Imagine this scenario:

Beth Howard sighed as she looked over the reviews from a recent customer satisfaction survey. Beth, the President and Executive Director of the Greenville Titans, a minor league baseball franchise with a long history of success placing players in the major league but now losing revenue fast, was hired from a national sports marketing firm to restore the team's past grandeur. The owners of the Titans hired Beth because she had rebuilt the image of multiple teams in her 19 years in sports marketing and they believed she was the right person to bring the Titans into the 21st Century. She started with the Titans about 18 months ago and in that time faced battle after battle with the staff who were out of touch with current fans. Simon, the current sports media director and 17-year veteran with the Titans, told Beth just a week ago that "this is baseball, we need to play well and the media will take care of itself. What is your obsession with all of this social media? Reporters don't know what they're talking about half of the time and fans blogging or tweeting certainly don't have a clue what's important to this team."

One of Beth's first objectives when she arrived as President was to build better relationships with reporters because she watched in horror as players for the Titans insulted journalists on Twitter and posted demeaning, home-made videos on YouTube of one of the most respected journalists in baseball, Jack Vergara. Beth knew that managing the athletes would be one of the key challenges when she took over, but she had no idea that her own staff would also be openly opposed to building a better public image for the team, mostly through a robust social media presence. She had been careful after taking over not to fire the previous staff but instead hoped to coach them into a new way of doing business that moved away from trying to get headlines "above the fold" in the local newspaper and instead to actively include fans in promotions. She was beginning to doubt her decision because it appeared that her promotional staff was stuck in 1990 and simply couldn't accept that the Internet had changed the way all businesses, not just sports organizations, had to communicate with their customers.

As Beth rubbed her temples, the phone rang. It was Jack Vergara and he was angry. Beth listened to Jack yell for a few minutes then asked Jack if they could meet for lunch. He was a bit surprised by the invitation but intrigued because Beth added that she had some great news and wanted to give him the exclusive. Jack was skeptical and thought that Beth was just inventing things to make him happy, but fortunately, Beth knew better than to fabricate news. Instead, she'd tell Jack the great news that the team had just hired Don Stargell, a former major league baseball star, as their new head coach and manager. Stargell was going to introduce a new era in Titans baseball, and Beth wanted Jack to break the story to show how much she valued his partnership.

2.1 How Media Outlets Differ

All media outlets are not the same. This seems obvious, but as we learned in Module 1, we have to pay close attention to the constraints of every communication event. Understanding how different media outlets work is crucial to the sports organization because now, more than ever, sports organizations have to communicate in all media forms ranging from “old style” newspapers to social media. In the story that opens this module, Beth understands this concept and is trying to get her team on board. However, her organization appears to be stuck in the past. If the Titans continue doing things as they always have, they will quickly become even more irrelevant than they are now. Instead, the organization should understand, as Beth does, that sports communication, like all business communication, has evolved. In the sections that follow, we’ll trace this evolution and build an understanding of how each of these media work. We’ll conclude by describing how to deal with journalists, regardless of the medium.

2.1.1 Understanding the History of Media in Sports

Sports have been a part of cultures for as long as we have recorded history. Think about the original Olympic Games in ancient Greece, for example, that were memorialized in poems, fables and even on pottery! Even 2500 years ago, audiences loved to hear about sporting heroes and collect memorabilia.
In more modern times, however, the dawn of what we now understand as "sports communication" began around 1850 with newspapers and magazines reporting on boxing matches. At about the same time, sports were gaining popularity including baseball in the United States (invented in 1838), international cricket play (beginning in 1844), and horse racing. As the twentieth century began, tennis became popular with the Davis Cup starting in 1900 and golf having planted deep roots in both the United Kingdom and the United States with at least 2000 courses between the two countries around turn of the century.

This era also marked technological innovation with newspapers and magazines competing with radio in the early twentieth century and then both of these competing with broadcast television until the 1970s before cable vastly expanded the viewership of sporting events. Although each of these media channels spread sports to more and more households, they all shared one common concept: the media controlled all of the content. That is, the television, radio, newspaper and cable companies decided what sports events to cover and what information was going to be shared with the public.

Through this control over the information, they were able to build very successful businesses. These arrangements also enabled sports companies to build close relationships with specific teams and together, the media and the teams increased the prestige of sports so that both the teams and the media outlets could increase revenues. The media and sports organizations controlled the content – a term knows as "push" – into the 1990s with vastly expanding television coverage on thousands of television channels worldwide until the Internet changed the paradigm to one of "pull." In other words, fans and audiences, rather than the teams and sports organizations, began to control the information by demanding information in real time and by creating content themselves.

Even though the Internet has changed the way individuals consume information, many of the same channels exist today as have existed since 1850 and savvy sports organizations, like the Greenville Titans in our opening case, recognize that they need to understand all types of media to succeed (Schultz, Caskey and Esherick, 2010).

2.1.2 Recognizing the Power of Newspapers and Magazines

Print media such as newspapers and magazines originally controlled the flow of sports information. We are all familiar with the image of the reporter interviewing athletes and then printing stories in the daily or weekly newspaper. In fact, most major daily newspapers still have a "Sports Section" that covers local sports teams and often reports on national sporting events that interest local readers even if those events occur across the globe.

We also are familiar with magazine articles which give longer coverage to sports topics and athlete interviews. Some magazines are strictly dedicated to sports such as Sports Illustrated but others like Time might report on sports as a matter of cultural interest and sometimes give a "cover story" to a particularly relevant or influential sports figure such as Mohammed Ali (Boxing), Don Bradman (Cricket), Michael Jordan (Basketball) or Pele (Soccer). In all of these cases, these athletes received not only "short run" coverage in daily newspapers but also more in-depth coverage in magazines.

These two media share a reliance on subscriptions and newsstand sales for revenue. They are obviously also read by the audience and as print media they encourage a slightly deeper engagement with the content than other media might. Reading requires more concentration and often requires more careful attention to maintaining readers' interest through compelling and vivid language that describes events or personalities. As the original mass media, newspapers and magazines remain the core paradigm for sports reporting and therefore all other subsequent media retain elements of print reporting. Successful sports organizations recognize this and for this reason Beth, the President of the Titans, gives Jack Vergara "the scoop" by giving him privileged information—"the breaking news"—first. Even the vocabulary we use to talk about sports reporting was long ago determined by newspaper and magazine reporting even though it might now appear on a blog. (Schultz, Caskey and Esherick, 2010).

2.1.3 Explaining the Power of Television

Radio was definitely important in the evolution of sports communication because it presented live, "play-by-play" action of sporting events. Prior to radio, most sports reporting occurred after the fact, summarizing important events. However, sports didn't reach the level of importance it now has until television began to dominate the media landscape in the 1960s. In fact, we can talk about two generations of television, 1) broadcast television and 2) cable television. In both cases, the power of television lies in the marriage of live events with rich audio and visual. For the first time in history, television allowed viewers "to be there" even though we might actually be hundreds or thousands of miles away.

Television 1.0: Broadcast Television

Much like newspapers and magazines of the nineteenth century, consumers of broadcast television had little choice in the programming that was available. Viewers simply had to accept the content that was presented on a very limited number of channels. The television companies therefore gained extraordinary power over sports because TV could literally determine the success of a sports franchise by increasing its exposure. Conversely, successful sports franchises exerted influence on television stations that relied on advertising revenue to be profitable. If a popular sports event was broadcast, sponsors and advertisers would pay higher prices to the television stations because of increased access to potential customers. Television and sports held great influence over popular culture (and still does), because the mutual relationship encouraged wide dissemination of relatively few events which were sponsored by relatively few products and companies.

Television 2.0: Cable, Satellite and Pay-Per-View Television

The strict control exercised by the limited number of television stations was greatly disrupted, however, when cable companies introduced dozens, hundreds and now thousands of television stations. Viewers were no longer held captive by just a few events or stations and could choose a far wider array of events or teams. One of the most notable moments in cable broadcast of sports was in 1973 when Home Box Office (HBO) broadcast the "Rumble in the Jungle" between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier from Zaire. The "World Championship Boxing" series launched with the 1973 fight continues today on HBO, one of the most influential cable television stations in the world not only for its sporting content, but also its original content, such as Game of Thrones.

While the cable television stations enabled viewers around the world to see more sporting events than those allowed by broadcast television, the majority of that content was recorded, just as the Olympic Games are now in many countries. Satellite television changed that model by allowing fans to see sporting events live from around the world. No longer would fans have to wait to read about the event

in newspapers or watch a taped broadcast; instead, they could see and hear the event as it happened.

The combination of sporting events moving to television and then to the great expansion of outlets offered by satellite TV created two very powerful trends that changed sports communication:
Consuming sports in real time in reach media
Empowering fans to choose among a vast number of events.

These two key trends proliferated sports networks, sports channels, sports programs, and simultaneously crowded the field for all sports organizations as each team competed to receive airtime. While fans in 1920 had only a few choices for teams to follow or events to experience (probably through radio), by 2000 at the dawn of the Internet Age, fans could choose among thousands of channels and tens of thousands of events each year that were broadcast on television either live or as a recording. These choices vastly increased competition among sports organizations and consequently required those organizations to be far more strategic in communicating with the media and with fans in order to retain market share. In our opening story, for example, Beth's major challenge is to increase the profitability of the Greenville Titans precisely by creating a better media presence. As a marketing professional, Beth knows that unlike 1950—or even 1990—when fans had to passively accept what was given to them, the Internet changed everything. (Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella, 2007).

2.1.4 Describing the Emerging Dominance of the Internet

How has the Internet changed everything? Let's take a step back and think about communication itself. Recall from Module 1 that conversation is the fundamental paradigm of all communication. In a conversation, at least two people interact in real time on a topic of mutual interest and as they interact, those in the conversation collaboratively build a share understanding of the topic. In this model, participants are both audience AND creator; sender AND receiver. It's very much like a circle.

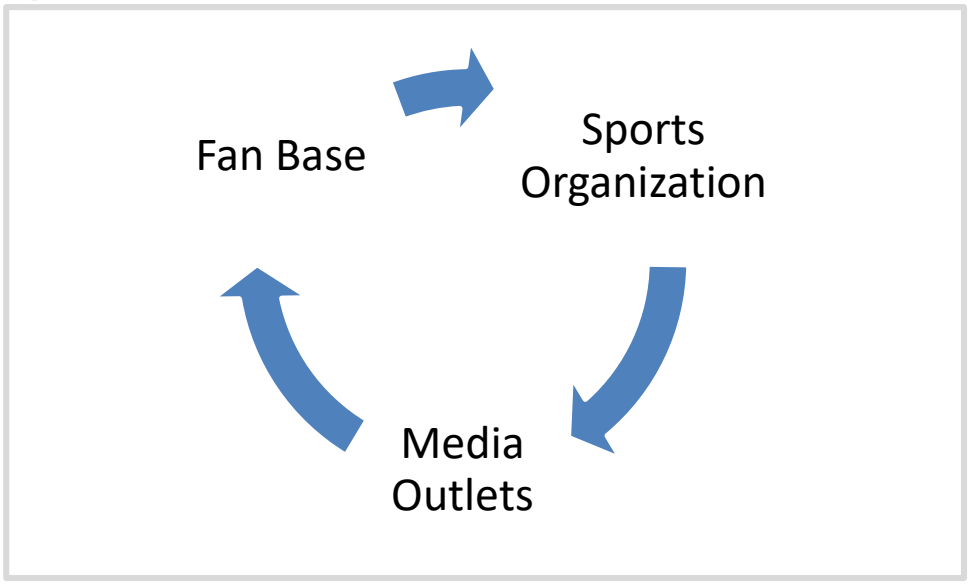
Compare the image of a circle to traditional media such as radio and television which have always "pushed" information. In this model, the media outlets have the power to dictate the story, to share only the information that they think is valid, to a captive audience that is forced to consume it. We can imagine this type of communication as a one-way arrow leading from the media company to the audience. To make problems worse, the sports organizations (or other businesses) that the media outlets rely upon for information traditionally have the same relationship: one-way arrows. Visually it would look like this:

Figure 1: Traditional Model of Sports Communication

Source: Own elaboration

Simon in our opening story thinks that this model still holds and Beth is struggling because she knows that it's a circle with cross-talk among the different groups that looks something like this:

Figure 2: The New Model of Sports Communication



Source: Own elaboration.

In this new model, collaboration and conversation are the dominant metaphor because each participant now has access to all of the others and all of them impact one another. The Internet fundamentally has changed the way that organizations interact because the world is no longer a "push" world. Instead, it's a "pull world" where each audience can acquire the content that it wants on demand in real time, at the moment that it wants that content. For sports, which historically was dominated by media control (a push model), the Internet had flipped communication on its head. It's opposite of the model that appears to have existed since the earliest media representations of sports.

Or has it flipped the paradigm? In truth, the Internet, and social media in particular (a topic for Module 3) has only re-established conversation as the dominant form of communication. Certainly conversation now occurs through digital channels but the idea of multiple parties taking turns to share and discover information is the most familiar and natural form of communication known to human beings. We all know this intuitively because we have experienced good conversations where we

listen to others and they listen to us. We share, in other words. The Internet has empowered fans of sports to become "content creators" along side the actual sports organizations—to share in content creation. Two obvious examples are fan sites and fan blogs where enthusiasts talk about sports with one another in forums that are not at all controlled by the organization itself. However, those conversations influence smart organizations because they will be listening to the conversations to discover what fans think is important.

This shift toward empowerment has changed the way that we need to think about using communication to meet the needs of fans and customers. In the past, marketing professionals like Beth talked about "The Four P's:" Product, Price, Placement, Promotion. Instead, we now talk about "The Four C's" proposed by scholar Robert Lauterborn (1990): Consumer wants and needs (formerly product); Cost of satisfying the wants or needs (formerly price); Convenience of buying (formerly place); and Communication (formerly promotion).

Consumer wants and needs. When organizations focus on "products," they distribute content or experiences or services that the company itself believes are best for consumers. However, this new concept begins with an organization listening to the consumers and developing products, services and experiences to meet those needs. In the world of professional sports, this might mean creating different ticketing arrangements or providing real time statistics on athletes during a competition. For a local club, it might mean re-arranging the schedule of practices to better suit parents or perhaps changing coaches all together. Regardless, the consumers express their desires FIRST and then the organization tries to meet those desires. In the "old days" companies created products and then tried to sell them by crafting persuasive campaigns to push those products. Now, organizations create products that consumers can pull.

Cost to satisfy wants and needs. In the "old days," companies created products then priced them in ways to generate marginal profits. In the new model, organizations think about not just price, but all things necessary to meet consumer needs and then build the price around what it takes to meet the need. Is a consumer willing to travel a long distance? If so, the price would be lower than if they expect the convenience of home delivery. Most importantly, though, organizations think first about what fans and consumers are WILLING TO PAY and then design their pricing structures around that price point. This inverts the model, again, from prior days when companies thought about what a product or service would cost them to produce and then would price it accordingly to make money. Instead, organizations now have to think about what it costs the consumer, in time, money and convenience, and then price according to that number.

Convenience to buy. In the Internet age, convenience reigns supreme. Consumers want products or services to be delivered to them as easily as possible. Historically for sports, we might think about stadiums or gyms or golf courses as the place that services and products were delivered. Now organizations have to think about making products available at home or on mobile devices. Consuming professional sports or participating in recreational sports must be as convenient as possible

because consumers and fans now demand that the service or product require as little effort to consume as possible. In the new model, we have to communicate with consumers "where they are" rather than asking them to "come to us."

As we hinted above, communication differs from promotion because promotion is a one-way arrow with the organization speaking TO the customer or fan. By comparison, communication is interactive; it allows consumers the chance to voice their opinions and they expect to receive responses to those opinions. Organizations now encourage fans to create their own advertisements or to share their own content to promote teams or products. Fans who already identify with teams gain deeper commitment to the team when they are encouraged to participate in showing how, for example, they "live the Chelsea life" by posting brief Twitter messages or by sharing their photos of Chelsea soccer on their own Pinterest pages. Social media has been particularly powerful in building interaction and that interaction has successfully deepened fans' identification with the organization. This seems perfectly natural when we think about it: in our personal lives, we feel closest to the people we communicate with most often.

Given the way that the Internet has changed the way that sports organizations (and all organizations) communicate with their consumers, fans and players, how should Beth's organization begin to engage their fans? How can they extend the life of every single game by having pre-game and post-game events online? How can they encourage fans to talk about the team with one another and with the team itself? In the past when "push" media like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television controlled content, sports organizations didn't have to think about meeting consumer needs or engaging them. Consumers simply had to accept what the companies offered. After the Internet flipped the media world upside down by empowering consumers, the best organizations now have to re-think how they operate by deeply engaging all audiences in conversation about sports. The evolution of sports communication has placed us in an amazing new era of dialogue and communication unlike any that ever existed in the past!