

Module 4. Best practice examples of social media campaigns and sponsorships

Introduction

A good social media campaign not only consists of intelligent and compelling content, but also requires a strong marketing strategy, an effective communication, and the right mix of content and marketing tactics.

Over the past decade, the manner in which fans engage and brands activate with sport – whether it's federations, leagues, clubs, media partners in broadcast, digital or social, athletes, event promoters, venues and/or governments – has rapidly, or even radically, changed, due to the rapid and vast improvements in digital technology that's reduced the cost of distribution and devices.

Many sports organisations hesitate to invest their hard-earned money into social media because they worry about the return on investment. After all, the real-world impact of social media can sometimes be difficult to quantify, especially for smaller organisations that do not use sophisticated analytics. While it can be difficult to put a commercial figure on the awareness or community-building aspects of social media, there is one area that's easy to quantify: sponsor acquisition and retention.

When done properly, social media can help your sports organisation increase sponsorship revenue, retain existing sponsors, and even attract new ones. Why?

- Social media extends an organisation's reach. Instead of a limited number of fans seeing a sponsor's banner at a football match game, a sponsor can access thousands or even many more fans online.
- Social media provides concrete data on how many people are engaging with your sponsor's message, which offers greater accountability.
- Some small businesses that sponsor local sports clubs may struggle with social media, and want to tap into your expertise and fan base.



- Today, people spend a lot of time online, but don't often click on ads. Many brands are also aware that their products aren't very interesting, and that people won't naturally follow a granola bar or a brand of deodorant on Facebook or Twitter. To reach their target audience, brands must align themselves with things that consumers are already passionate about, such as sport. By sponsoring sports organisations, brands can reach their target audience in a more effective way.

1. Do your research

Before you can properly engage new or existing sponsors, you need to know what your social media presence can offer them. Start with the following questions:

- How many social media followers do we have?
- What's the social media reach? Using Facebook Insights, it is quite easy to see how far the posts reach every month. Though you may only have 500 Facebook followers, for example, some top posts might reach up to 30,000 people because your followers share your content.
- What are my audience's demographics (age/gender/location)? Pay special attention to valuable markets (men aged 25 – 34, young families, etc.). Sites like Facebook, and YouTube offer this data via analytics. You can also use Google Analytics to figure out the demographics of the traffic that comes to your website via social media.
- How does the organisation compare to similar social media accounts? If you're a handball organisation, how many followers do other handball organisations have? What about handball across the country? Being able to say that your Facebook page is the most popular handball social media account in the region, or the third most popular account in the respective country, gives you a boost with sponsors.

Many sports clubs turn the answers to the above questions into a one-pager, and use it to make sponsorship asks, so remember to share this information with the person in charge of sponsor acquisition.

Also, research the social media presence of existing sponsors and partners. If they don't have a strong social media presence, you can offer them one. If they do, you can get a better idea of how you can complement their existing social media presence.

2. Make a plan

Meet with existing and possible sponsors to create a social media plan that will maximise their involvement. By finding out exactly what your sponsors hope to



accomplish through the sponsorship, you can come up with creative ways to meet their needs. Create an agreement that outlines exactly what you'll offer, and check in periodically with analytics to show your progress. Some organisations that host large events have specific social media offerings for bigger or smaller sponsors or graded them into several categories, while others prefer to work with sponsors directly to come up with solutions tailored to their goals.

Remember: you may need to prepare and calculate some numbers to clarify how to maximise the returns on your social media assets. Would it be better, for example, to give one big sponsor exclusivity on your social media profile, or should you offer ads to several sponsors?

3. Share your sponsor's messages

Re-posting, sharing and retweeting the content of sponsors and partner organisations is an easy way to provide social media benefit. Some sponsors will even provide you with a list of approved tweets and Facebook posts, which you can schedule in advance. Follow your sponsors on your personal Facebook account to see their posts, and make a list on Twitter of all your sponsors, so their tweets are easy to find.

Remember: strike a balance between sponsored and organic content. If too much of your content is from your sponsors, your followers will tune you out.

4. Create mutually beneficial content

Take your sponsorship to the next level by creating content that benefits both your organisation and the sponsor. Sponsors especially love photos or videos because it allows them to showcase the good work they're doing in the community, and helps them to promote their products and services in an organic manner. Photos and videos are also highly shareable, increasing the reach of your content.

Keys to success:

- Post and tweet photos of your members interacting with sponsored products. You could, for example, take a photo of some fans enjoying a sponsored product, or of kids playing with equipment purchased with a grant. Short video clips are also popular.
- If your sponsors provide you with banners, make sure they're visible in action shots posted on social media.



- Tweet at and tag your sponsor in content that features them. If your sponsor has a particular hashtag, use it.
- Offer your sponsors exclusivity in a type of content. Perhaps, all athlete video profiles are sponsored by one company and include their logo and branded messaging.
- Allow your sponsors to engage with your audience by blogging on your website.

5. Tell a story

Storytelling is a powerful way to create content that benefits both your organisation and your sponsor. Create a video or blog post that tells a story that aligns with your sponsor's values, and, in turn, they may consider sponsoring it. For example, an insurance company or family business might want to sponsor a series of short videos that feature athletes talking about a time when their family supported them through a difficult injury or loss.

6. Stay and be always honest

You won't offer any value to your sponsors if you alienate your fan base, so be clear when an initiative benefits your sponsor. For example, if a sports equipment sponsor writes a blog post about the benefits of their latest model, make sure that you clearly denote that the content is sponsored so that your fans can see that the blog isn't unbiased, neutral advice.

7. Hold contests or competitions

A simple social media contest or giveaway can increase your social media followers and provide value for your sponsors.

Keys to success:

- Keep it simple. Getting entries to contests can be difficult enough without making your followers jump through hoops. Photo contests, caption contests and contests where fans enter by retweeting or liking are the most popular ones because they require little effort.
- Ensure that the greatest number of your fans can enter. For example, a contest that asks fans to post their best skiing photos will only appeal to skiers. A contest that asks fans to post their best winter photos, however, appeals to everyone.
- Factor likes or retweets into the judging to get more social media traffic, but consider having a final judge picking the winner so that you're not stuck with a low-quality or joke entry as the winner.



- Provide a prize that people want. Remember: not every prize has a monetary value. A meet-and-greet with a high-performance athlete is free to you, but might be priceless to a fan.
- Make sure that you comply with the media platform's rules on contests. Facebook is especially known for constantly changing its contest-hosting rules.

8. Express gratitude

Sponsors, partners and granting organisations like to feel appreciated. It doesn't take much to tweet a 'thank-you' message or post a photo of the kids in a programme holding up a thank-you banner. A little gratitude, however, goes a long way when sponsors or granting organisations are considering your proposal next year.

9. Show your results

Send your sponsors an analytics package that highlights your success. These analytics can be pulled from a number of commercial industry products, or the respective Insights for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or YouTube Analytics. If a certain type of campaign or promotion takes off more than expected, you can suggest increasing this type of promotion. Some things to consider are the following:

- Increases in followers/likes/subscribers
- Increases in retweets, mentions, share and comments
- The most retweeted/shared/liked posts
- How many retweets/shares your posts get that mention your sponsor in them

10. Get creative

Social media is an evolving field, and creativity wins high marks with sponsors, who are often looking for the newest way to share their messages. Even small, simple touches of creativity can go a long way. (10 ways to engage sponsors and partners through social media, n.d.).

Practical best practice examples

The synergy between digital marketing and sports is undeniable. Done well, sports marketing campaigns have the ability to capture the hearts and minds of sports



fans. Brands that use sponsorships or digital promotions have increased affinity and loyalty with their audiences.

While mobile technologies and social media are transforming both sports and sports businesses. A potent mix. But what are the best examples of digital sports marketing? And what are the lessons we can learn? And why are they some of the most creative marketing campaigns around?

1. Red Bull Stratos

Remember this? Years in the making, the record-breaking “Space Dive” was the most watched YouTube live stream ever in 2012, with 8 million concurrent viewers. Across the world, millions huddled around desks, watched from phones, and sat transfixed in classrooms as Austrian Felix Baumgartner jumped from the edge of space into blue oblivion. And the purpose of this dramatic enterprise? A marketing stunt. An amazing undertaking, yes. A fantastic advertisement for Austrian energy drink brand Red Bull? Double yes.

What many liked about this particular campaign was its innovative use of live streaming. It paved the way for further streaming on social media, and showed – if done right – it could be another tool in the digital marketers’ arsenal.

It also matched the ethos of Red Bull’s brand. A marketing strategy that uses social media for maximum effect, capturing people with equal parts amazement and awe. Whether through the traditional sponsoring of athletes, extreme stunts, or the full-scale ownership of successful sports teams like Red Bull Racing.

The only slight dampener on the Red Bull Stratos success story? The relationship between Skydiver Felix and his employer nosedived after he failed to mention the name of the energy drink before he jumped. Ouch. (7 great—and not so great—sports marketing campaigns, n.d.).



Figure 1. P&G 'Thank you, Mom' campaign ad



P&G 'Thank you, Mom' campaign ad [online image]. (n.d). Retrieved from <https://www.bannerflow.com/blog/7-great-sports-marketing-campaigns/>.

2. Thank you, mom – Procter & Gamble

Back for the 2018 Winter Olympics, P&G's 'Thank You, Mom' is masterful marketing. It's an awesome example of how a sponsor can craft a link between (let's be honest, some fairly boring) products and the sporting event it backs. Named as one of the top campaigns of the 21st century by Advertising Age, it's an emotional masterpiece. And one in a series of 'mother' themed ads by the consumer goods giant.

At the heart of the campaigns, there is emotional storytelling. P&G positions its products as the enabler for mothers to support Olympian heroes. The latest campaign for the 2018 Winter Games focuses on 'love over bias'. According to P&G, the latest campaign "celebrates mum's role as her child's first and greatest advocate. The one who sees her child's potential regardless of how others see them". Remove the blurb, and it's still an ad campaign selling cleaning household brands, but it's bloody brilliant at what it does.

3. Under Armour – Rule Yourself

A brand that has come from nowhere, to a global player, Under Armour is a sports company with attitude. It was exactly this feeling that it attempted to capture with its gritty Rule Yourself campaign. First launched in the spring of 2016, then pushed

again via social media before the 2016 Rio Olympics. The outcome: phenomenal. The Michael Phelps focused ad became the second most shared ad of the 2016 Olympics and the fifth most shared Olympic ad of all time.

According to AdWeek, the ad struck “the right emotional chord with its target audience: millennial men between the ages of 18 and 34”. A challenge at the best of times. VP of Marketing and Insight at Unruly, Devra Prywes, noted that the aesthetic of the Under Armour ad worked in its favour. “With younger viewers, over three-quarters will lose trust in a brand if an ad feels fake. Under Armour’s recent campaigns are all consistently authentic”. The athlete himself even said that the ad “showed exactly how I prepare”. Prywes also noted that the key emotion associated with the ad was “inspiration”. A feeling that evokes a strong reaction in millennial males. Something that, with no doubt, helped it get shared repeatedly.

4. Unibet – Value Stats

In 2019, Unibet took the use of data feeds by the scruff of the neck and totally upgraded its display advertising offering. Out of the sports betting companies on the market, Unibet is well-known for supplying insightful information to customers in its sports marketing campaigns, whether that is through its digital video, social channels, or blog.

What it did that was so unique this time around, was that it took its insightful data and combined it with its live dynamic odds, within its display advertising and landing pages.

Indeed, for a long time, iGaming brands have used data feeds and dynamic content to supply live odds or reactive content, but what Unibet did with this project was injecting value. It created a new dynamic data feed for its display advertising called ‘Value Stats’. (7 great—and not so great—sports marketing campaigns, n.d.).



Figure 2. Unibet – Value Stats

The banner is for Unibet's Premier League promotion. It features a dark background with a blurred soccer field. On the left, the text reads: "Bet on Premier League this Summer", "CLAIM YOUR £30 WELCOME OFFER", and "+ OPTIONAL SECOND LINE". Below this is a yellow "Join Now" button and a small disclaimer: "18+ only. T&Cs apply. www.begambleaware.org". On the right, there are two dynamic stat boxes. The top one shows "SHEFFIELD UNITED VS LIVERPOOL" and states "Sheffield United have had the most corners in 5 of their last 6 matches" with a green bar indicating "MOST CORNERS: SHEFFIELD UNITED 3/1". The bottom one shows "1. FC UNION BERLIN VS ENTRACHT FRANKFURT" and states "Eintracht Frankfurt have lost 4 of their last 5 away matches" with a green bar indicating "41/20" and "1. FC UNION BERLIN TO WIN". At the bottom, there are three numbered steps: "1 Join Now Create your free online casino account", "2 Deposit Select your trusted payment method", and "3 Play Anytime, anywhere in New Jersey!". A green arrow icon is in the bottom right corner.

Unibet – Value Stats [online image]. (n.d). Retrieved from <https://www.bannerflow.com/blog/7-great-sports-marketing-campaigns/>.

This new dynamic feature – used across Unibet banners and landing pages – provides smart insights based on the games highlighted by another data feed in the ad. (7 great—and not so great—sports marketing campaigns, n.d.).

5. FC Barcelona

Barcelona’s respect for its fans has played an invaluable role in making it one of the world’s greatest soccer teams. Their tactics, however, aren’t just reserved for top-flight athletic clubs; sports marketers (and businesses) of all shapes and sizes can learn from what FC Barcelona has done. (Whitaker, n.d.).

Figure 3. FC Barcelona



FC Barcelona [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.marketsmiths.com/2020/more-than-a-club-what-fc-barcelona-can-teach-sports-marketers-about-fan-engagement/>.

In recent years, the club has taken an outspoken stance against homophobia by launching a star-studded video campaign and donating just shy of 1% of its annual revenue to the Barça Foundation, a charity dedicated to boosting social development in young people. Lots of brands say they care about the people they serve—and it's often mere lip service. In Barcelona's case, fans are presented with concrete evidence all the time that they are indeed the firm's priority.

Standing up for fans doesn't just have to mean tackling social issues. FC Barcelona has also invested heavily in engaging a new generation of fans through a well-curated social media presence and interactive digital experiences that invite fans to predict how their favourite players will do. Audiences are looking for tangible instances of meaningful outreach more than anything else, and a business doesn't have to be a world-famous soccer club to provide those.

Barcelona has a legacy of bringing their fans as close to the action of the club as possible, but a legacy like that works both ways. Fans expect a lot from the club, and the club delivers in return. If other sports marketers want to achieve a similar reputation of going the extra mile for its consumers, it needs to do so through its action as much as through its words. (Whitaker, n.d.).

6. Sport England – This Girl Can

First launched in early 2015, Sport England's 'This Girl Can' campaign was a ground-breaking success. Created specifically to tackle the gender gap in sports participation between males and females in the UK. The campaign sought: "to tell the real story of women who play sport by using images that are the complete opposite of the idealised and stylised images of women we are now used to seeing". The result was spectacular. According to Sport England's own figures, This Girl Can directly resulted in 2.8 million women engaging in more active lifestyles.

What made the campaign a particular success was its ability to capture minds across channels. Plus, its creation of an online community of individuals who would normally be ignored. The stats speak for themselves: 600,000 women and girls joined the This Girl Can social media community. Plus, the campaign is still mentioned regularly on social media since its launch. Search via the hashtag #thisgirlcan on Twitter and see for yourself. It was of no surprise that Sport



England choose to return to the campaign again and again, with a new version for 2020.

7. Seattle Seahawks and Starbucks

Local company helps local sports team. It's a classic scenario. However, what happens when the company is Seattle based Starbucks and the team is the Seahawks of the NFL? Some pretty cool marketing, that's for sure. The two Washington State giants teamed up to produce co-branded cup sleeves that not only looked like Seahawks jerseys, but featured a Snapcode too. This allowed Seahawks fans to access exclusive content on Snapchat. (7 great—and not so great—sports marketing campaigns, n.d.).

Figure 4. Seattle Seahawks and Starbucks



Seattle Seahawks and Starbucks [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.bannerflow.com/blog/7-great-sports-marketing-campaigns/>.

The campaign worked not just because of the Seattle connection, but because of how it used lifestyle and everyday technology. A coffee in one hand and a smartphone in the other – hopefully with Snapchat installed. This smart social campaign was produced in honour of the Seahawks reaching the playoffs, and was a great way of incorporating a sponsor.

8. Paddy Power and social media

Paddy Power's use of social media is well documented. With millions of followers, it's a staple of many people's feeds and unique in terms of sports marketing campaigns. It produces, seemingly round-the-clock, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat posts. When it comes to creating content, the betting company thinks like a publisher. And, like a publisher, its success comes from the tone of voice and attitude, which runs throughout its advertising and social engagement. Whether print, online display, or video, you recognise a Paddy Power ad.

On its social effort, Paddy Powers head of engagement Paul Mallon has commented: "I can't think of many brands who produce the standard of in-house social and editorial content that we do". And he's right.

Without focusing too hard on one particular campaign, Paddy Power's ads and posts all have the same traits: mischief; disruption, and controversy. Whether trending when pretending to chop down the Amazon rainforest in support of England in the 2014 World Cup. Or tweeting on the delightful haircuts of footballers Agüero and Falcao. Paddy Power wants to engage with its punters in real-time. It's a cost-effective way to build brand awareness, increase affinity with the brand, and differentiate themselves from competition. And that's why we salute Paddy Power's use of social media.

9. AS Roma

If you get the chance, check out how Italian football team Roma is combining its awesome signing videos with adverts for missing children. Launched in 2019, it has been such a success that it has not just resulted in kids being found, but it is now being exported to other clubs to be part of their social campaigns too. We will definitely be focusing on this in another article as it such an awesome idea.

So there you have it, a selection of exceptional (and not so great) digital sports marketing campaigns. Each campaign notably different, yet they all have one thing in common: unique engagement with a target audience. (7 great—and not so great—sports marketing campaigns, n.d.).



Figure 5. Adverts about missing children



Adverts about missing children [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mediaoneonline.com/sports/football/romas-transfer-video-campaign-has-helped-to-find-missing-children-150063>.

There are many more best practice cases from previous social media campaigns and sponsorships, and there will be many more outstanding cases in the future. But there are also examples where the expected results were not achieved; these are the cases of 20th Century Fox and Manchester United.

Somewhere, someone at 20th Century Fox thought that linking up with Manchester United for cross promotion purposes was a good idea. How better to sell films than to parachute Wayne Rooney into trailers? The result is predictably horrific. Let me explain why this happened: Wayne Rooney is a footballer and not an actor. Respected Guardian film critic Peter Bradshaw when analysing a *Deadpool* tie-in commented: “It is genuinely difficult to tell if this intentionally seeks to align the pansexuality of *Deadpool* with what some have seen as the homoerotic quality of footballers’ goal celebrations”.

Ham-fisted in the extreme, placing Manchester United stars into trailers for blockbusters isn’t proving a massive success. Take this attempt, a mash-up of Rooney and the *Wolverine* film *Logan*; replies to the video on social media include ‘delete’ and ‘why?’. With over 72 million Facebook followers, and another 10.2 million on Twitter, it’s understandable why 20th Century Fox wanted to join forces with Man United. It’s just a pity the results are utterly awful. (7 great—and not so great—sports marketing campaigns, n.d.).

Summary

Innovation and technology are redefining all industries, and sport is no exception. Today all organisations are immersed in the digital transformation by making it part of their day-to-day processes. In the sports sector we see it reflected more

intensely in areas such as teams and athlete's performance, data analytics, esports, smart stadiums, media, sponsorship, and above all, in what makes this industry move with passion and emotion: the fans.

We are witnessing the consolidation and arrival of new technologies, tools and platforms for analysis and measurement that are destined to change the classic model that has traditionally sustained sport. If this was already a reality before, after the COVID-19 pandemic it became one of the greatest allies of the sports organisations.

Sport is the only content genre, in the face of the ongoing digital disruption, that's retained its appointment-to-watch value, compared to historical contemporaries such as news, movies, and, entertainment. This is due mainly to Sport being unscripted drama, a gladiatorial battle between heroes, and teams who share historical rivalry with the end result unknown at the beginning of every battle. Such rare magnetism's also allowed the business model of Sport, based on ever-increasing revenues from television, to have enjoyed unprecedented growth over five decades.

All that is changing, and fast.

The explosive adoption of smartphones through the course of the last decade, fuelled by 4G data connectivity, is changing consumer behaviours as the next-generation hasn't followed the content consumption patterns of its predecessor. The biggest impact has been the fragmentation of consumer attention that has dwindled audiences for television and challenged the continued monetisation of Sport's rare appeal.

Thankfully, the intrinsic value of Sport remains, as a mode of communal recreation and tribal entertainment. However, its packaging needs to adapt to the new environment, and place a high premium on convenience so it can compete more successfully, for attention, with the innumerable alternatives available to fans.

Fans, therefore, must also now be treated as customers, who have choices, and, can vote – as much with their feet, as with their eyeballs. In order to treat them as customers, sports entities must recognise the urgent need to not treat fans as a singular, and homogenous, whole but rather an aggregation of consumer segments whose needs are often similar but rarely the same. First-party data about fans (such as their e-mail, mobile phone number or address, but not their name as it is disallowed under new regulation) has a central role to play in converting this realisation into relevance, reach and, ultimately and inevitably, revenue.



Technology, as ever, holds the promise to shed light on the possible ways in which Sport can maintain - and even regain in some instances - its former dominance as the leisure pursuit of choice for the mass market. In contrast to the past, when broadcast television sets provided access to millions, the narrowcasting mode of the mobile phone is a more appropriate avenue to engage billions of fans around the world who are separated by nanoseconds in enjoying live coverage of the same match. The combination of first-party data and new technologies such as Augmented Reality, Computer Vision & Blockchain have the potential to change the economical basis of Sport in the course of this decade. (Next Generation Fan Engagement, 2021, pp. 2-3).

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