

7 Ways to Increase Your Social Media Followers

If you're like many sports organizations, you know you need to be on social media, so you've created accounts and are dutifully posting up a storm. Yet, after months of hard work, all you have to show for your efforts are a handful of followers and a few dozen views on your Youtube channel. You're beginning to think this social media thing just isn't going to work for your organization.

Wrong. The truth is that collecting followers is perhaps the hardest part of social media communication. That doesn't mean, however, that it's impossible. We've assembled seven proven ways to increase your social media followers now.

1. Tap into your communication network



The people in your community want to share their love of your sport and your organization. The problem: they won't go looking for you. So how do you find them? By tapping into your existing communications channels.

Here are some tips:

- Integrate your social media information on all of your communications pieces: the front page of your website, your newsletter, brochures, Annual Reports, membership forms, posters, and even promotional magnets/pens/mugs. Social media should never exist in a vacuum.
- Display your social media accounts prominently at tournaments and events so spectators, fans and athletes can interact with you.
- Connect with NSOs, other PSOs, clubs and even tournament venues via social media. These organizations will be happy to promote your content along their channels provided that you repay the favour. Tweet at them and tag them in Facebook posts and they'll begin spreading your message.
- On Twitter, try to tag at least one relevant account per tweet to increase your chance of being retweeted. (Example: "Congrats to @TeamBC for winning its first game at the @RichmondOval" not "Congrats to our team for winning the first game of the tournament.")

2. Create a Community



The only way that your social media efforts will translate into real-world results is if you stop thinking of followers as a numbers game, and start valuing the quality of your followers. After all, anyone can buy social media traffic, but who cares if the Washington Apple Growers' League is following you on Twitter or if you've got 5,000 followers on Facebook but only 1 like per post?

Creating communities take patience and time, but you can help the process along by creating a positive space for people to gather. Post interesting articles and ask your followers questions about them. Have a fun, positive tone. Respond to people who take the time to comment on your page. Deal quickly with negative behaviour like trolling. When in doubt: ask your real-life community what they want to see.

When done well, social media allows people to connect in ways they can't in real life. Your Facebook page might help an athlete from Quesnel swap training tips with one from Squamish, or connect a parent looking for used equipment with another parent across the province looking to sell equipment. As the old cliché goes: if you build it, they will come. Begin the slow process of creating an online community, and the followers will find you.

3. Give your members a reason to follow you



Let's face it: you've got a lot of competition out there. A recent study found that 78% of Facebook users don't follow any brands, and the ones that do average between 2 to 5 brands. So how do you compete with the barrage of cute animal videos, memes and Instagrammed photos of sunsets? By giving your community members content they can't get anywhere else.

- Take a look at what pages you personally follow on Facebook. What made you follow them? What made you keep following them? Chances are that what works for you will work for other people.
- One of the quickest ways for sports organizations to rack up followers is to provide social media coverage of tournaments. If the only way to find out scores, see photographs and even see video highlights is to follow your social media channels, your community members will be happy to do so.
- A simple contest goes a long way. We'll be offering more advice on social media contests, but an easy photo or caption contest gives users the motivation to suggest your page to their friends and family members. (Hint: make the prize something they actually want).
- Provide content first on social media and later on your website to condition people to check your social media profiles first.
- Provide teasers on your website or newsletter (such as the first few photos of a photo series) and send people to Facebook to see the full content.

4. Create great content



On the Internet, content is king. Without content that people want to share, even the most sophisticated social media strategy is doomed to failure. Creating effective content easier said than done, (and we'll be devoting a module to this topic in the future), but here are some tips to get you started:

- Remember that the content you want to share is not always what people want to receive. If your fans want mountain-bike crash videos and you're giving them 10-minute video interviews with your Executive Director, you're going to have a bad time.
- Value quality over quantity. While you don't want your social media channels to become a desert, posting irrelevant content for the sake of posting drives away followers.
- Don't be afraid to be creative or take a risk, as long as it's a calculated risk. Social media requires a low time and money investment, so you can afford to take a few gambles. Discard what doesn't work and keep doing what's popular.
- Use humour, as long as it's not offensive.
- If you don't have time to create content yourself, tap into the talent of your community members. Athletes are an especially rich source of social media content if you give them direction and the right tools.
- If your posts are falling flat, don't be afraid to ask members of your community what they'd like to see. You can even check out other pages devoted to your sport to see what's popular.

5. Evaluate your progress



Though social media seems like the Wild West at times, the best social media communicators rigorously evaluate their results and tailor their approach based on data. Analytics is a complicated field, but you don't need a stats degree to take advantage of the sophisticated data that's at your fingertips for free. (And, yes, we'll be offering a module on Analytics).

- Have a communications plan with measurable benchmarks and evaluate your success on a monthly or quarterly basis.
- Use the Facebook Insights tool (on your page's admin panel) to evaluate how well your posts fared, what types of posts are getting you more likes, and what made people unfollow your page. Use this data to adjust your strategy.
- Use your website analytics to see what social media content drives people to your website.
- Twitter doesn't offer analytics, but (free) programs like Hootsuite do. Hootsuite also allows you to schedule your tweets and is a great resource for social media communicators.

6. Be consistent



When you've got a million other items on your To Do list and you're doing social media off the side of your desk, it's easy to let your accounts grow stagnant, then unleash a flurry of posts to make up for lost time. This, however, will annoy your followers. The trick is to strike up a balance. An unpopulated social media channel makes your organization look unprofessional, while a channel that posts too much quickly grows annoying.

- Post at least a couple of times a week but never post more than 2 or 3 times per day (except for tournament coverage).
- If you are short on time, use a service like Hootsuite (it's free) to schedule posts in advance over the week.
- If you're short on content, weekly posts like "Throwback Thursdays" (where you post historical photos), "Motivational Mondays" (where you post inspirational quotes), or Athlete of the Week features help to provide consistent, relevant content that's easy to produce.

7. Have patience



In 1891, James Naismith invented a game he hoped would get his rowdy physical education class through the harsh New England winter. The game was played 9-a-side, used a soccer ball, and required athletes to score by throwing the ball into a peach basket. In his diary, Naismith wrote that the class "did not show much enthusiasm" for his new sport. Just 45 years later, however, Naismith handed out the basketball medals at the 1936 Summer Olympics. What started in that small New England gym had turned into one of the most popular sports worldwide: basketball.

With any luck, your social media network will follow the same pattern. You'll fumble around at first trying to make up the rules and convince people to be enthusiastic about your efforts. With patience and hard work, however, you can see your social media network grow beyond your expectations.