



Eight troubleshooting tips for sports organizations using social media



You've created some accounts, have been posting regularly and are ready to take advantage of all that social media has to offer...until a problem crops up that derails your efforts. Social media has been popular for less than a decade and everyone is still adjusting to its effects, so a few bumps in the road are natural. That's why we've assembled a troubleshooting guide of social media problems that sports organizations often face to help you get your plans back on track.

Have a problem that's not on the list? Have a solution we haven't mentioned?
Email arley@bcwheelchairsports.com and get in the conversation.

In Module #10, you will find solutions to the following scenarios:

1. [None of the athletes in my organization want to appear in my social media content](#)
2. [There's so much to do in social media. I don't know what platforms I should be on!](#)
3. [The coaching staff thinks social media is a distraction or a waste of time](#)
4. [No one is following my organization on social media](#)
5. [Leaders in my organization are against social media](#)
6. [All my social media content ideas are dismissed as being too edgy/controversial](#)
7. [I can't think of any creative ideas for social media content](#)
8. [My athletes are posting inappropriate content on social media](#)

1. None of the athletes in my organization want to appear

in in my social media content

Solution: Your athletes are busy, so it's understandable (and can be frustrating) that they might not want to spend their limited spare time starring in your latest social media video or blogging for you. Your athletes are a great resource for creating engaging social media content, so it's important to get them on board.



Here's how:

- **Demonstrate the benefit:** Having a social media presence can help athletes grow their personal brand and secure sponsorship, public speaking gigs and even media attention. To convince your provincial and national team athletes that they have a lot to gain, meet with them face-to-face and ask how you can help them promote themselves online. Maybe they've got their own ideas for content, maybe some of your ideas don't gel with the image they want to project, or maybe they've never considered that taking 30 minutes out of their day to star in your video will give them something to show to students at school visits for years to come. Lay out the reasons why they'll benefit from your social media efforts and they'll be more likely to respond positively.



- **Get it in writing:** Many teams have a clause in their athlete agreement stating that all athletes must take part in reasonable promotional efforts. This includes social media. While it's not advisable to force unwilling athletes to take part, sometimes a team needs a reminder that social media can be just as important as traditional media, and that they have a responsibility to help out. This message should ideally come from the coaching staff and it should be framed in a positive way (i.e. "Our team will be active on social media as part of our campaign leading up to the Rio 2016 Olympics, so please work with our communications coordinator to help us achieve this goal" not "Anyone who doesn't help out with social media will do wind sprints until they puke.")
- **Identify the source of the problem:** You might have to do some digging to unearth the source of your athletes' distrust of social media. Are your athletes nervous in front of a camera? Not confident about their writing or blogging skills? Just too busy? If possible, ask coaching staff to carve out some time with you to meet with the team at a training camp. Once you identify the problem, you can find a solution. Maybe your team needs social media training or you just need to find a different role for an athlete. If an athlete doesn't have the writing skills to blog, for example, maybe she would make an excellent video interview subject.
- **Make it convenient:** Your athletes are busy, so you may need to go to them personally to ensure their participation. Visit them at their training environment to conduct a video interview, or just give them a camera and ask them to film a behind-the-scenes video. Going a little out of your way to connect with an athlete can pay off in the long run.

- **Make an ally:** Chances are that you've got at least one athlete in your organization who's passionate about social media or is pursuing a communications degree and looking for work experience. This athlete may not be on a provincial or national team, but still has access to the team and trains in the same environment. Connect with this athlete to help you brainstorm social media content, and use him/her to act as a go-between between you and your athletes.

2. There's so much to do in social media. I don't know what platforms I should be using!



Solution: Check out Module 4: [What social media sites should my sports organization be using?](#) for handy tips on how to pick platforms that will help you achieve your goals and avoid spreading your resources too thin. You might also want to try our last module [building a communications network](#) to help figure out how all the pieces of your social media puzzle fit together.

3. The coaching staff thinks social media is a distraction or a waste of time

Solution: It's understandable that coaches don't want any distractions in their quest for excellence. It can therefore be an uphill battle to convince them that their team should take part in even basic communications efforts. The problem is that most amateur sports don't have the luxury of ignoring either traditional or social media. Without a communications plan in place to lay the groundwork, a team will struggle for media attention no matter how many gold medals they win.



-  **Make a plan:** If your coaching staff is aware of your communications goals, they will see you as something more than that annoying person who pops in occasionally to schedule their athletes for 6 am talk show visits. Send the coaching staff your social media plan and meet with them to get their input on how you can achieve your communications goals. Once the coaching staff feels that they have some control over your communications plan and understand how it benefits them, they may be more likely to buy in.
- **Create a team social media policy:** Many times, coaches are hesitant to engage in social media because they worry that their athletes will turn into a public relations nightmare, or you'll reveal their training secrets to the world. Coming up with a social media policy and

having both athletes and staff sign off on it will both prevent social media gaffes from occurring and make everyone feel more comfortable. (We'll have a module on social media policies in the future). This policy may mean that your coaching staff approves every video you create and monitors their athletes' social media accounts. Addressing your coaching staff's fears head-on will help to turn them into allies.

- **Show them examples:** It helps to show reluctant coaches examples of professional sports teams who certainly aren't hurting for media attention but still use social media to show a different side of their athletes. The Vancouver Canucks, for example, have a robust social media program and their athletes have become social media celebrities.
- **Earn their trust:** If a team is hesitant about using social media, give them complete control early on. Let them oversee every social media video/blog post/Facebook post and Tweet. Eventually, they will build up a level of trust with you, and slowly hand over the reins.

4. No one is following my organization on social media

This is probably the number one problem that sports organizations face and it's not unique to the sports sector. Luckily, we have a module on [seven ways to increase your social media followers today](#).

5. Leaders in my organization are against social media



Solution: Perhaps your executive director doesn't use social media and doesn't understand it. Or maybe he or she has seen her 19-year-old nieces/nephews/grandchildren posting inappropriate photos of themselves online often enough to fear a potential public relations catastrophe when your organization's young athletes are given a public forum. Maybe your board members don't see the benefit of social media and aren't willing to approve your communications plan. Either way, it's important to get higher-ups in line with your social media efforts.

- **Show them the numbers:** Analytics allow you to demonstrate in quantifiable terms why social media is important. Being able to show, for example, that your captioned photo reached an audience of 28,000 people, (which is 150 times more than the number of people who came to your most recent tournament), will help the powers-that-be to concretely see the benefit of social media. Many people who are unfamiliar with social media see it as airy-fairy and ineffectual, so analytics can go a long way in convincing them that your approach is well researched and well thought out. (We'll have a module on analytics in the future).
- **Make a plan:** Having a social media plan not only saves you time and money because it prevents wasted effort, but it also allows you to frame social media as a key component in your overall communications plan with measureable objectives and goals.



- **✘ Show the success of others:** If your organization is not active on social media, your Executive Director might need to see proof that a social media network can pay dividends. Find a comparable organization with a robust social media program and offer examples of their success. Sometimes an organization will even share their analytics with you so that you can provide quantitative data to your executive director or board.
- **✘ Calm their fears:** Many executive directors or board members do not want their organizations to participate in social media because they fear negative consequences. Having a clear social media policy and a well-thought-out [organizational voice](#) will help to allay their fears over any public gaffes. You may also have to agree to let your executive director approve everything you do on social media before you release it. As months pass and your success becomes obvious, however, you will earn your organization's trust and get more independence.

6. All my social media content ideas are dismissed as being too edgy/ controversial

✘ Solution: In previous modules we've detailed how organizations often play it **✘** too safe on social media, leading them to create boring content that no one wants to share. It's an unfortunate fact that the most successful social media content tows a fine line between unique and controversial (Module 3: [18 ways to improve your social media etiquette](#)). For example: the Canadian wheelchair rugby national team's most success video pairs rap music with clips on athletes falling out of their wheelchairs. This video has 90,000 views, which is exponentially more than their average range of video views (between 500 and 3,500 views). Obviously, no one wants to create negative press, but the best social media videos are often dismissed the first time around by nervous executive directors.

- **Show examples of similar videos:** Provide your executive director or other supervisors with examples of potentially controversial social media content made by other organizations. Screen capture social media reactions to this content, to show how the discussion was productive.
- **Have a method to your madness:** There's no point being controversial for the sake of being controversial. The most successful social media content packs a punch for a reason. You should be able to articulate what role your controversial idea has in your communications plan. For example, a video that tackles a stereotype about your sport in a funny way might be the most successful way to break this stereotype and start a discussion about it.



- **✘ Clearly articulate where the “line” is:** Everyone in your organization will have a different tolerance for risk. Knowing where exactly the line in the sand your organization draws between appropriate and inappropriate content is vital to prevent problems before they start and prevent you from wasting time on ideas that will never get approved. Discuss, with your executive director, exactly what content your organization will never permit and what content it will permit in certain circumstances. Maybe swearing is never okay, for example, but jokes at your organization’s expense are okay, if they’re in good taste. An open conversation will also allow your organization to articulate why certain content is forbidden. Perhaps your executive director has been against certain types of content as a knee-jerk reaction, but will soften his/her stance if you are able to articulate what place that content might serve in your communications plan.
- **Agree to a longer approval process:** If there’s even a chance that your controversial idea could backfire, it should be subject to a longer approval process. Agree to show drafts of the project to a test audience beforehand and make changes based on their feedback.
- **Push the envelope...slowly:** If you storm onto the scene trying to drum up attention for your brand new social media network with a controversial video, you’re likely to encounter resistance and possibly turn off your audience. Social media is often an exercise in trust building. The more successes you have, the longer the leash you’ll be given.

7. I can’t think of any creative ideas for social media content

Solution: Check out our module on [Creating "shareable" social media content](#) to learn about creating articles, photos, memes and videos!

8. My athletes are posting inappropriate content on social media

Solution: No matter what social media policy you put in place, and no matter how much you drum into your athletes’ heads that they shouldn’t put anything on social media that they wouldn’t be comfortable plastering on a billboard, chances are that you will still find yourself trying to explain to an athlete why he or she maybe shouldn’t tweet at adult entertainers from his official account, or why she shouldn’t take to Twitter to share her innermost thoughts about a recent breakup. Let’s face it: many athletes at the provincial level are teenagers and it can be challenging to convince a teenaged athlete that he or she is a brand, and that his/her normal teenaged behaviour is inappropriate in a public forum when it comes from someone who represents your organization.

- **Lay out the ground rules in advance:** You should have a social media policy in place with clear rules about how athletes representing your organization can use social media. Be explicitly clear about what your organization will and will not tolerate. You should also articulate the course of action for an athlete breaking these rules including who will approach the athlete, and what a potential punishment will be. A clear social media policy allows everyone to be on the same page so that you can deal with problems quickly, fairly and



efficiently.

- **✖ Encourage your athletes to create a professional account separate from their personal account:** To help your athletes see themselves as a brand, encourage them to make a professional account separate from their personal account. Their personal accounts should not be visible to the public and should have the highest privacy settings. Though even an athlete's locked-down personal account can be easily screen-captioned, the separation between your athletes' personal and public accounts will give them more room to interact with their friends online in a casual manner without making any waves.
- **✖✖ Monitor your athletes' social media to solve problems proactively:** Make a list of all of your athletes' Twitter accounts (and official Facebook pages) and monitor the list on a regular basis. If you notice that an athlete is edging into inappropriate territory, contact them quickly before it turns into a problem. Be especially proactive during major events when the media might be tuning into your athletes' social media accounts.

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



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