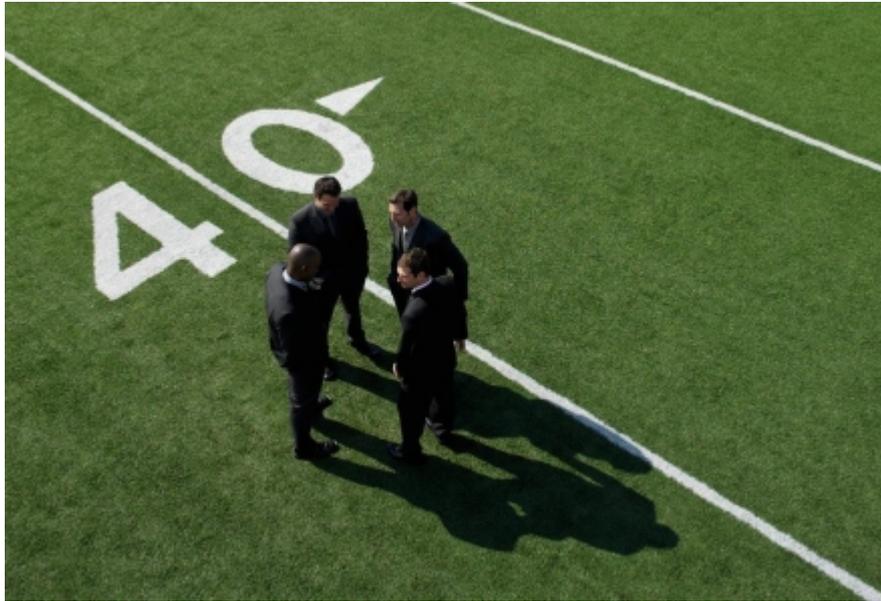




## Building a communications network in sport



It's a common story: an organization develops a social media presence, begins posting content, and after a few months becomes frustrated by the lack of engagement. Often, the problem is that the organization's social media presence is not linked to any of its other communications tools such as a website or newsletter. To grow your social media presence, you need to tap into the roots of your existing communications network.

In short, social media cannot exist in a vacuum. **Your social media platforms should not only be linked to each other, but they should also be linked to your overall communications strategy**

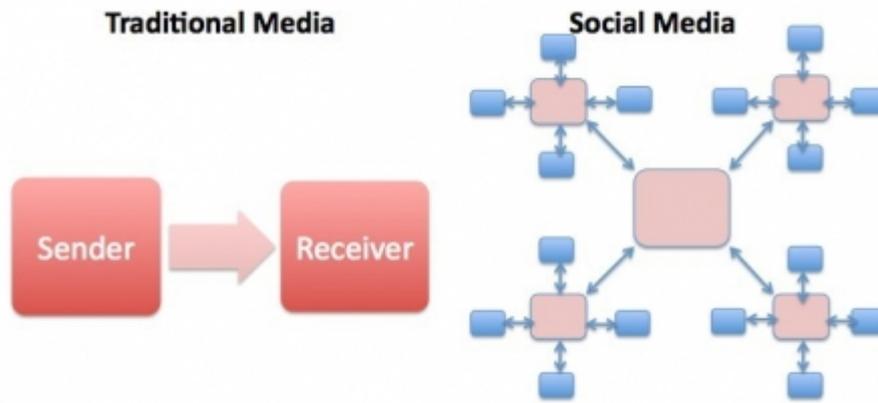
### **In Module #9, you will find:**

1. [What a social media network looks like](#)
2. [Seven principles of a good communication network](#)
3. [Building your communication network](#)

## What a communications network looks like in sport

The main benefit of social media is that it operates in a branching pattern.

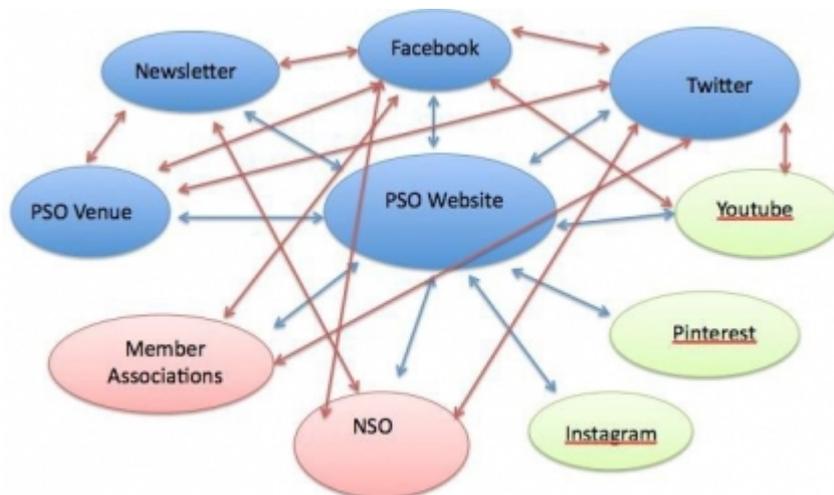
If I send out a print newsletter to 1000 people, for example, it will only be seen by those people and maybe their roommates, husbands or kids who see it lying around in the recycling bin. If I post that same content on social media, however, those 1000 people may choose to share it on their own social media networks, and their followers may choose to share it on their networks, making your content move far and wide in a branching pattern. That's how content goes "viral."



In other words, social media can do the work for you but all of these benefits are impossible without a good communications network.

Even if you've never mapped it out, chances are that you already have an informal communications network. By spending a little time thinking about how all the pieces of your communications strategy fit together, you can streamline your network and make sure that the communications content you work so hard to create gets the maximum amount of attention.

The network below was created for a softball Provincial Sport Organization (PSO). Though it has some unique aspects - the PSO runs its own venue that also has a website - it represents a common communications network model.



The network is laid out in a wheel format with the PSO's website as the "hub." This model aims to drive traffic to the website, where the viewer will be exposed to the rest of the organization's content.

If you follow the arrows, you will notice that:

- **Content on the website is cross-posted on the appropriate social media platforms.** The arrow, however, goes both ways. Links to relevant social media content are also posted on the

website. For example, the organization might create an article about a tournament and post it to Facebook. To give website visitors who are not currently following the organization on Facebook an incentive to do so, the website article might also contain a link to a Facebook photo album with exclusive content. Visitors to the website can easily get to Facebook, and Facebook visitors easily get to the website.

- **Content is posted across multiple social media platforms.** Content gets the maximum reach by being posted across every relevant social media platform.
- The organization focuses more heavily on some platforms more than others, but **every platform has a role.** For example, Pinterest is used to find funny or inspirational softball content on slow news days.
- The communications network **includes outside organizations**, such as their National Sport Organization (NSO) and member clubs. By building a relationship with similar organizations, the PSO is able to extend their reach.

By taking time to map out its communications network, this PSO was able to clarify what role each platform plays in their daily communication and figure out how to maximize their content, ensuring that their communication hours were well-spent.

## Seven principles of a good communication network

### 1. It has a clear hub

By picking a focus for a communications network, an organization avoids confusion and creates a central location where all their content can be accessed. Most organizations use their website for this purpose, since it is easy to search and contains the most content. Some organizations choose to use Facebook as a hub because they do not have the ability to update their website by themselves and cannot ensure that content will be timely.

### 2. It contains clear, visible links to every other platform.

Some studies show that users who can't find what they need on your website may give up after three clicks. Your website should therefore have links, (preferably on the front page), to all of your social media accounts. Your social media accounts should also contain links to every other platform and your website. A visitor should be able to go to one platform and find them all in seconds.

### 3. Every platform has a role.

We'll talk about this more when we discuss creating a social media action plan. In broad strokes, however, every platform should fill a purpose. For example, you may use Pinterest to find content, Twitter to communicate with other organizations, and Facebook to really engage with your community. Knowing how each piece fits in the puzzle saves you time since you won't waste effort using a platform for a purpose it wasn't intended for.

### 4. Content is shared across all networks appropriately

Your content should be shared across all relevant networks in a timely fashion, making sure to tailor your message to the conventions of that platform. (I.e. using hashtags on Twitter, but not Facebook).

## 5. Every platform is active.

Having a few inactive platforms will make your organization appear stagnant. If you can't commit to using a platform for a clear purpose, don't use it.

## 6. It's strengthened by offline actions

Sometimes the key to social media success doesn't involve the Internet at all. Insert links to your social media accounts in your brochures, magnets, pens, posters, pop-up banners and other promotional material. Phone coaches and other stakeholders to find great athlete success stories to turn into social media content. When you launch a major social media content piece such as a video, email the communications contacts in your NSO and member organizations asking them to promote the content, then return the favour when they need it.

## 7. It's measurable



Though using Analytics can be time-consuming and require some know-how, they allow you to fine-tune your approach. Analytics can show you which platforms are driving the most traffic to your website, which types of content are most successful, what areas of your website people are having trouble finding, and even what time of day it's best to post at. (We'll have an entire section devoted to Analytics in the future).

# Building your own communication network

 **Step 1:** Make a list of all of the platforms your organization currently uses.

**Step 2:** Make a list of all platforms your organization would like to use (refer to Module 4: [What social media sites should my sports organization be using?](#) to learn about potential uses for each platform).

**Step 3:** Make a list of potential partners you could include in your communications network. Be as broad as possible. You could include NSOs, member clubs, other PSOs, and even high-profile athletes who have a social media following.

**Step 4:** Rank all of the social media platforms you're on by how often you use them and/or how important they are to your communications plan. For example, most organizations find that their Facebook page is more active than their Twitter account.

**Step 5:** Select a hub for your communications network. As stated above, most organizations will use their website as their hub. If your website is unreliable and/or you cannot update it in a timely fashion, however, then you might choose to make your Facebook page the focus of your communications efforts.

**Step 6:** Following the diagram on page 2, write the name of your hub in the center of a piece of paper, then lay the other communications platforms around it in a circle. You may choose to put platforms you're not currently active on, but plan to use, in a different colour. You may also choose

to put platforms that you do not control (such as your NSO) in a different colour. 

**Step 7:** Use arrows to connect the platforms. Connect any platforms that could share content or interact. For example, content on your Facebook page, Twitter account, and YouTube channel could be shared in your newsletter. You could tweet at member organizations on Twitter. Most platforms should connect to your hub.

**Step 8:** Examine your network. Is there a platform that doesn't connect to many other platforms? Why is this? If it's because it plays a small but significant role, then leave it in. If, however, you have one platform that you cannot usefully tie to the others, then you should consider getting rid of it.  

**Step 9:** On a separate piece of paper, write a one-sentence description of each platform's role. Example: "Twitter: to connect with similar organizations and promote our high-performance athletes."

**Step 10:** Share your network with your colleagues and determine whether your plan is feasible. You might choose to allocate a certain number of hours a month for social media and see whether you can realistically maintain your network. If you cannot devote time to all of the platforms you would like to be on, then you will have to prioritize and perhaps de-activate some platforms.

 In summary, your communications network plan is a blueprint for your social media success, and should work in tandem with your communications action plan. It's not a diagram to be posted on the wall and consulted every time you make a post, but a useful exercise to help you make the most of every piece of content you create.

Hopefully, the act of drafting your communications network has also shown you that you are not a lone social media wolf posting into the ether to a few fans. Instead, you're linked to a whole network of other sport communicators who are also trying to maximize their social media success. By joining them, you can get the results you're looking for without increasing the hours you spend at your computer.

**Source:**

<http://cs.stanford.edu/people/jure/pubs/navigation-wsdm14.pdf>

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



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