



Facebook 101 for sport communicators

Facebook is at the heart of most sports organization's social media efforts and it's easy to see why. Every month, 1.9 billion (yes, billion!) users log into this social media giant to post status updates, share photos and memes, play games and invite their friends to events. If your sports organization is going to be on one platform, Facebook should probably be it.

Whether you're new to Facebook or just looking for a few handy tips to improve your efforts, you can find answers to commonly asked Facebook questions in our Facebook 101 guide.

In Module #5, you will find:

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Facebook basics to get started



If you don't have a strong foundation, your Facebook efforts could be easily hampered. To set your Facebook page up for success, make sure that you:

1. Create the appropriate Facebook page for your needs.

When you are creating your page, select the business type that best describes you (sports team, organization, non-profit etc). Do not under any circumstance create a personal account with the name of your business, since a) this is against Facebook's terms of service and you will be banned if caught and b) personal accounts don't have access to the many benefits of Facebook business pages like ads and analytics. Don't know if you've accidentally created a personal account instead of a business one? If it's a personal account, your followers must 'friend' you (permission required), where if it's a business account your followers will have to "like" you (no permission required).



2. Give your page a profile picture that looks good when shrunken into a 180 x 180 pxl square.

This is the size it appears on your followers' newsfeed. If your organization has a complicated logo, you might choose to use a great action photo of your sport instead.

3. Give your profile picture and header the same "look and feel" as other communication pieces at your organization, like your website and newsletter.

Incorporating your website's colour scheme, fonts etc. into your header makes your communications network look cohesive. (Pro tip: Facebook's profile picture size is 180 x 180 pixels and the header is 851 X 315 pixels).

4. Fully populate the "About" section of your page using concise, concrete language.

Remember: you're catering to the average Facebook user, so existing text like your mission statement will likely have to be rewritten to be more accessible. (Not: "[Organization Name] is dedicated to fostering empowering physical literacy experiences at all ages of the LTAD spectrum" but "[Organization Name] offers recreational basketball, hockey and golf programs to British Columbians aged 8 to 85.")

5. Register a custom URL.

Once you have 25 followers, you can register a custom Facebook URL. Remember to keep this URL short. If possible, make your Facebook URL the same as your Twitter or YouTube account, so that it's easier for people to search for you. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/username> to register your URL.



6. Populate your page before you invite your members to follow you.

If your page is empty, you're less likely to get those important early 'likes,' so before you invite the world, add a few photo galleries and post some content.



7. Invite your members.

Once your Facebook page is ready to go, it's time to invite the world...or at least your membership. Send out an email inviting your members to join your new page, invite your personal Facebook friends using Facebook's invite function, and announce your Facebook page on your website and in your newsletter. A simple Facebook contest like a photo contest or a caption contest with a decent prize also goes a long way to helping you reach your first 100 likes.



Types of content your followers will enjoy



Do you struggle to find content for your Facebook page? Are you unsure of what type of content is right for Facebook? **Here are some content types to try:**

- Articles from your website.
- Information that's relevant to your members, such as competition dates, changes to major events, registration information, job postings etc.
- Articles about your sport, athletes, teams etc. from traditional media. Set up a Google Alert (<http://www.google.ca/alerts>) for your sport, your organization and other key terms to have relevant articles delivered to your inbox. Make sure to frame articles in a way that sparks discussion and to credit the appropriate source. (I.e. "This writer suggests that children are specializing in one sport too early. What do you think? or "Check out this great feature on local bobsled athlete Bob Smith from friends at the Daily Times").
- Articles from partner organizations that may be of interest to your members.
- Athlete profiles, such as an Athlete of the Week/Month series. This can take the form of a quick photo with some text below (called an 'image macro'), an interview on your website or even a video interview.
- News that brings your community together. Did someone in your organization welcome a new baby or have a birthday? Share it on your Facebook page.
- Memes. We'll have a whole module on these in the future, but if you're unfamiliar with memes, www.knowyourmeme.com is a great place to start.
- Weekly posts like Throwback Thursday (#TBT - where you post historical photos) or Motivational Mondays (where you post motivational quotes or photographs). They're a great

way to fill in the gaps when you don't have enough content. Hint: Pinterest is a rich source of quotes for Motivational Mondays. Just search for your sport's name.

- Photo albums uploaded from competitions and events.
- Facebook events. Creating a Facebook event for tournaments/competitions is a great way to get more fans in the seats, since it allows people attending the tournament to easily invite their friends and family.
- Video content you've created for your YouTube channel (or videos created by other people).
- Simple contests like caption contests and photo contests.

Content to avoid posting and why



You've probably already gathered the following tips from the University of Common Sense, but every year people lose their jobs because they posted ill-advised content on social media, so it's best to be on the safe side. Remember, however, that you're the expert on your community and you are therefore the best person to decide what content to post. Some communities welcome healthy debate, while others want only positive information. Some communities love a grittier sense of humour, while others would be offended. Find out where your community's line in the sand is, and adhere to it.

- i. Negative content. It's okay to post articles that might stir up some heated discussion, but you should never post an article that slams an athlete, team or even a partner organization. When in doubt, keep it positive.
- ii. Anything that's even remotely sexist/racist/homophobic etc.

iii. Content that might embarrass someone or portray someone in a bad light. (You might want to keep the photos from that boozy staff holiday Christmas party off official social media channels, for example).

iv. **Photos that you don't have permission to release.** Many organizations build photo releases into waivers that athletes, coaches and officials sign. If you don't, it's a great practice to start. Most interpretations of Canadian photography laws states that you can take and release photos of people in public places, even if their faces are visible, because people in public have a "diminished expectation of privacy." Because many tournaments take place on private property open to the public, however, photographic consent is a bit of a grey area. Many tournament organizers get "implicit consent" by posting a sign at the entrance to the tournament stating that people entering the tournament give their permission to be recorded or photographed. If you're dealing with a sensitive population, such as children, however, then it's a good idea to attain photo releases, since some children cannot have their image posted online because of custody battles or foster-care situations. Keep a special folder on your computer of social-media-approved photos, and clearly mark photos of people who do not want to appear on social media. (Some people even go so far as to name unpostable photos

'DONTPOST1.jpg, DONTPOST2.jpg).

- v. Content that's too long. While it's okay to link to a lengthy article, keep your Facebook posts concise (within a short paragraph) to ensure that people are reading your posts and don't feel spammed by the large volume of information. If your post is any longer, simply turn it into an article on your website and post the link.
- vi. Content that's irrelevant. If you post too much content that's not of interest to your members, they'll tune out and start unfollowing you.
- vii. Content that's religious or overtly political. Unless your organization is a religious or political organization, you may alienate a segment of your population.
- viii. Posts that beg people for likes/follows/etc. It's okay to ask your followers to help you reach a milestone (i.e. 500 likes), if you only do it once or twice a year. Make sure, however, to avoid asking people to like individual posts ("Like this post if you think our sport is the best ever!!").

How often should I post?



As the great Oscar Wilde said, "Everything in moderation, including moderation." In general, you should post on a moderate level: not enough to annoy people, but often enough that your account doesn't fall idle. Your community will, however, forgive you on the occasions when you post several times a day, such as during a major competition, or on occasions when you take a break (such as over the holidays). Some experts recommend posting at least once a day, while others say that 3 to 5 times a week is ideal for smaller organizations.

The most important factor, however, is to make sure that the content that you're posting is timely and relevant. Content on social media has a very short shelf life, so that amazing sports play that all of your athlete friends are sharing today will likely be old news tomorrow.

When should I post?



Facebook's algorithm uses a principle called "time decay," which means that newer posts are given

a better position on a news feed than older posts. Studies have shown that half of your post's reach comes within the first 30 minutes. It's therefore important to post at the right times. The problem is, however, that researchers can't agree on when those perfect times occur. (Yes, people do make a living researching Facebook).

Here are some handy tips we've pulled from recent research data:

- Content posted on Thursdays and Fridays gets 18% more engagement (likes, shares, comments etc). Why? According to one researcher: "The less you want to be at work, the more you'll be on Facebook."
- The "Happiness Index" of posts on Facebook spikes on Friday, so it's a great time to post positive content.
- Posts on the weekend got 32% more engagement. Saturday is the optimal day to post.
- Some studies show that content posted at 1 pm gets the most shares and content posted at 3 pm gets the most likes.
- Other studies showed that 9 am to 7 pm are great times to post.

Since these statistics do vary, however, it's a good idea to test to see what time your community is online, since a community of college-aged people will obviously be online at different times than a community of 9-to-5-ers. Luckily, Facebook just unrolled an easy way to help you figure out when your community is online using its **Insight analytics**.

Here's how:

- Go to your Facebook page.
-  Under the Admin panel, click on Insights. 
- Click on the Posts tab 
- Click on the When Your Fans Are Online tab,  and presto: you've got a graph showing when your fans saw your content the most!

Some helpful tips to maximize your efforts



Back in the dawn of social media when social media dinosaurs (Myspace, Friendster) roamed the land, the earliest social media users had to invest a lot of time and energy into learning the new tools. Luckily, social media is getting easier and easier to use every day. These days, you don't have to reinvent the wheel to have social media success.

Here are some handy tips to save you time:

1.  **Facebook now allows you to schedule posts.** On Monday morning, schedule a few posts for the week during peak times. Just 15 minutes of content scheduling can cover your bases for the whole week



2.   **Create your own original content.** Captioned photos (also called image macros) are very popular on Facebook and easy to make using some of the many, free meme generators around (i.e. <https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>). You can also make them in Photoshop. Add a funny caption

or an inspiring quote to a photo of your sport and you'll be surprised at how much attention your post receives.

3.Engage your community members to get great content for your Facebook page (and other social media platforms). Maybe you have an athlete who's a communications major who'd like to blog for you. Maybe a parent is a graphic designer who can design you a great header. Maybe some of your athletes own GoPros and are generating great sport clips that you could use on YouTube. Ask for help and you'll be surprised by the response.

4.Set one or two small, measureable goals per month for your Facebook page and evaluate your efforts at the end of the month. For example, you might devote your first month to rewriting the content on your Facebook page and promoting your Facebook page to your existing members. Make sure that these goals are within your control. You can control, for example, making one athlete profile video per month. You can't control whether or not it goes viral.

5.Use Facebook's Insights to see which of your posts are most successful, then create more content of this type.

6.Follow similar sports organizations on Facebook through your personal account and then share their content on your organization's page.

Increasing your Facebook followers



We've got a whole module devoted to this topic. To view it now, visit www.viasport.ca/social-media-toolkit and click on **Module 2 - Seven ways to increase your social media followers today**.

What's the difference between Facebook pages and groups?



Facebook pages are public fronts to businesses, organizations and other groups. Because they're meant for external communication, anyone can like and follow them and they're easy to find in a Facebook search. With a Facebook page, you can create ads, see analytics, share content and much more.

Facebook groups, on the other hand, are meant for internal communication and are usually not open to the public. Members must often be invited privately or approved by a group administrator before they're allowed to join and privacy settings can be set very high. Facebook groups help real-life groups of people such as book clubs, running clubs, bible study groups, and sports teams organize more effectively. For this reason, groups have organizational functions that pages don't have: such as a file-sharing system and polls.

While your organization should have a page, not a group, groups can be handy for individual sports teams to share resources, organize fundraising efforts and post documents like team rules and team schedules.

Pros and cons about Facebook ads



The jury's still out over the effectiveness of Facebook ads. While they can definitely direct more traffic to your website or Facebook page, many sports organizations who've tried them report that this traffic didn't help them reach their goals (tournament tickets sold, likes of Facebook page, website visits etc). Unfortunately, Facebook ad traffic can often be generated by bots, fake accounts or other artificial means.

One interesting exercise is to ask your friends and coworkers how many of them click on Facebook ads and, if so, what kind of ads they responded to. I, personally, have never clicked on a Facebook ad, since I don't want to "meet hot singles in my area" or "shed belly fat with this one weird tip." In fact, I've only met 1 or 2 people who say they find Facebook ads useful. As Facebook works to get rid of the junk ads for suspicious products and gets better at targeting ads at users that are actually useful, however, this might change.

Facebook also offers Promoted Posts, which allows you to pay a small fee to boost the number of people who see your posts. While this is a more organic way to market on Facebook, many social media marketers found that the majority of traffic that their posts received was from spam accounts.



There are, however, two pieces of good news. The first is that Facebook is constantly tweaking its algorithms to try to make their ads and Promoted Posts more useful to businesses. Facebook knows that it needs to make money to keep existing, so it has a strong incentive to improve this function. The second is that Facebook ads are very inexpensive. With a small budget, you can test Facebook ads and evaluate their efficacy.

If you choose to try Facebook ads, here are some tips:

- Start with a small budget and evaluate your results before investing further.
- Investigate what kind of people are liking, sharing and interacting with your promoted content to see if they're real accounts. You can also use Insights to see where your increased traffic is coming from.
- Check your website analytics to see what kind of referral traffic your ads are providing. Make sure to check how long visitors stay on your page.
- Give your ads a catchy title and photo that clearly state your message.

Bottom line: If you're hosting a big event or just want to give your Facebook profile a boost, Facebook ads might be worth a small investment. Make sure, however, that your ads are actually generating meaningful traffic. After all, it's all well and good that someone from Poland or Malaysia knows that you're hosting a volleyball tournament in Kelowna, but what's the chance they'll be buying tickets?

Promoting your events on Facebook



If you are active on Facebook personally, you probably know that Facebook can be a great tool to organize parties and other gatherings among friends. It can also be an excellent tool to promote your tournaments, fundraisers and other events because:

- Facebook reminds attendees about your event and puts it in their Facebook calendar, increasing the likelihood that they'll attend;
- Facebook events make it easy for your members to invite their family and friends and for potential attendees to see who else will be going;
- Facebook events puts all of your tournament's information in one convenient location, meaning your fans don't have to visit your website to find the tournament dates, times, schedule, etc.;
- Fans can ask questions and give feedback about the event; and
- You can easily inform attendees about last-minute changes (such as plans for bad weather).

Here are some tips to help you use Facebook events successfully:

- Make sure that all information is current.
- Unfortunately, (at the time this module was written), Facebook no longer allows you to create an event that lasts longer than 24 hours. If you're hosting a weekend tournament, you'll have to set the date for the first day and then change it every night.
- Use an eye-catching action shot as the event photo.
- Make the event description clear but concise. (I.e. not "Wheelchair rugby tournament" or "Vancouver Invitational" or even "Provincial Wheelchair Rugby Teams Play At Vancouver Invitational" but "Vancouver Invitational Wheelchair Rugby Tournament").
- Take into account that newcomers to your sport may visit your Facebook event. Some sports have complicated tournament names/leagues/divisions that make perfect sense to the athletes, but are baffling to outsiders. Clearly describe what fans will see at your event in the event's description. (I.e. "Come watch B.C.'s up-and-coming figure skaters, including previous national champions Jane Doe and Bob Smith, battle for the right to represent our province at the Canadian national championships.")
- Make sure to use persuasive language in your event description.
- Respond promptly to any questions or comments.
- Depending on your event's size and how many newcomers you expect, it's a great idea to post resources that answer common questions a newcomer might have (such as basic rules, video clips of common plays, etc).
- Promote your Facebook event in press releases, articles on websites, e-newsletters, etc.

Measuring your success on Facebook



At the end of the day, social media is about creating a community that supplements the one your organization has in real-life. **It's not** merely a game of who can rack up the most followers. A successful Facebook page is therefore one that has meaningful participation. If your members are liking, sharing and commenting on your content, you're on the right track.

A successful Facebook page also produces real-world effects, though these can be difficult to measure. When managed correctly, your Facebook page can increase the number of fans at tournaments, recruit participants, assist with fundraising and much more.

To determine whether your page is successful, ask yourself the following questions:

- How many likes/shares/comments does our page get per month? Is this number increasing? If it's decreasing, why?
- How often do our members discuss our Facebook page or content they saw on your Facebook page in real life? There's no higher compliment for a social media coordinator to receive than to sit on the sidelines at a tournament and hear athletes commenting on a recent web video you made, or discussing an article you posted.
- Is our Facebook page integrated into our organization's communications network (website, blog, Twitter account etc)?
- How often do my members use Facebook to ask a question or get other information?
- Have I set some small goals for our Facebook page? If so, what progress am I making on these goals? Is it time to switch our focus?
- Is my Facebook page inclusive? Would a newcomer to my sport be able to access meaningful information?
- How much traffic does Facebook send to my website?

Remember: building a successful Facebook page is a slow and steady process. Start now, grow incrementally, and your Facebook page will begin paying dividends when you host your next big event.

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To learn more, check out our Social Media Toolkit, found [here](#).

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