



Ten ways to uncover great social media stories for your sports organization



In 2007, a visitor to the Vancouver Aquarium shot an adorable video of two otters swimming around holding each other's paws. They then posted it to YouTube, at social media platform which was then only a few years old. The response was overwhelming. Within a few weeks, the video had been seen by nearly a million people. This simple moment had become one of the world's first viral videos.

The otter video was not a one-in-a-million event. In fact, otters hold on to each other's paws all the time and thousands of aquarium visitors had seen the same sight. It took one savvy visitor, however, to recognize that the otters were a unique story that other people would care about. Like the paw-holding otters, engaging stories are all around us. If you work in sport administration, you likely meet people with interesting stories every day. The challenge for social media communicators is to identify these stories and share them with the world.

In this module, you'll learn how to uncover stories that will get social media attention. In future modules, we'll help you shape this raw material into a cohesive online story.

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But first: what makes a great social media story?

Stories that do well on social media don't necessarily need the 'hook' that traditional news stories do. After all, you would probably never see a newspaper article with the headline 'Otters Hold Paws' or 'Cat Does Something Adorable,' but these videos attract thousands of views online. While traditional news has to resonate with a broad audience, social media stories can be specifically tailored to a particular audience. (Remember: there's also a lot of overlap between social media and traditional media stories. Don't be surprised if your social media story gets picked up by the traditional media if it's successful).

The best social media stories often have one or more of the following elements:

- **Challenges the viewer's expectations:** A story about a football player getting his PhD in astrophysics, for example, breaks the 'dumb jock' stereotype.
- **Is unique or memorable:** Keep in mind that unique stories don't have to be groundbreaking. A set of triplets on the same softball team or a woman who takes up triathlon at age 70 would certainly pique your audience's interest.
- **Is cute or heartwarming:** There's a reason that some of the most viral content involves animals or babies.
- **Inspires or motivates.**
- **Celebrates someone's success.**
- **Showcases someone overcoming an obstacle or rising to a challenge.**
- **Is important to your community:** Because social media content can be tailored to your audience, you can use it to explore stories that may not be of interest to the general public.
- **Is funny.**

Still not sure if a story has social media potential? Ask yourself if you would personally be interested in the story if you came across it on social media. Chances are that what resonates with you will resonate with others.

How do we find these stories?

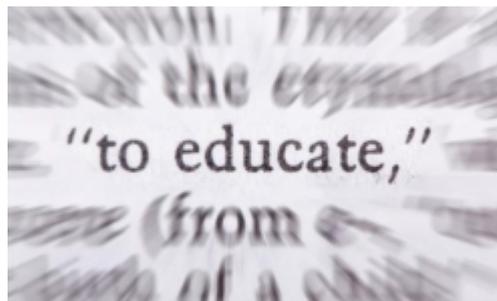


Many sports communicators report that they have difficulty unearthing great social media stories.

The problem is often that the person creating the social media content is not the one dealing with members on a day-to-day basis. Even if you came to work at your Provincial Sport Organization (PSO) because of a former sports career, you simply can't know every athlete, coach, official and volunteer. Unfortunately, the people with access to the most compelling stories are often reluctant to share them, either because of modesty or because they simply don't recognize a story's potential.

So how do you get the people who have the stories to share them with you?

1. Educate your members on what makes a good social media story.



A few weeks before a wheelchair rugby tournament, I asked some coaches if any of their athletes had any interesting stories that I could use to promote the event. No one could think of anything. A few days later, however, my phone began ringing off the hook with media from across the province wanting print-quality

photos of an athlete I'd never heard of. After a bit of digging, I discovered that the athlete in question had sustained a spinal cord injury during the Iraq war and had come to Canada as a refugee. Playing wheelchair rugby had been key to his recovery and his ability to adapt to life in Canada. Talk about a compelling story! Because he was a new athlete and was not expected to impact the team's success, however, none of the coaches had recognized his story's potential.

This incident taught me the valuable lesson that if I wanted to get great stories from my members, I had to show them what a great story looked like. When you put out a call for stories, give specific examples about what you're looking for and be sure to specify that the person doesn't necessarily need to be a star athlete. Remember: when you're gathering stories, be sure to put out the call via your website, social media and your newsletter to make sure you reach a wide audience.

2. Know what you are looking for



While a great social media story can certainly come out of nowhere, it helps to have a general idea of what you want. Are you hunting for success stories to help with fundraising or grant applications? Do you want to shatter some stereotypes about your sport by showcasing a diverse range of member experiences? Do you have a big event coming up like the B.C. Games and want to highlight interesting participants or alumni? Being able to articulate what types of stories you're looking for and provide examples of these stories will increase your response rate.

3. Give your members an incentive



Let's face it: your members are busy and helping you generate engaging social media content might not be on the top of their To Do list. For this reason, many organizations use contests or other giveaways to get their members to share their stories. One organization, for example, holds a Future Stars contest that recognizes young athletes with the potential to go far in the sport. Others add a 'Giving Back,' 'Spirit of Sport' or

'Comeback of the Year' award to their annual awards to find members with memorable stories. Some organizations have an Athlete/Team/Volunteer of the Month contest where both the winning athlete/team/volunteer and the nominator get a prize. Some simply offer an iTunes gift card to the person who brings in the best story every month. Though contests seem like a lot of work, keep in mind that each contest will generate multiple story leads that can provide you with social media content for the months to come.

4. Show mutual benefit



Don't have the budget for a contest? Highlight the other ways that your members can benefit from your online storytelling. Your social media content can be used to assist fundraising and grant applications, share a team's success with a wider audience, acquire sponsorship for an athlete or a team, recruit volunteers or other participants, and even get traditional media attention. When your members realize that sharing their story can provide mutual benefit, they'll be more likely to get involved.

5. Brainstorm with key stakeholders

When you get a group of leaders in your sport community together, you'll be surprised how many great stories they can come up with. Many organizations build story brainstorming into the annual general meeting or strategic planning sessions.

Key brainstorming questions include:

- List some member success stories.
- What are the most exciting things to happen to our organization over the past year?

- Share some examples of how you've seen our sport impact someone's life.
- Who are the most interesting people in our community?
- What members have overcome remarkable obstacles this year?
- List some alumni accomplishments.
- What stories made you proud to be a member of our community?

6. Follow your members on social media

Follow your members on Twitter and create a Twitter list (Paragraph 12 in [Module 14](#)) to collect their tweets. You can also follow any high-performance athletes' official Facebook pages. If you uncover an interesting story, follow up directly to make sure you have permission to share it.

7. Don't forget about alumni



When you're looking for social media stories, make sure to look beyond current members. Many alumni are happy to share how your organization played a role in their success. If many alumni remain on your organization's email list or newsletter list, put out a call specifically for alumni stories. You'll be surprised by the response.

8. Connect with Parents



Who loves bragging about you more than your parents or family members? Find great stories by connecting directly with your athletes' parents or guardians. Some organizations do this by building a call for stories into their registration forms or annual surveys.

A sample registration form might read: "This year, we're looking for unique stories about our participants to share via social media. Can we share your child's unique story via social media? If so, please tell us some unique facts about your child (examples of unique facts include: plays on the same team as his twin brother, won an award for volunteering at school, overcame cancer or a

disability to get back in the game). How has participation in our league impacted your child?"

9. Build trust



Sometimes people with the most unique stories are hesitant to share them because they do not want the story to be presented in an overly emotional or sappy way. (This is especially true of people who have overcome an obstacle or illness). Build trust by giving the subject final approval on all social media content. You can also offer examples of past social media content you've created to show that you have the ability to treat all stories with sensitivity and tact.

10. Be aware of the stories around you



Chances are that you routinely encounter great potential social media stories without recognizing them. Has a parent ever emailed your organization to thank them for the impact a coach or program had on their child's life? Have you received positive anecdotes about your coaches or programs through annual surveys? Has a coach reached out to help share details of a fundraiser for a participant's family who's going through a rough time? All these have the potential to be great social media stories.

Do you have another great way to uncover stories that we haven't mentioned? Have you tried any of the methods on this list? Get in the conversation by emailing arley@bcwheelchairsports.com. We'll use your feedback in future modules.

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



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