

Module 3. Content planning - Why is it crucial to plan ahead?

Introduction

To create impactful social media content, it's important for your content to line up with your business objectives and ambitions. This is what gives your content a purpose.

It's important to understand how each social platform works and which one your ideal target audience is using before getting started. Note that it's unnecessary to be on every single social media platform just for exposure purposes. Think of quality over quantity. It's useless and a waste of time to put effort into a specific social media platform that none of your ideal target audience is using. So, take the time to research where the users you want to see your message are and create content tailored to that platform and those users. This will ensure that your message is put in front of the right people, in the right places, at the right time.

Engaging fans by using player's social media status

In the social media age, players and athletes have become just as important as the teams they play for, perhaps more so in certain sports. Younger fans follow their favourite players in the thousands, and that loyalty even extends to following that player when they move teams or clubs. Capitalize on this influencer status by producing, promoting, and supporting this content across social media, to help drive traffic to subscriber services.

Planning your social media content ahead of time ensures that you consistently have valuable content going up. It also ensures that you don't miss any important dates or deadlines. Create content that users will want to share and engage with. This is where you get to have fun and be creative.

Let's see now the reasons why planning ahead is so important:

Before you start getting overwhelmed with your planning and budgeting, take a deep breath. Think again about cutting your budget and time for your social media platforms.

It will always save you time

Planning and thinking ahead will always save you more time. Saving time generates more opportunities to create and grow within your sports organization,



whallows you and your employees to get more work done, and helps you make more money. Isn't that a perfect foot to start the new year on? This all begins by starting a social media calendar and planning out a month ahead at a time. Sit down towards the end of the month and start planning for the month ahead. Plan and make note of what's coming up for the Sports Organization that you want to share, what opportunities or deals you're going to have, what holidays are coming up, and what trends are featured in the month ahead of you. Each of these topics will help you plan out your posts and help you create them. This will help eliminate the "um... I don't know what to post today" moments and get rid of any creation/writer's block. This also gives you the time and opportunity to pop in and add or change content that has been created so it reflects real-time actions or events. To help you with this process, once you've planned and created all of your upcoming posts, it might be time to invest in a posting program. These programs let you load up the days, weeks, or month's worth of content in one sitting, schedule what times they need to be posted and on what platform, and it does the rest of the work for you. When the end of the month comes, you won't be overwhelmed or unprepared to plan and create for the next month ahead of you. If you can get into this cycle, it will naturally become apart of your workflow!

Staying Relevant, in the Know, and On Brand

If you're not sitting down with your marketing team and planning out what's happening within your Sports Organization and using your social media platforms to show that off, you can get into some big trouble. It is very likely that your social media posts and ads (if you even take the time to post them) are going to sound and feel rushed, stale, and have an inconsistent voice. This is a subconscious turn off for your followers and potential future followers and customers. Creating posts and posting this way becomes frustrating and annoying, and feels like it's taking up more time than it actually is. This is when social media gets marched up to the chopping block and sliced away. Part of your best marketing strategy is creating your brand and voice. If you lose either of these, your Sports Organization loses its uniqueness and credibility. If you spend time sitting down and planning ahead, your voice can stay consistent and your brand will remain well nurtured.

Communication is key with your followers, their world, and the world around you. Staying well-informed with what the latest trends and pop culture references are can help you build some amazing and fun content. It can also help you gain more followers and customers. Being able to create this kind of content takes time and planning to successfully execute. You need to stay on top of what's coming and what's relevant to pull off this content and this kind of connection. This will also help you stay ahead of your competition, too. If you are time-sensitive about your posts and aware of what's happening, you can stay consistent with your buyers



and customers. This will help you keep a consistent growth in followers and traffic to your platforms.

Moving Forward and Growing

Planning ahead also helps you see how successful you've been in the past. Is that confusing? Planning means keeping track of what you've done in the past and helps you stay ready for what's to come. If you successfully stay organized and keep track of what social media posts you've had in the past, there is a ton of information to learn there. You can monitor and see what the most successful types of posts have been, know what types of posts to avoid, see which ads have been the most successful, and it helps you really learn about your target audience. With this knowledge you can create the best posts possible, know when the best times to post are, and how to reach your target audience. It also allows you to study the best ways to stay in communication with your followers and make time to remain in contact with them. (The Top Three Reasons why Planning Ahead for your Social Media Marketing is so Important!, 2019, para. 3-7)

Coming up with content ideas

Coming up with original content ideas is probably the most challenging part of planning out social media posts. Luckily, even if you ran out of content ideas, there are plenty of helpful sources to get inspiration from:

- Social Content Calendars make lives of video creators easier with daily suggestions for social media posting. Holidays, hashtags, observances and national days – just choose the date and see what's about to be trending on social media on that day.
- Inspirational lists may be quite helpful, too. It takes time to find a solid list with valuable suggestions, but when you find one, make sure to bookmark the page and use it when you're stuck for ideas.
- Your own old content – what's old is new again! Repurposing your posts allows breathing new life into old pieces of content. You can turn your blog posts into videos, case studies into podcasts, match or event statistics into infographics – as long as your content piece is evergreen, you can transform it into many other forms.

Scheduling your posts

If you're not using any social media scheduling tools yet, I strongly recommend start doing that right away. The only difficulty here is choosing the scheduling tool that is just perfect for your demands and goals. Luckily, there are a lot of brilliant options to



choose from: Facebook's own Creator Studio, Buffer, Sprout Social, Agora Pulse, Hootsuite, MeetEdgar, and many others.

As soon as you've chosen the scheduling tool you'd like to use, you should determine your optimal posting schedule and monitor your content's performance to improve this schedule. Let's address these two steps in more detail.

Determine your optimal posting schedule

Every brand wants to generate maximum engagement, reach, and exposure for their social media content. That's why you've probably seen so many studies on best posting time and frequency. There is just one tiny problem with all of them – contradictory results.

One study claims that users should write on Twitter five times per day, another – that it's ok to bombard your followers with 20+ tweets a day, and so on. It's easy to get confused with all these numbers. Then how to pick the best time for posting your content?

"The best solution here is to focus specifically on when is the best time for your brand to post."

The truth is, there is no universal optimal posting schedule. The best solution here is to focus specifically on when is the best time for your brand to post and what is the ideal posting frequency that your audience prefers.

- Where is your target audience located?
- When does your audience go online?
- What posting time is most relevant to them?

In order to determine the most effective posting schedule, you should know answers to all these questions in the first place.

Monitor and measure your content's performance

Numbers don't lie. The most effective and reliable way to make sure you're scheduling your posts right is to monitor and measure your content's performance.

Here are the most significant content performance metrics to keep an eye on:

- Engagement overview – shows how many interactions your content receives in a given time period;



- Number of interactions per 1,000 fans – helps to consider the share of your audience that’s actively interacting with your posts;
- Top-performing posts overview – gives an insight into what your audience’s social content preferences are.
- Monitoring and measuring these content performance metrics allows you to evaluate the effectiveness of your current posting strategy and decide what needs to be improved.

Preparing the promotion

So, you came up with amazing content ideas for the whole week, month, or even year. Visuals are ready, posts are scheduled, and it seems like you’re all set.

At this stage, it’s crucial to plan the promotion of your content. Yes, you have some great content pieces prepared, but if nobody will see them, what’s the point?

Here are a few ideas on what you can prepare in terms of social media content promotion:

- Write a newsletter to your audience;
- Create targeted video and image ads;
- Prepare cross-promoting posts that will be distributed across your channels;
- Collect a list of influencers that may want to share your content with their audiences;
- Tap into communities of users interested in your topic.

Keep in mind that planning the promotion of your social media content is as important as creating it. (How To Plan Out Your Social Media Content in Advance, n.d., para. 4-24)

And all these activities, especially in the emotional and passionate environment of sports, require dynamic adjustments, flexibility, and a constant smart and measurable approach and plan.

The vast majority of media, marketing, and communications departments implemented during recent years has a content calendar model to capture all relevant information, ideas, and flexible wording (positive on winning and caution when a negative or unexpected result has been recorded).



According to Cooper and Tien (2021), social media content calendars are the best way to plan and organize upcoming content. I'll share with you some of their very interesting words on this topic:

A social media calendar is like the Marie Kondo [the heartbeat] of your entire social media strategy. It sounds like a big commitment at first, but you can rest assured it'll pay that time back in the future (not to mention preventing minor panic attacks).

Whether it's a simple grid with a few links or a bespoke dashboard that can plan out dozens of feeds, your social media content calendar can be as simple or complex as your brand needs it to be. (Cooper & Ten, 2021, para 1-2)

What is a social media calendar?

A social media calendar is an overview of your upcoming social media posts. It can be organized in the form of a spreadsheet, Google calendar or interactive dashboard (if you're using a social media management app).

Each entry in a social media calendar usually includes some combination of these elements:

- The exact date and time the post is going live
- The social network and account where the post will be published
- The post's copy and creative assets (i.e. photos or videos)
- Links and tags to be included in the post
- Any additional relevant information (e.g. is this an Instagram feed post or a Story?)

Depending on the scope of your social media strategy, your social media calendar can include one or many social networks.

Why use a social media content calendar?

1. Save time by being organized

Your social media marketing goals have a key point in common with many of the other goals in your day planner: they take effort and attention every single day. Not just when you're feeling inspired (or at 11PM when everything else is taken care of).



Maintaining a social media calendar lets you plan ahead, batch your work, avoid multitasking, and note down all your creative brainwaves for later.

Basically it's the best way to make sure you'll never find yourself desperately scrolling through generic inspirational quotes hoping to find something to post ever again.

And even though you'll be posting every day, maybe multiple times a day, that doesn't mean you need to be babysitting your feeds constantly. Certain social media calendar tools allow you to schedule social media posts ahead of time, and, just as important, manage audience engagement from one place.

2. Post consistently

Whether you're trying to increase your Instagram likes, your YouTube subscribers, or you've implemented social media KPIs, the first tip from experts will always be "post consistently." There's just no shortcut around it.

Why?

Consistently showing up in your audience's feed is the key to engaging them on social. Impressive engagement increases your organic reach via the platform's algorithm, so your posts get shown to new eyes, and new people start following your brand. And making genuine connections with a growing audience is the one true path to lifting your conversions.

Populating your social media calendar with posts ahead of time allows you to post consistently whether it's a slow news week, or your biggest promotion of the year.

3. Make fewer typos, and also reduce the risk of big mistakes

Planning your posts ahead of time means that you can build failsafes into your workflow. Copy-editing the text, fact-checking information, or even vetting it with organizational stakeholders like the legal team or C-suite, are all a lot easier when you're working days or weeks in advance.

A social media calendar—especially one with team member approvals built in—is the best way to prevent a low-key embarrassment like posting the same message across channels, or a high-key social media crisis.

4. Get more ambitious with your social strategies

The world's biggest social media brands are often running multiple campaigns at once—long, medium and short-term, paid and organic. And that's just the day-to-day posts.



Once you have your schedule nailed down, your glorious brain is freed up to tackle even bigger questions. Should you run an Instagram contest? Start looking for influencer partners? Maybe it's time to get your brand on LinkedIn, or introduce a social media employee advocacy program.

Whether you're managing a five-person content team or you're posting your Story while mixing bleach for your 3pm client's pastel ombre long-bob, getting your social game to the next level means getting organized.

5. Don't miss out on relevant moments

Never forget about the Super Bowl again. (Or, you know, make sure you're ignoring it on purpose.)

A social media calendar allows you to strategically observe worldwide global moments that are relevant to your brand's audience.

Like, for instance, Star Wars day.

Also, with your day-to-day schedule covered, if something topical comes up—like maybe one your athletes or players joins Instagram or an egg gets bigger than before—you have the creative and logistical bandwidth to engage with the moment in an on-brand way.

6. Make higher-quality content

Social media production values have skyrocketed since the early days, and the notion of a lone-wolf Millennial tweeting memes from their beanbag chair has gone the way of the juggling.

Today, it's not that unusual for a single social media post to have a whole team of creatives behind it: copywriters, designers, video editors, photographers. And asking your team of hard-working artistes to drop everything for an emergency Instagram Story is not going to win hearts or minds. (And it's not even guaranteed to earn engagement, if it feels slipshod or pushy.)

A social media calendar helps you allocate your assets—both human and digital—effectively, so that your team has the breathing room to do their best work.

And a long-term vision means you're pushing a consistent brand voice and content that supports your marketing goals.

7. Track what works, and improve it



What gets scheduled gets done, and what gets measured gets improved. Your social media analytics have a lot of insights for you. A social media content calendar provides the opportunity to schedule your experiments towards improvement. Plan out your A/B tests until you find the right recipe for the type of content, format, post frequency, and best time of day to post for each social platform. (Cooper & Ten, 2021, para. 4-32)

These two authors also give 8 steps to create a social media calendar (para. 34-70)

- Audit your social networks and content
- Choose your social channels
- Decide what your calendar needs to track
- Make a content library for your assets
- Establish a workflow
- Start crafting your posts
- Invite your team to review, and use their feedback to improve
- Start publishing/scheduling

Tip: If this is your first time making a calendar for social, you might want to crack open our guide to creating a social media marketing strategy first. Your calendar will be all the better for having clear goals to underpin it.

1. Audit your social networks and content

Developing a clear picture of your current social media efforts will let you identify areas for improvement and opportunities for new efforts. An audit is key to fine-tuning your content strategy and maximizing your ROI.

Build a social media audit template. This will result in precise, up-to-date data on:

- Impostor accounts and outdated profiles
- Account security and passwords
- Goals and KPIs for each branded account, by platform
- Your audience, their demographics and personas



- Who's accountable for what work on your team
- Your most successful posts, campaigns and tactics
- Gaps, underwhelming results, and opportunities for improvement
- Key metrics for measuring future success on each platform

Budget some dedicated time to go through all of your social assets. Then rest assured that you'll be tackling your refreshed social strategy with the best information. That is, the information that's unique to your audience, accounts and brand.

2. Choose your social channels

It seems like every social media manager we know got the same Slack message last year. Some random higher-up going Hey there! [sunglasses emoji] Why aren't we on TikTok?

In the hustle and bustle of the daily grind, it takes concerted effort to find the time to stay on top of new developments. Like, should your brand care about Instagram Threads? And is your audience even on TikTok?

This is why you should take a minute to make sure you're clear on each social media platform's user demographics. And review best practices for business marketing strategies, too.

3. Decide what data your social media content calendar needs to track

As you figure out what this beautiful beast is going to look like, (and where it's going to live, a.k.a. a permanently-open Chrome tab between Gmail and Slack) you want to map out the information and functionality this tool is going to provide to you.

Maybe you're starting fresh for, say, your side-hustle doing social for local indie rappers. In which case a simple spreadsheet might do.

But if you're managing a seven-person team with a dozen different consumer-facing brands, you're going to want something that can tell you who's doing what, when it's done, when it's approved, and when it's published—and then how successful it was.

In general, the practitioners advise you to start with basic details:

- Platform



- Date
- Time (and time zone)
- Copy
- Visuals (e.g., photo, video, illustration, infographic, gif, etc.)
- Link to assets
- Link to published post

Also, add more advanced details that you might potentially find helpful. (You can always nix them later if they're redundant.) Details like:

- Platform-specific format (eg., feed post, IGTV, Story, poll, live stream, ads, shoppable posts, etc.)
- The vertical or campaign it's affiliated with (eg., product launch, event, contests, annual giving, general brand awareness, customer service, etc.)
- Geo-targeting (i.e., is it global, North American, etc.)
- Value (i.e., Is it a short-lived topical post or a big-budget evergreen showpiece that could be recycled or cannibalized for parts down the line?)
- Paid or organic? (If paid, then additional budget details might be helpful)
- Has it been approved?
- Has it been posted? (If so, do you want to include the link with its UTM?)
- Analytics and results (Generally at this level of complexity you probably rely on your analytics reports to contain and explain this information.)

4. Make a content library for your assets

Some people like to call these content repositories or media resource databases or digital asset banks.

Regardless of what you call it, your supply of visual content should not be living on your iPhone, or in a bunch of desktop folders marked "misc social."

You can use Dropbox, Google Drive, your company's internal network, or made-to-purpose database software. A social media content library has a few key features:

- It's spacious enough for large files;



- It's accessible from your phone as well as your computer (trust me on this one);
- It's easily shareable with team members, but you can trust its privacy features;

It provides links to individual files so that you can plunk them into your calendar (or perhaps it interfaces with your calendar natively).

The way you set up your content library is almost as important as your social media calendar. The less searching around for assets that you have to do, the better.

5. Establish a workflow

Ok, now that you've gathered all possible information, it's time to start sketching in the bones of your daily, weekly and monthly social media cadence.

You want to think about:

- How often you want to post to each channel;
- The best time to post to each channel (based on your analytics)
- What your content ratio will look like;
- Who needs to approve posts (e.g., your copy-editor, your legal team, your CEO) and how communication will work there;
- What the process is for brainstorming new content, not to mention assigning and creating it.

Tip: Once you have a social media workflow outlined, consider documenting it in an easy-to-access place (say, a separate tab in your social media calendar spreadsheet). The more complex your team, the more helpful it is to break down definitions and processes so that you're not answering texts from colleagues when you're supposed to be chomping beignets in the French Quarter, or getting a root canal.

6. Start crafting your posts

At this point you're probably raging with ideas, right? Take some time to go through that old "misc social" folder and start pulling together some discrete posts.

As you work, evaluate how your calendar feels. If it's onerous and finicky, maybe you want to dial back some of the detail. Or maybe it's not detailed enough and



you need to add a few columns. (Or maybe it's just... kinda ugly, in which case check out our beautiful free templates, in the next section.)

7. Invite your team to review, and use their feedback to improve

Now that you've sculpted the foundations of your sports organizational environment and vision, it's time to reveal your work to the world, or at least to your colleagues.

You want your calendar to be moderately intuitive, so send an invite around to the people who'll need to use it every day (or every day you're on vacation).

Ask them to put it through its paces, and schedule a meeting for everyone to connect on findings. You'll probably find some gaps.

Does everyone know how to find, download and upload the high-res infographic the designer made for the piece for LinkedIn? If not, can they figure it out easily?

At the end of this step, you should have an airtight document that even the newest team member can understand.

8. Start publishing (or scheduling)

Now it is time. Your social media calendar is up and ready to run.

As you start publishing consistently, you may realize that it's still taking time to sit down and manually publish your posts.

As you can see, planning ahead social content has considerable advantages. It's up to you now!



References

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