.)

Sustainability as the new focus area in digital marketing



Sustainability is becoming increasingly important for sports organization. In a simplistic way, sustainability can be referred as the “**responsibility**” that a company must show that it has on a social, environmental, and ethical level.

As our planet gets more and more exposed to the effects of climate change, governments and humanitarian development organizations are coming together to fight this global issue. People are becoming more aware of their carbon footprints and how every single purchase they make is having an impact in the well-being of the future generation. With this improved awareness, customers are themselves asking for more information on the sustainability impact of the products they consume.

With digital media’s wider outreach, companies can reach to a larger audience with lesser resources and, most importantly, more sustainably. Digital media will directly influence the carbon footprints of the organizations as lesser flights will be used to travel, fewer documents will be printed for marketing promotions, etc.

In addition to this, use of digital media also allows organizations to connect with younger generations who are naturally more technology savvy. If the younger generations are more aware of the challenges associated with climate change and understand the importance of adopting sustainability, they will be better prepared to handle problems resulting from climate change. Therefore it can be said that while the increased usage of digital media is posing some challenges, the benefits clearly outweighs its disadvantages in promoting sustainability



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