Twelve tips for recruiting athletes, coaches, officials and volunteers via social media

It's no secret that sports organizations face more competition to recruit athletes, coaches, officials and volunteers than ever before. Children can choose to fill their extracurricular hours by attending a circus camp, joining an ultimate Frisbee league or just playing Minecraft for hours online. Adult participants can get active with everything from acrobatic yoga to Zumba. How do you attract newcomers to your sport when there are so many other organizations clamoring for attention?

Thanks to social media, you don't need a big budget to make your sport stand out from the rest. In this module, we'll share 12 great ways to harness social media to recruit athletes, coaches, officials and volunteers and to help your current members share their love of your sport with family and friends.

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1. Focus on Sharing:

 Many sports organizations do a great job of serving their existing members on social media and receive lots of likes and comments on their content as a result. If you want to reach new members, however, you need to focus on getting shares and retweets. To learn how to create content that will travel beyond your current membership,

check out our module on [Creating Shareable Social Media Content](#).

2. Identify your target audience:

Before you can create a recruitment campaign, you need to identify a target audience. Because social media content takes much less time and money to produce than other marketing products, you can hone in on recruiting a very specific population. For example, if you find that girls tend to drop out of your sport at around age 13, you can create a social media campaign to appeal to this demographic. If you're short on officials in the Fraser Valley, you can focus your recruitment efforts there. Many organizations report that they have more success with specific social media recruitment campaigns than they do with more general campaigns because specific campaigns allow for clearer call-to-action and a more targeted strategy.

3. Identify barriers to participation:

Once you've identified your target audience, identify barriers or stereotypes that keep them from participating. For example, you might discover that some people hesitate to sign up for your adult recreational league because they fear their fitness level will be a hindrance. By creating a campaignshowing the diverse fitness levels and body types in your league, you can ease potential participants' fears and get them into the game.

4. Identify benefits to participating in your sport:

With such a crowded market, your recruitment campaign might need to focus on the specific benefits that make your sport stand out from the rest. Maybe your sport builds problem- solving skills and mental toughness in kids. Maybe it doesn't require expensive equipment and is perfect for families on a budget. Identify one or two compelling reasons why participants should choose your sport over the others and build a campaign around them. Remember: [Google Scholar](#)is a great source of scholarly articles that can offer statistics to back up your claims.

5. Give your cheerleaders some pompoms:

Those of us who work in sport marketing have a major advantage over marketers trying to use social media to sell widgets or gadgets: people *want* to promote our work. Studies have shown that one of the main reasons why people share content on social media is to declare support for a cause or movement they're passionate about. Another study found that 68% of people shared content because it allowed them to portray themselves as they wanted others to see them. People want to be viewed as healthy, active and fit, and they want to share the success they (or their kids) have had with your programs. Many of your members, however, likely don't sing your sport's praises for fear of 'Facebragging' or just because they don't know how to eloquently describe their experience. **Equip your natural cheerleaders with content such as videos, success stories, and captioned photos, and they'll share your message far and wide.**

6. Tell success stories:

 In the sports section of a newspaper, you'll see success stories of high-performance athletes achieving amazing feats. While these might be inspiring to your local recreational athlete, the gap between winning a gold medal at the Olympics and just getting off the couch and going for a jog is so wide that one study found that participation in sport sometimes actually *drops* in host countries after the Olympics are over1. Social media, however, can provide potential participants with success stories they can relate to. Tell the story of a child who moved to a new city and made friends through your sport, or a woman who lost 30 pounds by playing in your recreational league, or a volunteer who used her experience volunteering with your league to get a new job and you'll show newcomers a level of success they can related to and be inspired by.

7. Showcase your community:

Many people do not get involved in sports because they worry they won't fit in. Alleviate this fear by showcasing the range of ages, genders, races, body types, fitness levels and backgrounds of your community members. Make sure that your photo albums show a diverse range of participants, and be sure to include behind-the-scenes shots of people socializing to show that you are a friendly, welcoming community.

8. Create web friendly content:

Many sports organizations post electronic versions of posters, flyers and brochures that were originally created for print. Too often, however, these materials don't fit in the online world. A poster meant to be seen on an 11" x 17" poster is usually difficult to read on a computer screen or mobile phone. Graphic design choices like clipart can look outdated online.

Though it takes a little extra work, creating content for the web will result in exponentially more online engagement. Even if you're not a Photoshop whiz, you can still create impressive social media graphics using resources like this [cheat sheet](#) on sizes for Facebook content or free tools like [PiktoChart,](#) [Canva,](#) and [PicCollage](#). Throw away that clipart and make your visuals online-savvy, and you'll reap the rewards.

9. Make getting involved simple:

Creating a recruitment campaign on social media is not just a matter of creative marketing ideas. Even the best marketing content will fail if a participant finds it too difficult to take the leap from the online world to the real world. Many studies show that if someone can't find the information they're looking for on your website in one or two clicks, they'll leave. Make sure that your social media content contains a clickable link to the appropriate section of your site. Sign-up forms should be as simple as possible and a phone and email contact should be easy to find. Anticipate potential sources of confusion for new recruits and you'll ensure that you won't lose that new participant you worked so hard to attract because she couldn't figure out how to fill out that PDF sign-up form.

10. Get connected:

We've talked before in this module about [how your social media efforts should be linked to your communications network.](#) Your recruitment campaign should never exist in isolation. Link it to your website, your newsletter, and all of your other communications platforms, and share it with your partners. More importantly, however, make sure that your recruitment campaign is tied to upcoming real-world events like the start of your season. There's no point recruiting new referees, for example, if they can't take a certification course for another six months.

11. Create different messaging for different participation levels:

Depending on your sport organization's structure and how many levels of the [Long Term](#) [Athlete](#) [Development](#) (LTAD) model you cover, you may need different messages for different types of participants. To attract media attention, many sports promote themselves as being high-impact, aggressive, adrenaline-filled or physically demanding. This messaging may appeal to older participants or those with high-performance desires, but might scare off the parents of a participant in your introductory programs or someone who wants to play in your recreational adult league to get a little fitter. Having clear messaging for each program will help you recruit the appropriate participants for the appropriate programs.

12. Use your allies:

When you launch a social media recruitment campaign, make sure to target all of your allies to help spread the word. Share your messaging with Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs), National Sport Organizations (NSOs), community centers, viaSport (we love to help!), parent resource centers, coaching associations, associations for officials/referees, club teams, universities, current members and anyone else who could help you get those valuable shares and retweets.

Got another idea for recruiting participants via social media? Have a question? Contact arley@bcwheelchairsports.com

References:

1. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/london-2012-and-the-physical- activity-legacy-to-question-legacy-claims-is-to-risk-being-labelled- unpatriotic/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/london-2012-and-the-physical-activity-legacy-to-question-legacy-claims-is-to-risk-being-labelled-unpatriotic/)

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