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CLASSICAL MEDIA RELATIONS AND NEW MEDIA RELATIONS IN SPORT

Theoretical
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Abstract

Media relations in sport mean maintenance of networks and positive relationships with people in the media to obtain positive media exposure for a sport product (informal and formal information sessions with media representatives). Because of the pervasive influence the media has on marketing success, sport marketers must make concerted efforts to create a positive relationship between their sport event and the media. They may accomplish this by providing the media with press releases, having news conferences, having media-day events (in which the media are invited to interact with the players, coaches, and administrators), providing media guides for the respective sport events and so on. Each of these activities promotes active involvement from the media, which will subsequently contribute to relationship building with the community.

Introduction

In a sport organization, the public and media relations department is responsible for designing and implementing promotion actions to support the marketing strategy. The primary aim is to raise the brand's profile and promote its identity.

Marketing communication cannot be limited to annual reports, advertising, and brochures. Interaction with the media is both a necessary and a valuable endeavour. Historically, businesses interacted with the public mostly through face-to-face encounters. However, today perceptions of an organization are delivered through multiple communication channels.

In most sport corporations, media relations are managed by the communication directors or marketing managers. These companies also engage in media relations activities in an attempt to garner positive publicity through the media. The peculiarities and, at the same time, the variables of each brand reside in the economic, social, educational, financial, political, religious or any other type of specificities, that are different first and foremost from one product to another, but also from country to country, and we could even add, from region to region (Ioanet al., 2014).

PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SPORT

The public and media relations department is responsible for designing and implementing promotion actions to support the marketing strategy. The primary aim is to raise the brand's profile and promote its identity.

Public relations mean activities and programs that help the organization develop positive relationships with its target audiences, especially community and media relations activities and programs.

Public relations also involve assessing the public's opinions and attitudes toward a product. This information provides valuable feedback

regarding the ways in which marketing activities and programs are influencing consumers' perceptions of the product and the extent to which the organization is forging positive relationships with its target audiences. With this information, sport marketers can modify promotions activities and programs to ensure that they are communicating positive images and messages about the product and thus fostering positive relationships between the organization and its target audiences.

The different areas involved in Sports Public Relations consist of: Media Relations, Community Relations, Player Relations and Investor Relations (Figure 1).

MEDIA RELATIONS IN SPORT

Public opinion is one of the most powerful forces in our society, and media relations are designed to formulate and shape favourable opinion via the mass media. Media relations – communicating with the news media verbally or through other vehicles – must also balance public opinion with business strategy. Depending on its role within the organization, media relations take one or more of the following approaches: reactive, proactive, or interactive. They respond to questions, queries and requests from the media and other interested parties. In a sport setting, such requests may concern the player's interviews, appearances, autographs, photos, biographies, or profiles. In addition to these simple requests, the reactive function might also relate to requests for statements about or reactions to situations involving organizational policy (Mullin et al., 2007).

In proactive media relations, the point of initiation is the organization rather than some external entity. For example, sport organizations could choose to contact media outlets with possible stories, distribute package of player bios and media guides, or highlight films to a pre-selected audience without having been requested to do so.

Although media relations will always have reactive functions, the primary mode will be proactive – to take the initiative in providing information and creating publicity as a marketing function.

Media relationships form a basis from which all marketing and promotional strategies are launched. From the competency standpoint, the sport marketer must be knowledgeable about the specific formats, terminology, and personnel employed by the media.

Media generally includes two categories, print and electronic. Within these categories, print media refer to newspaper and magazine professionals, whereas electronic media typically include television, radio and Internet. Although the classification system has worked well for many years, technology is rapidly blurring the lines of distinction. Many television stations are owned by publishers; publishers produce vignettes for television and with electronic computer bulletin boards, some newspapers are never printed. Regardless of the labels placed on media professionals, sport marketers must develop sophisticated skills and nurture productive relationships.

The most important elements of media relations in sport include: press conferences, press releases, newspapers and magazines, television, radio and Internet (Figure 2).

PRESS CONFERENCES

The reason for having a press conference is to brief the media on major issues whether they are proactive, such as highlighting aims of forthcoming competition, or reactive to events that have already taken place. A press conference could take place prior to, during or after a competition, depending on the circumstances (Blakey, 2011).

Press conferences should occur only when circumstances warrant their use. Too often, a media relations director will call press conferences to disseminate information that should have been in a

news release. This causes the press to be wary of conferences. A press conference takes up a great deal of a reporter's day; therefore, if the press conference is to be a success, the information must warrant its occurrence.

Press conferences are most appropriate when the information must be distributed to all outlets at the same time.

PRESS RELEASES

Used by commercial, amateur, and collegiate sport organizations for many years, the press release has become a familiar tool for dealing with the media. It has become the most common form of communication in the sport industry.

A good news release has three parts: the significance (headline), the essence (lead), and the details (tail). When scanning a newspaper, people want to see if a story is important to them prior to spending the time to read it. A headline is the first thing the reader will notice. There is some disagreement about whether a press release should have a headline attached. A recommendation would be to supply the headline and allow the reporter to make an editorial decision. In the electronic media, people listen to the lead-in and make decisions about the relevance of the topic.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Newspapers are current and relatively inexpensive, and reach a mass audience. In deciding to advertise using newspapers, sport marketers need to provide copy that is eye – catching and succinct. It is also important to be aware of the section the target audience reads. The business sections of daily newspapers are increasingly becoming a repository for sport advertising. Magazines invite leisure readership, as they invariably lie around the house or business for an extended period.

Almost all segments of the sport industry have specialized publications. Newspapers and magazines are not

imposed upon readers; the reader purchases or reads one that someone else has purchased. Thus, at the outset, there is some assurance of readiness to accept or expose oneself to the content. Generally, readers are interested in the content, and most influential citizens make it a practice to read current newspapers and sport magazines.

Because these publications often are read at leisure, readers generally have time to digest the content of the items read and to formulate at least tentative opinions.

Sport marketing directors should make a point to get to know the publishers, the CEO, the editor, the editorial page editor, and finally the managing editor.

A common complaint from newspaper and magazine editors is that the purpose of some sport organizations is to seek free advertising. Experienced media personnel are quick to recognize this tactic, which severely strains relationships. Another familiar complaint is that sport marketers often attempt to colour or censor the material.

Many sport teams and events utilize the media to enhance their properties. In this process, sport managers often secure media outlets (newspapers and television stations / networks) as sponsors. This allows the sport organization to “leverage” the media for coverage. Because media coverage is vital to sport organizations, sponsorship benefits (i.e., on-site signage, tickets) are often provided to media outlets in exchange for advertising space in their paper or on their network.

TELEVISION

In sport, television has emerged as an important substitute for attendance at the live event. The question is whether sport on television is the same product as the live event. The exposure and promotional benefits to be gained by a sport from televising its games or events have been central to most sport marketing strategies in the professional sport sector.

At issue, also, has been the revenue aspect of televising sporting contests versus the live game. That is, consumers have the choice either to attend the event or stay at home and watch it on television. For sports where consumers may decide to stay home and watch the event on television, this choice represents direct lost revenue. It is, however, also revenue that may find its way back to the sport indirectly in the form of television rights as a consequence of high program ratings. At its best, television sports is the finest programming television can offer. In many respects, sports may be the quintessential television program format, taking fullest advantage of the role TV plays in our daily lives. Sports on TV have visually attractive elements - splashy colours, attractive locations, motion and movement galore. They have expansive vistas, exquisite details, and larger-than-life images. There is drama, tension, suspense, raw emotion, real anger, unvarnished joy, and a host of other responses (Shilbury et al., 2014).

Television interviews will either be done in the studio / outside broadcast unit or at a venue. They will either be live or pre-recorded, depending on deadlines and the accessibility of technical equipment (Blakey, 2011).

Pay television is another player who has entered the sport – business - television relationship. It is slowly becoming available worldwide, contributing to the globalize economy and in particular the familiarity of sport. The business basis on which pay TV is predicated is fundamentally different from that of the free-to-air networks. Free-to-air networks are in the business of reaching the widest possible audience, hence the term ‘broadcasting’. Free-to-air television is popular and generally taken for granted as an everyday part of life. Pay television, on the other hand, requires the payment of subscription fees to receive programming. The basic operating premise on which pay TV exists is known as narrowcasting, and its revenue base is sourced from

subscription fees. Unlike with the free-to-air networks, advertising is not the predominant revenue source.

RADIO

This is a very flexible medium that operates pretty much - 24 hours a day. It is an immediate medium because of its ability to turn around interviews and features quickly.

Sport marketers can use radio in a variety of ways. Probably the most common is for a team to broadcast its games over an official radio network. These distribution outlets are important in providing the game to fans who cannot attend in person or to those who enjoy the casual atmosphere of listening to sports events without visual cues or while travelling to the event site.

Radio advertising relies on recall in a heavily cluttered marketplace, so frequency is critical. Radio's advertising advantage lies in the fact that, given its lack of visual images, the imagination of the listener may be stimulated by suggestive advertising. As a result, event promoters can create advertising, for example, around the sounds of the ski slope, the beach and summer or the city while at the same time creating an element of mystery (Shilbury et al., 2014).

INTERNET

New sport media relates to devices capable of sending and receiving digital content (images, spoken and written word) in real time. The predominant formats are web-based and mobile communication vehicles that enable innovative, personalized sport communication messages to be provided to sport consumers. New opportunities have been created for web and mobile sports rights exploitation on platforms that are less expensive for sport consumers than traditional sport media formats.

The use of electronic networks for mass communication is an integral part of sport marketing in the 21st century. Sport

e-business, the internal information technology processes, focuses on integrating all the systems within the sport organization to ensure that the business functions of communications, sales, and service can be offered in an online environment. This is accomplished through a combination of horizontal, vertical, downward, and lateral integration (Schwarz et al., 2013).

Sporting organizations – like business, government and educational institutions - have increasingly turned to the Internet to conduct their business. Comprehensive websites have been established by a myriad of sport organizations to inform, entertain and otherwise engage their consumer base. Moreover, access activity related to such websites is increasing exponentially.

Other advantages of the Internet include the ability of sponsors to use the home page of a particular sport or organization to provide a link to the sponsor's site, where further information can be gathered on the sponsor's products and services. There is little doubt that this expanding technology is providing information to organizations on a scale previously not possible. Moreover, the use of email and bulletin boards has dispelled the isolation previously experienced by sport managers of small organizations.

Sport marketers today most often work in this area of digital technology, working to conduct cross-business and technology integration with traditional marketing functions to build brand equity, image, and awareness. The goal is to provide individualization and interactivity for the potential and returning sport consumer (Schwarz et al., 2013).

Internet-driven platforms include the increasingly sophisticated methods of communicating that the World Wide Web supports, such as blogs and social networking sites, e-mail, web video, podcasts, vodcasts, websites, pop-ups, spam, virtual worlds, wikis, electronic commerce (such online and mobile

payments), Facebook and Twitter. The use of YouTube and other similar user-generated video sites is another popular example of Internet-driven technology being used in sport marketing (Smith, 2008).

Fundamentally, a website for any sport organization should tell the story of the organization, answer questions for sport consumers, add to the list of contacts, provide clear information, make a good first impression, and bring in sport consumers who would not normally be reached.

It is no secret that the proliferation of **social media** has infiltrated sport organizations, the companies that sponsor sport organizations, as well as the companies that advertise during sporting events (Figure 3). Sport marketers are focusing on adding social features to websites, to leverage Facebook and Twitter, and to manage fan communities. Sport marketers have realized that individual passion for teams, players and leagues will create millions of social actions acting as megaphones to build awareness on the backs of the most passionate fans in a cost-effective manner.

The technological developments behind each of the new sport media platforms have occurred at an amazing pace, and will continue to do so. Mobile communication technology advances are spellbinding, enabling SMS, MMS, e-mail, internet access, video streaming, video calling and even serving as a wireless modem. Sport marketers are working on how best to use mobile to engage fans at the arena, and beyond, and in building mobile platforms for sport sponsorship (Blakey, 2011).

There are several key platforms in use that are pertinent to sport consumers and, by extension, sport marketers. Social networks such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn are most frequently identified as having the greatest reach to potential sport consumers; blogs and forums are heavy with use from sport fans; and the micro-

blogging site Twitter has numerous sports stars with their growing list of followers.

CONCLUSIONS

The media must be considered as clients. Effective relations with media outlets will provide significant opportunities for communicating marketing concepts and product information with other clients and customers.

Media relationships are one of the most important factors in designing marketing communications. While the primary goal is the provision of accurate information for all media sources, the trend in the sport environment is for the media relations director to take a lead role in shaping the corporate image and brand.

Productive media relationships require sophisticated skills and the highest of ethical standards. This mandates a high level of service, well organized press conferences, professional quality written material, and the development of personal relationships across all media outlets. Internet, radio and television programming are evolving in new directions, and top sport marketers will need to be current with technology and trends. As programming and outlet sources change, so will the competition across sport. Yet, with hard work, the marketing functions can be enhanced through effective media relations.

Sports and social media are at crossroads of fan participation. Social sport media will continue to escalate with even more user-generated content and platforms created to showcase that content.

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Figure 1: Sports Public Relations

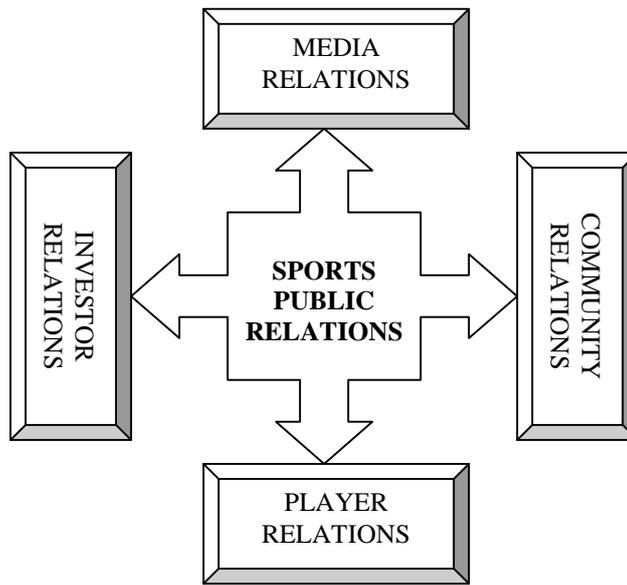


Figure 2: Media Relations in Sport

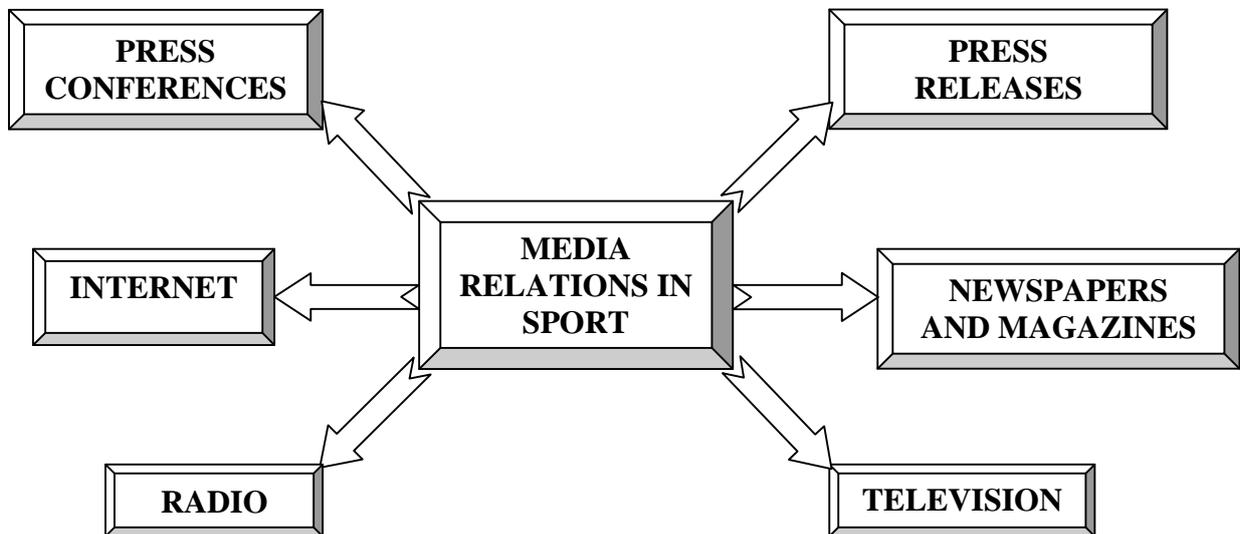


Figure 3: Social Media in Sport

