Imagine the following scenario:

Erica Moreno is very excited to begin her new position as Social Media Manager for Triple Play Media Properties, a new startup website that publishes content related to sport and finance. Erica has just graduated from the local university with a degree in communication and a minor in strategic social media management and is looking forward to putting what she learned at school into practice at Triple Play.

During her interview, Erica asked Jaime Duncan, the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of Triple Play what the organization's plan was for social media. Jamie responded that he was not sure, and that was why they were hiring a social media manager. Erica, seemed a bit surprised by that response, but did not think much more about it as she was so focused on finding a job.

During her first day at Triple Play, she meets with Jaime and Mustaf Arellano, the COO (Chief Operating Officer) of Triple Play and they ask her to create a written strategy for Triple Play's social media accounts. They tell Erica that they believe social media can be an asset for Triple Play and charge her with raising the public profile for Triple Play via social media, so they can use that in their sponsorship and advertising efforts. They also tell her that Triple Play does not have the budget to use a consultant, so she will be responsible of developing the plan herself.

As Erica walks to her office, she begins to worry about this task. She has never created a social media plan and, although in school she did assignments related to social media, she has never put together a social media strategy plan. She remembers one of her professors studied social media so she reaches out to him via e-mail. The professor responds with a recommendation for several books on social media strategy and encourages Erica to reach out to several social media experts on Twitter.

Erica reaches out to these individuals, and one, Shannon McClain responds to Erica and they begin to dialogue. Shannon points Erica to some additional resources and tells her she will be happy to look at anything she created – free of charge!

As Erica orders these resources, she begins to feel better about creating a written social media strategy.

4.1 Developing a Social Media Plan

To be most effective, a sport organization's social media should have structure – in other words, a plan must exist. Otherwise, social media is not directed, and often grows sporadic and does not help the organization reach its goals. Remember that social media allows sport organizations to reach multiple audiences such as fans, corporate sponsors, the local community, and the media; and it is imperative that a plan that outlines how those audiences will be reached and the best platforms for reaching them is in place. Additionally, it is also important to plan the kinds of content that will be used to reach those audiences along with how organizational resources will be allocated for social media. Social media is a valuable organizational tool, but to be so, it must be used to help the organization reach its goals and engage with its publics. Thus, organizations need to have a plan that will execute with social media to help the organization achieve its goals. Unfortunately, many organizations do not have a plan for social media in place, and the purpose of this module is to help you become familiar with writing a social media strategy to ensure your organization optimizes its social media presence.

4.1.1 Developing The Social Media Plan

To begin developing a social media plan, sport organizations need to consider unique elements of the organization that might influence how social media is deployed. For example, a sports organization that participates in intercollegiate athletics in the United States is governed by rules and policy from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and thus, there may be things they could not post on social media that a sports organization at the professional level could (e.g., an athlete representing a corporate sponsor). Remember, as well, that for a social media plan to be effective, it must run through every facet of the organization; it cannot just be considered the purview of the organization's communication or media staff. After these considerations have been made, there are some key questions that organizations need to answer in developing a social media plan:

- *Who will be responsible for the plan?* – Although social media should underpin the entire organization, at some point, a designated person or group of people who will be responsible to create and execute the social media plan should be identified. In making this assessment,

factors to consider might be: Who has strong knowledge of social media, including understanding the differences between the platforms? Who has experience with using social media? While someone can certainly be *taught* social media, ensuring that the person or people responsible for the plan have a sufficient knowledge base in social media is important. Of course, depending on organizational resources, consultants or outside vendors with expertise can be brought in to assist with this and other parts of the planning process.

- *How will the organization use social media?* – Here, organizations need to determine things such as:
    - (a) Will there be one central social media account for the organization, or will there be multiple accounts? For instance, some sport organizations have one dedicated social media account, whereas others take a segmented approach and allow their public relations and other departments to operate accounts. When segmented accounts are used, one important factor to consider is the duplication of content. In general, duplicating content is an ineffective use of resources and, while there are times when content can be duplicated (e.g., announcement at change in scheduled game time); in general, the content on each account should be unique.
    - (b) Who will be responsible for operating the social media accounts? Organizations need to determine how staffing resources will be allocated to social media. For example, who will be the primary person responsible for posting content on each platform? What are the contingency plans in case that person is sick, cannot come to work, or leaves the organization? Who will have access to the passwords for the different social media accounts? Answers to these questions help ensure that the organization is devoting resources to social media both sufficiently and efficiently.
    - (c) What are the financial resources available? Again, organizational budgets will vary, but the financial resources available must be considered as part of a social media plan. For example, will the organization use paid metrics available from social media sites like Facebook? Are there resources available to buy programs that can be used to build graphics? Can the organization afford high-quality photography equipment that will assist in visual content?

- *What platforms will be used?* Organizations need to determine what social media platforms will make the most sense for them to operate. There tends to be two different schools of thought here. One is that the organization should be on every potential social media platform, whereas the other view holds that organizations should focus on being excellent on a smaller number of platforms. Certainly, organizational resources will influence this decision. For organizations that have a limited staff, being active on, say, 2-3 platforms is a more optimal strategy, whereas an organization with a larger staff may decide to be active on all major social media platforms. In deciding what specific platforms to use, the organization will need to consider the audience they are trying to reach. For instance, an organization that is seeking to reach the larger public may decide that Facebook and Instagram are the best platforms to reach those groups. Another organization may decide that they want to specifically target millennials and, therefore identify Instagram and Snapchat as the requisite platforms. Most sport organizations are likely to have multiple audiences that can be reached with the same platform, and in this situation, segmenting the content on those platforms becomes important. As discussed earlier, here organizations should consider how identical content will be on each platform. If organizations are trying to reach different audiences on each platform, then duplicating content may be advisable. However, if the organization is trying to reach the same audience on multiple platforms, duplicating content may prove ineffective, as the audience is not being given an incentive to follow the organization on more than one platform.

- *What are the goals for social media?* – It is vital that sport organizations consider the goals for social media, and these should relate back to the collective goals of the organization. In other words, goals for social media should not really be *different* than other organizational initiatives. For example, if one of the goals of the organization is to *give back to the local community*, how can social media be used to achieve that goal? One way this could occur is by the organization documenting their community relations efforts and sharing that via their social media platforms. Another possible route here is that the organization could collaborate with a community organization and use its social media platforms to encourage fans and others to donate to the community organization. At a macro-level, the goals for social media should align with those of the organization. At the micro-level, then, goals need to be established specifically for the social media channels. For example, an organization may decide that a goal for Facebook is to: (a) post 3

times per day; (b) obtain a 25% engagement rate; and (c) obtain a 20% conversation rate with people going to the team website. For social media strategy to be effective, there must be goals in place, otherwise it is difficult for an organization to know if their social media strategy is working.

- *How will feedback be handled?* Social media is built on interaction and sharing and, as previously discussed, sport fans and sport media consumers are very active on social media, thus, sport organizations can expect a good amount of feedback. Strategies for responding to positive and negative feedback were discussed in Module 2, so they are not reviewed here, but organizations will need to identify how they plan to respond to both, positive and negative feedback accordingly.

Developing a social media plan requires planning and effort, and in many ways, most of the work in developing a plan is unrelated to the actual content itself. As organizations develop a plan that accounts for responsibility, resource allocation, the achievement of organizational goals and outlining measurable standards to gauge success, a strong foundation will be in place as the social media plan is executed. To help you better understand these concepts, use the following table to begin creating a social media plan:

Table 1: Social Media Planning Tool

Social Media Planning Tool				
Organizational Goals:				
Target Audiences/Markets				
Best SM Platforms to reach Target Audience/Markets				
Staffing Allocation for Identified Platforms				
Proposed content for each platform				
Frequency of posts				
Measurable Goals for Each Platform				
Strategies for responding to positive feedback				
Strategies for responding to negative feedback				

Source: prepared by the author

4.1.2 Implementing the Social Media Plan

After a social media plan has been developed, it, of course, must be executed. The plan should outline what social media platforms will be utilized and how they will be used; and, as it has been discussed, there are tools such as content calendars that will help the organization plan content. Thus, the first step in implementing a plan is to start posting content! The next step is to notify others in the organization about the social media accounts, and to help all employees feel invested and *buy-in* to the social media plan. The organization may want to consider posting this plan on a company intranet and/or providing a way for employees to provide input or ideas for social media content. This strategy can be a great way to obtain content ideas, as other organizational employees may have a unique vantage point on the organization.

Of course, once a plan has been implemented, it requires management. While an organization can have an effective plan in place, there may be reasons why the plan does not produce the desired results and/or does not resonate with target audiences. Thus, it is crucial that organizations pay attention to the results they are receiving on social media.

4.1.3 Managing the Social Media Plan

As a social media plan is executed, it requires maintenance. These maintenance steps should be outlined in the social media plan, and include things such as:

- *Monitoring* – Who will be responsible to ensure that content is being posted and that the content aligns with the objectives outlined in the plan? This need not be a time-intensive task, but there should be someone responsible for checking social media routinely to make sure the content matches the plan.

- *Contingency* – This step speaks to monitoring, but it is important that contingencies are accounted for and addressed as needed. For example, if the sports organization finds itself winning the championship in its sport, then content around this accomplishment would take priority over other planned content. Additionally, if a tragedy or natural disaster strikes the area in which the sport organization operates or society at large, content needs to be adjusted and perhaps

silenced so the audience does not perceive the organization to be acting inappropriately.

As organizations obtain feedback in the management of their social media operations, it may be necessary to adjust what the organization is doing on social media. Accordingly, it is crucial that social media plans are flexible and elastic, rather than fixed and static.

4.1.4 Evaluating the Social Media Plan and Making Adjustments

One of the best ways to evaluate a social media plan is to listen to what the audience is saying. What kind of engagement is occurring with the audience? As previously discussed, this assessment can be made using organic tools such as Facebook likes and shares, and Twitter re-tweets, in addition to paying for more robust metrics offered by each social media platform or outside vendors. Organizations can also use content management systems such as HootSuite and Sprout Social to manage multiple accounts and these programs provide metrics that can be used to evaluate social media performance. Certainly, organizations should not make rush judgments (outside of a content that produces a significant spike, positively or negatively) and need to remember that it takes time to build a culture on social media. With that said, engagement provides an opportunity to assess what content is resonating with audiences and what content is not, so the organization can continue to put out content that connects with audiences and produces results.

Beyond the metrics and analytics that can be obtained, another important part of evaluating the social media plan is to *listen* to what people are saying about their perception of the organization. What are people saying *about* the organization on social media? For instance, if a sports organization is seeing a lot of people complain about their online ticketing process, then the organization should take this feedback and investigate what can be done to solve this issue. For sport organizations, it is important that listening is not just centered on the organization, but those who are representatives of the organization, such as athletes and coaches. Being proactive here can help identify potential public relations issues. Remember, as well, that there are some issues that cannot be resolved (e.g., such as fans complaining about the team's loss) and so listening should be focused on those issues the organization can address as well as identifying potential public relations issues.

Adjusting is a necessary part of social media. As organizations collect, analyze data and determine what is working and what is not; the focus of social media may shift. For example, a sports organization may initially set out to use social media to drive ticket sales, and after 90 days, find out that posts directly marketing ticket sales (including discounts) have a very low engagement rate. They may also find that posts that feature *behind the scenes* access and which tell stories about players and people involved in the organization have a high engagement rate. Thus, it may be advisable for the organization to shift strategy and focus more on *behind the scenes* and storytelling content, as this is resonating more with the audience. This is not

to say that the organization should move entirely away from content related to ticket sales, only that it may be more plausible to find ways to integrate the storytelling and *behind the scenes* content ticket sales. For instance, a Facebook post that features the players getting ready in the locker room might be captioned, *Players are prepping hard! Good things coming tonight!* A link to the ticket purchasing site may then be embedded in the post.

As has been previously discussed, social media requires vigilant monitoring of advancements with this technology. Thus, another part of adjusting a social media plan may be shifting platforms. For example, after 6 months, an organization may see that they are getting no engagement on YouTube, yet notice that when they post videos on Facebook and use Facebook Live, those posts receive high engagement. Consequently, the organization may decide to abandon YouTube and focus its efforts on Facebook and Facebook Live. With social media technology emerging quickly, adjustment also includes determining if an organization should adopt a new platform. Certainly, this decision will be driven by factors such as staffing resources, but an organization needs to determine if a new platform is a beneficial way to reach their audience and achieve organizational goals. If yes and if organizational resources permit, then integrating the new platform into the social media strategy is warranted.

Social media is not something that can be left to chance. While it is assumed that organizations know their audiences and know their preferences without a written plan to guide social media strategy, it is very difficult to know if social media efforts are being maximized and if the organization is receiving a return on its investment. With that noted, there needs to be a degree of flexibility involved, and organizations cannot be so rigid with a written plan that they are not receptive to change.

Think about your own organization. How have they approached social media? Was there a plan put in place? Or has the organization's social media presence been a product of *going with the flow*? While there is trial and error involved in social media, having a written plan provides a base of guidance for which an organization can begin to successfully optimize social media to achieve its goals.

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