Six ways to get the most out of photos on social media

If you're a sport communicator, you already know how valuable photos are to your communications and marketing efforts. But did you know that photos are even more important in the age of social media? Research shows that photos are by far the most popular type of social media content. In fact, one study found that photos make 75% of all content shared on Facebook. Another study discovered that tweets with photos received 35% more engagement. Within the sports sector, that number jumps to 48%.

To help you get the most out of this important content type, we've answered the six top questions sport communicators ask about using photos on social media.

What you will find in Module 23:

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1. Do I have to get my members' permission to post their photo on social media?

If a friend has ever posted an unflattering photo of you on Facebook, you know how annoying it is to have your image plastered across social media without your permission. While it's legal to take and post photos of anyone in a public setting, posting unwanted photos is a quick way to earn the ire of your members.

To make sure that you have permission to post your members' photos, build a photo release into your membership form or participant waiver. Create a list of people who have opted out and store all photos containing these people in a folder clearly marked 'not approved for social media.' If you want to take photos of non-members (like spectators) in a semi-public area such as a gym or other competition venue, make sure to post a sign stating that people

entering into the competition may appear in photos or videos.

Remember: **if you're dealing with minors, it's best to receive clear, written consent in the form of a distinct photo release waiver.** Children in foster care or whose parents are involved in a custody dispute may be legally prohibited from appearing on social media, so the stakes are higher. When posting images of children, it's also best to not include names.

2. Can I post someone else's photos on my social media channel?

To answer this question, it's important to make a distinction between **sharing** a photo and **posting** a photo. In general, it's okay to **share** a photo whose copyright you don't own. After all, if you couldn't share content on social media, nothing would ever go viral. When you share a photo, control of photo remains with the account that posted it. The person who uploaded it can still delete the photo, change the viewing permissions and track the photo's analytics.

When you **post** a photo by uploading it to your social media account directly from your computer or by pasting in a URL, however, the person who created the image loses control over it and is not credited. Any views or engagement that the photo receives is credited to your account, not the person who holds the copyright. It's the difference between citing a quote in a college essay and plagiarizing by passing off the quote as your own work. Only post photos that either **a)** your organization holds the copyright to or **b)** you've received permission from the photographer to post.

Remember: even if you have permission to post a photo or own the copyright, make sure to credit the photographer.

3. How can I increase the engagement my photos recieve?

As obvious as it sounds, the number one way to increase the engagement your photos receive is to post content that your followers care about. (For tips on how to do this, check out our [Creating Shareable Social Media Content module](#). What resonates with your followers depends on your community, but here are some best practices from others who have had success with using photos on social media:

- Post photos of a wide range of athletes, not just stars. The more people you include in your online albums and shared photos, the more people will share your content.

- Don't jut post action shots. Behind-the-scenes shots of volunteers, as well as general atmosphere shots, (athletes hanging out between games, children cheering on a parent, etc), are often very popular.

- When photographing team sports, make sure to take close-up photos of one or two athletes. Wide group shots are often not popular online because they look small and visually cluttered when viewed as a thumbnail.

- Speed matters. Photos posted from a smartphone live from a tournament often receive more engagement than those posted hours later. If you live- blog at events, photos should be a key part of your strategy.

- Take advantage of memes like Motivational Monday or Throwback Thursday.

- When you post a photo, include a link back to your website to drive traffic there. Also provide links to social media photo albums in articles, your e-newsletter and on your website.

- Increase engagement by asking your followers to interact with your photo. You could, for example, ask them to caption the photo, or pick which of two photos they like better. "Caption This" contests, are routinely very popular, even if you don't give out a prize.

- Increase your engagement by adding a caption, such as a motivational quote, to your photos.
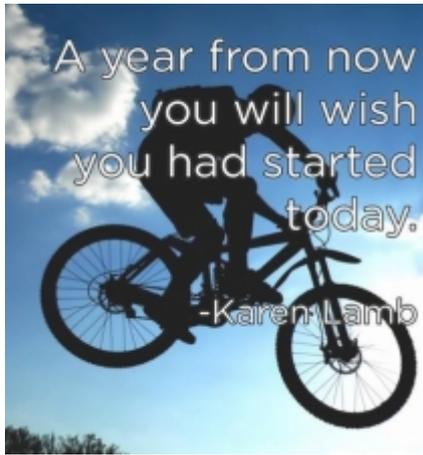
- Tag the adults that appear in your photos or albums, since when you tag a person, the photo will also be shown to their friends. On Facebook, Google+ and Instagram, you can tag people who have their permissions set to allow this. On Twitter, you can @tag the accounts of the people in your photos. **Remember: it's a bad idea to tag minors in your photos.**
- Make photos easy to find by putting them in well-labeled albums. You might choose to create albums on your website, on photo-hosting services like Flickr or on sites like Facebook. The easier it is for your fans to find your photographs, the more likely that your images will keep gaining traction even years after they were first posted.

- As with other content types, humour is very popular on social media. As long as you won't offend anyone, a funny caption or hashtag can boost your photo's engagement.

4. How do I scale my photos for social media?
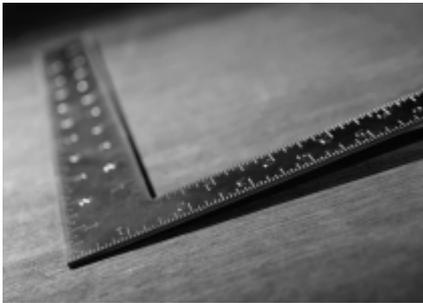
You take an impressive action shot, but it's too big, so Facebook rejects it. Or you upload a new cover for your Twitter or YouTube page, but only part of the image is viewable. Now you have to go back and edit them all over again.

Luckily, today it's easy to avoid these situations. Sites like canva.com will help you scale your images for different social media formats. Prefer to edit your images in a program like Photoshop? You can also check out handy cheat sheets like PetaPixel.

5. How can I use photos effectively on Instagram?
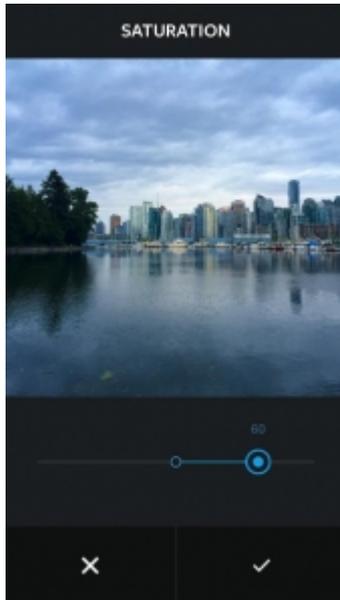
[Instagram](#) is under-utilized by sports organizations, but it's a great tool to expand the reach of your photographs.

- Live-blog on Instagram from a tournament or competition by designating a hashtag for the event.

- Post often. 41% of brands on social media post at least once a week.

- Engage with people who comment on your photos.

- Like Twitter, Instagram has a greater tolerance for hashtags, so research popular hashtags for your sport to broadcast your photos to a greater audience.

- Though some Instagram users have grown tired of typical Instagram filters, a little editing goes a long way in making your photos visually pleasing.

6. I 'm a terrible photographer and don't have a high-quality camera. How can I get great photos to put on social media?

 If you're tired of posting low-quality smartphone photographs, why not recruit volunteer photographers? Chances are high that you have an amateur photographer or two among your membership who would be happy to give back as a volunteer. You might even have a photography student looking to create a portfolio. If your search within your membership turns up empty, try soliciting volunteers on volunteering sites or by sending out a call for volunteers among journalism and photography programs.

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To learn more, check out our Social Media Toolkit, found here.

Click this button to download the toolkit as a PDF:

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