



MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS





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Introduction:

How do potential players, fans, supporters, hear about your club and its activities?

A club that spends time considering how they tell their potential customers and players about the facilities, services and opportunities they have to offer is already engaged in marketing. Marketing includes the promotion, branding, selling and creation of the club's public image to help it achieve its goals and objectives.

Start With A Plan

The marketing plan for a club can cover a number of areas, but it is often wise to focus upon one or two key issues that the club wishes to develop. Limiting the focus of the plan also enables the club to devote some of its budget to promotional materials or advertising for each effort. Often the objectives of the marketing plan will be linked with the goals outlined in the club's long term or long-term plan, but clubs generally focus their marketing efforts in these areas:

- Increase membership (the lifeblood of a club)
- Develop junior players/participants
- Recruit more volunteers
- Increase the number of coaches/officials
- Increase overall participation and community involvement
- Improve performance levels
- Attract external funding
- Raise funds
- Recruit members and maintain loyalty to the club
- Raise community profile
- Develop new programs

METHODS OF MARKETING

Most clubs are familiar with the wide variety of marketing methods and techniques. Some of the items in the following list may not be applicable to all of your club's events, but the list will give you a guide to some of the more popular and effective marketing methods:

- Web site
- Email announcements, updates and reminders
- Leaflets, brochures (about the club, to promote a new program or event etc.)
- Posters
- Local newspaper advertisements
- Regular team/club newsletter
- Editorial coverage in newspapers (especially community newspapers)
- Sponsorship of events, e.g. schools rugby tournaments
- Promotional/Open day at the club
- T-shirts advertising the club
- Notice boards at local schools, colleges, businesses
- Introductory events for people who are considering joining the club
- Participation or support at other local community events



The creation of an effective web site and the use of email deserve a special mention here. All clubs should have their own web site that outlines the club's history, schedule information, highlights of upcoming games/events, contact information, messages to members, feedback from others, news coverage about the club, other articles or stories of interest to the rugby community, etc. A rule of thumb for web sites is that all visitors to the web site should be able to find what they are looking for in "5 clicks" or less. Your club's website is part of your public face; people will visit your web site frequently if it provides the information they need, if it is kept up to date, and if new information is added on a regular basis. Where possible, assign a Webmaster to keep the web site current and running smoothly.

If your club uses an email list to keep members, players and other community supporters up to date on the club's activities, ensure that everyone on the email list has opted to receive information by email. If you are using email as a marketing tool, it is a generally accepted courtesy to only email those people who have expressed interest in receiving your information and to have a note at the bottom of the email letting people know how they can remove their email address from the distribution list.



Who Are Your Customers?

Your club's target market involves anyone who does or can have any affiliation with your club. Your marketing activities may be targeted at one or many of the following "customers" - players, coaches, volunteers, supporters, past players, prospective members of your club, people who live near your clubhouse, people who would have a say in the fate of your club, your local media, local schools, local authorities and sports partnerships. It is important to remember that your target audience will change depending upon the objective you are aiming to achieve through your marketing efforts.

All club members need to understand that the club's public image is an integral part of promoting your club. For this reason it is important for everyone to understand that the public will be listening to, and observing the attitudes of your coaches, past players, players and members both on and off the field.



USEFUL TIPS

When producing promotional material it is important that your message comes across in four key ways:

- Attracts attention (What's this?)
- Holds interest (Let me read on)
- Arouses desire (Hey, this sounds like something I would like to do)
- Elicits action (I'm going to call/email right now and sign up)

Whether your promotional material is a brochure, newsletter, web site or advertisement, it is important to apply these design elements. Given that funds are limited, regular mentions through local media help to create and sustain awareness of your club and its activities in the community. Develop a good relationship with your local media. Send them accurate game results in a timely fashion, invite them to all of your events, provide them with story ideas, and help them feel comfortable following and reporting on rugby events or the achievements of your players and coaches.

COMMUNICATIONS

There are three important lists that a club should maintain at all times; a centralized communication list that is email based, accurate phone and contacts lists and a public web site. Make sure that updates to your members for score reporting and upcoming games or events are accurate and timely. Clubs must have a stable and reliable fax number. At the beginning of each rugby season the Munster Branch will request to have a key contact to whom they will send relevant information.

MARKETING CLUB EVENTS

There are numerous methods for marketing and promoting your special events. Utilize your club membership for more widespread promotion. If you have a mini-rugby program within your club, extend your volunteer base to the parents of young children; they can be enormous resources for promoting special events, especially fundraisers. Inform potential participants early with accurate information. Distribute flyers, posters and email notification, detailing the date, time, venue, cost, etc.

Always know who you are marketing to. For example, if your event is specific to children, send marketing materials to schools, parents and community centres. If the event is primarily for young adults, focus your distribution in primary schools, secondary schools, universities, local institute of technology, colleges and on the radio. When pricing your event, conduct market comparisons and be sure to give good value for your participants' money. There are some instances in which people expect costs to be a certain amount, depending on the event

Linking your event to another event or another group will often help to increase your participant base. Consider hosting an annual tournament followed by an annual dinner or dance; or host an event in conjunction with a local charity. These types of events can be marketed and sold separately, increasing the participants at the events and thus, your revenue.

Guidelines to Media Relations

USEFUL TIPS

Media Relations is potentially the most cost effective means of promoting your club and its activities. Handled poorly, bad Media Relations can be damaging! But largely speaking a good pro-active PR effort will work for your club. In the first instance your focus should be to:

- Portray an inviting and strong image and awareness of your club, its players and its general endeavours in rugby and in your greater community.
- Develop communications with the media.
- Take note of the many outlets of media available to you to get your message across.

For example on behalf of your club your targets should be:

- Local weekly newspapers and/or free sheets
- Local TV
- Local radio
- School and/or university news bulletins
- Rugby magazines
- Websites
- Ceefax and/or Aertel
- National newspapers – TV – Radio
- Ensure your club website is up-to-date, as it is often to this outlet that the Media will search for news and information.

COMMITMENT TO ROLE

- As a means of maximising the media outlets, it is essential that your club has appointed a Public Relations Officer who has a commitment to the role and who has some understanding of it.
- Club members who work in the media, marketing and advertising areas or in a PR capacity should be the principal targets for the role.
- Your club PR person may also ideally be a younger member with designs on going into the PR or media business as a career.
- A role as a rugby club PR spokesperson is an ideal testing ground in this regard.
- It is best that one person be identified for the job as it eliminates confusion and ensures continuity and identification.

MEDIA CONTACTS

- Having sourced the person most suited and committed to the PR role, the next step is to inform all media outlets of that person, providing home and business telephone numbers, fax and also a mobile number.
- If a club PRO is not prepared to give this commitment, then he/she should not be given the job! The commitment to divulge this contact information must be associated with an obligation to availability, insofar as is practicable, all enquiries are dealt with as soon as possible.
- For a PRO to be constantly unavailable and/or not to return calls, invites problems. The consequence will be a missed opportunity and probably negative publicity.



- Therefore, it can not be sufficiently emphasised the need to appoint the right person.
- It is important that an agreed routine for the dissemination of information then be established. Bear in mind that your role is to maximize your club's publicity potential so that ALL media outlets receive your information on a shared basis. Ensure you are sending your club information to the right person in each Media outlet.
- The early availability of fixtures, kick-off times, team selections and / or news relating to injuries will help the prospect of publicity. But remember that subsequent team alterations and injury updates must also be provided.

STORY LINES

- So as to attract the interests of the Media outlets, some thought must be put into the provision of interesting story lines. Remember you are vying with other sports in your area for space and the more interesting you make your story line on behalf of your rugby club the greater the chance it has of being publicised.
- You should take the attitude that your story line is issued to ALL media outlets as any story to one outlet only is destined to backfire in negative response from those who have been "scooped".
- A Media Conference should only be held in the event of really significant announcements. If you do call a Media Conference, ensure you have proper audio and/or visual equipment available and that all the relevant club officers/sponsors, etc. are in attendance.

- If you are supervising an interview at a Conference, make sure the interviewee knows the subject thoroughly and speaks clearly, briefly, accurately and to the point.
- Story lines will take account of team selections and injury news on a regular basis but if you closely examine the activity in your club you will discover a multitude of ideas.

Examples are:

- A new coach has joined the club.
- New players have signed up.
- Mr. X has taken over as Club President...Y – is the new club captain.
- Next week's team includes two / three brothers/ or a father and son... anything unusual of that nature.
- The club plans an extension / refurbishment of its clubhouse.
- The club has plans for a new pitch/pitches... Floodlights are to be installed.
- A new mini rugby/youth section is being introduced.
- The numbers now playing mini rugby have grown to X.
- How to join our club – it is open to everyone.
- The club is planning to go on a tour... A touring team is to visit the club for a game.
- The club is staging a special dinner to celebrate X ... to honour Y.
- The clubhouse is available for use to community groups.
- Club has a new sponsor and/or would you like to sponsor our club.



PRESENTATION OF STORYLINES

The primary role of the rugby club PR person is to inform the Media. This is more often than not done by word of mouth. The club PR will have established his media contacts and be on first name terms – so that there will be less, if, indeed, NO, demand on actually writing media releases. However, correspondence is only required in its most simplistic form – so do not be put off by the notion of having to write to the highest standards: **THIS IS NOT NECESSARY – AS THE MEDIA JUST WANT TO KNOW THE STORY... word of mouth is fine... or a simple e-mail!**

- However, bear in mind when writing a release that you should keep it SIMPLE – mostly on one page, A4 size.
- Watch your spelling, use good grammar, ensure you have accurate information. Do not use abbreviations, as in don't... wasn't, etc.
- Ensure you have a story to tell – something newsy, e.g., some forthcoming event in your club, team selections/injuries, results of games, sponsorship announcements, club initiatives: but get your punchline into the first paragraph.



Your story could read as follows:

James Smith will create a record for X rugby club when he plays against Y in the AIB League on Saturday. This will be his 50th all Ireland league appearance since he played his first senior match in 2001. To honour the occasion the out half will be made a special presentation after the game by club President Andy Brown in the clubhouse. (PS: I can supply a photo of the presentation – or if you would like to send a photographer please contact me on ----- mobile number supplied)

or

A draw for a trip to France will take place at half time during Saturday's AIB League match between X and Y. Tickets will be on sale prior to the game, priced £1 and the winner will receive an all-in package, including flights, accommodation and tickets, to the France – Ireland RBS Six Nations match in Paris. Proceeds from the draw will go towards providing playing kit and equipment for the club's mini rugby programme. Parents of boys and girls between the ages of six and 12 are invited to bring their children to the club's mini rugby sessions each Saturday morning at 10.30 Am., during which tea/coffee, etc will be available in the clubhouse.

FACILITIES

- Bone fide media personnel coming to your club should by tradition have identification, e.g. an NUJ (National Union of Journalists) card or their own company identification cards. However, discretion should be used.
- Reserved car parking should be made available for the media.
- Ideally, a room (e.g. committee room or changing room) not being used, should be set aside, with wall socket and telephone point facilities; a "working" table, chairs, heat, light – and offer tea/coffee or something stronger after the game! (The more comfortable this facility is the more positive will be the appreciation).
- Invitations to pre-match and post-match functions should also be offered to the Media.
- Assistance from the club PRO should be forthcoming in pre-match team/replacements personnel and numbering checks.
- A public address system should be in operation, initially making know the team participants and their playing numbers – and subsequently the identification of scorers and replacements as the game progresses.
- Assistance should similarly be offered to photographers/TV/radio personnel.
- Working media should preferably be provided with a dedicated area from which to view the match, "covered" if possible, if not an open top bus or its like will suffice.
- If your club provides facilities better than the next, it will be noted and appreciated.

Community Relations





INTRODUCTION

One of the best assets a rugby club has, when it comes to community relations is the amount of work it can do to support the local community and the benefits that can be derived from this work. To truly realise this as an asset, it is essential to develop relationships with key people in the community who can help the club to achieve its goals. It is important for clubs to develop close ties with their local Council, Schools and Media

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

While it is important for a club to develop positive working relationships with key stakeholders throughout the local community, it is equally important that the club doesn't try to do too much at the same time and spread itself too thin. Club administrators should prioritise the areas that will help them reach their most important goals and objectives and then start to develop relationships in this area.

CITY & COUNTY COUNCIL

City & county councillors and all local authority representatives should be aware of your club and the ways in which the club contributes to the community. It is important to develop strong relationships with council and make them feel like they are welcomed members of the club. Building personal relationships with members of council, in addition to inviting and hosting them as special guests at rugby events will help them get to know people in your club and understand the work you do in the community.

When it comes time to ask for their support on a project, council members will have a much more personal and complete context in which to evaluate the proposal. Supportive council members can also "coach" a club through local proposal and funding application processes.

Community Relations contd.





SCHOOLS

Schools are one of the largest potential producers of new rugby players. Find out who the sports coordinators are at your local schools and offer the club's assistance where possible. Schools can benefit from coaching support, equipment, organisational assistance, or any other area where the club can share its experience and know-how. It is in the club's best interest to get the sports coordinators or physical education teachers involved with the youth programmes in the club. They know the opportunities available & can match the skill set to the clubs requirements. Schools become a natural avenue for marketing and supporting the club's youth programs.

RECOGNITION

An easy way to build relationships and create ties in the community is to invite all of the "key players" to the club's big events, big games (such as the play-offs), touring sides, new programme launches, facility improvements, and annual awards functions. The guest list may vary from event to event, and each relationship may contribute to the club's success in a different way, but at a minimum all of these people should be publicly recognised at least once per year. This recognition could come at an annual awards banquet or other

similar event, during which the president of the club can acknowledge their support in a speech. Regardless of how it's done, your community supporters should feel welcome, appreciated, and acknowledged for their support.

MAKING THE COMMITMENT

Developing ties within your local community takes time and effort. Where possible, a liaison should be appointed to develop the relationship with each of the key groups mentioned above. Contact with authorities may be less frequent but still requires the attention of one or two club members.



Contacts:

Munster Rugby

Tel: 021 4323563
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Leinster Rugby

Tel: 01 2693224
Fax: 01 2693142

Connacht Rugby

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Ulster Rugby

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