



## Maximizing memes: what they are and how to use them



In this social media toolkit, we've covered many serious topics such as how to [create a social media action plan](#), how to [maximize your communications network](#) and how to [improve your organizational voice](#). Today, however, it's time to put the 'social' back in social media by focusing on the fun side of online communications: memes.

While memes may seem like silly time wasters, (and often are silly time wasters), they can help you increase your social media reach, gain followers, and spread your messages in a fun way. It turns out that all that time you spent looking at cat photos on your lunch break was actually professional development!

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## But first, what is a meme?



The term 'meme' came from the 1976 Richard Dawkins book *The Selfish Gene* and has since been adapted to refer to ideas or trends that spread virally across the Internet. If you've laughed at a LOLcat, done the Harlem Shake or taken part in a trending hashtag, you've participated in meme culture.

There are several different kinds of memes:

- Photo memes: (e.g. planking or Tebowing);
- Video memes: (e.g. the Harlem Shake);
- Image macros: captioned photos like LOLcats or Advice Animals;
- Word/quote memes: popular phrases, trending topics or inspirational quotes;
- Marketing memes: when an organization or business asks you to create a meme to either raise awareness of a cause, (such as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge), or win a contest/prize.

If you're not familiar with memes, check out [knowyourmeme.com](http://knowyourmeme.com) for a full history of the most popular and trending memes.

## Why should I use memes?



Gymnast McKayla Maroney's moment of disappointment launched one of 2012's most popular memes. (Image courtesy of Getty).

Memes are easy to create, consume and share. If they weren't, they wouldn't be so popular. This makes them the perfect content type for busy communications professionals. When you create a meme, you tap into an audience much larger than your own social media network, which can

dramatically increase your exposure. Memes are also a great way to rally your community behind your sport by making your members feel as if they are in on a shared joke. In short, if you've got a little time, some creativity and perhaps a sense of humour, you can reap huge rewards. Besides, memes are a great way to reveal your sport's fun, playful side and unleash your own creativity!

## How can I effectively use memes?

### Act quickly:

Many memes spread rapidly across the Internet before falling into obscurity, so time is of the essence. The Harlem Shake, for example, went from receiving 100,000 tweets, blogs or posts on February 10, 2013 to receiving 800,000 on February 18 then declined exponentially the next week. Those who hopped on the bandwagon first were rewarded with thousands of views and shares.

### Know your meme:

To avoid committing a gaffe, make sure that you understand the meme before you use it. This may seem like common sense, but often social media marketers try so hard to respond quickly to a trending meme that they end up creating a public relations disaster. For example, a pizza company recently had to apologize after their social media marketer tried to capitalize on a trending hashtag by tweeting “#WhyIStayed because you had pizza,” without realizing that the hashtag was being used by domestic violence survivors to talk about why they stayed in abusive relationships.

Some memes like [Advice Animals](#) also have complicated conventions. There are, for example, two different Business Cat memes: the “I should buy a boat” business cat and the traditional business cat, which gives out business advice from the perspective of a cat.





**Know your audience:**

Even the cleverest meme will fall flat if your audience isn't familiar with it. Before you create a meme, ask yourself how Internet-savvy your audience is, what types of content they prefer (photo or video?) and what kinds of humour resonate with them.

**Play to your strengths:**



As a sports organization, your biggest strength is your expert understanding of your sport and its community. Memes that draw on this knowledge will help your followers celebrate your sport and will make them feel included in your community.

**Have a goal:**

Often, the only goal of the meme is to engage your community in a fun manner. Sometimes, however, you may choose to use a meme to tackle a stereotype, promote an event, raise awareness of a problem or issue a call to action. Either way, make sure that your meme relates to your brand and your sport.

**Use humour:**

Many memes use humour, which is one of the reasons they're so shareable. Not everyone has the ability to be witty in such a short space, however, so don't be afraid to reach out to community members who have this skill. Run your meme by a trusted colleague to make sure that it's not offensive.

Remember: humour that targets a person or group is nearly always a bad idea in a professional context.

**Make sure to edit:**

The strength of memes lies in their brevity, so edit your memes ruthlessly to ensure that they're effective. It's also a great idea to show your meme to a coworker or community member to ensure that it makes sense and is as impactful as possible.

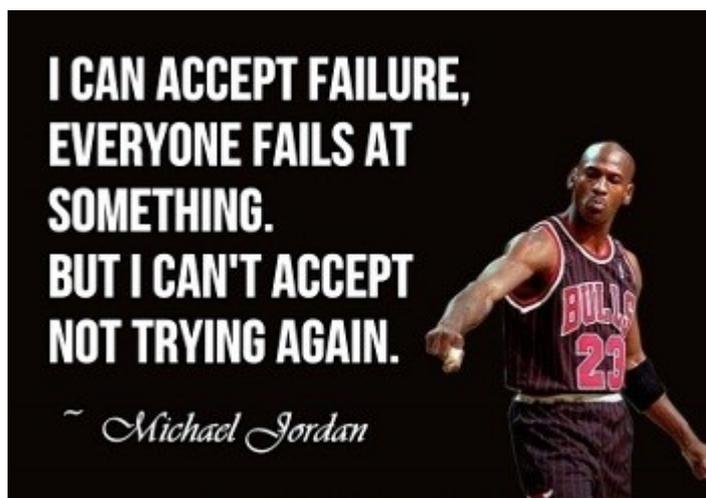
**Find a key influencer:**

When Internet researchers trace the origins of memes, they often find that they first went viral thanks to a key influencer with a large social media following. Don't be afraid to reach out to social media influencers in your community and ask them to participate in your meme, especially if you're creating an awareness campaign.

**Try memejacking:**

Unless you have a large social media network, starting your own meme is very difficult. Instead, 'memejack' by hijacking an existing, trending meme for your own purposes. You can find trending memes on [Reddit](#), [Tumblr](#) or [knowyourmeme.com](#).

## What kinds of memes work well within sport organizations?



Sports organizations report success with the following memes:

- Weekly memes like Motivational Monday and Throwback Thursday;
- Awareness memes that promote the benefit of your sport;

- Captioned photographs, especially of unflattering action shots. (Some organizations have a 'Caption This' contest to generate the captions).
- Very popular trending memes like the ALS ice bucket challenge or the Harlem Shake;
- Photo memes where community members hold up signs discussing the impact of the sport;
- The [Success Kid Meme](#);
- Memes that show off physical fitness, such as planking.

Got a question about memes? Have a success story to share?

Email [arley@bcwheelchairsports.com](mailto:arley@bcwheelchairsports.com) or tweet @ViaSport\_ to get in the conversation.

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




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