

# IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme



## Info sheet #3: Communication in the Sports Club Business

Communication is another vital aspect of the club's "off the field" activity and like the other activities it needs to be planned and delivered.

The club has a wide range of internal and external "customers" that it needs to communicate with including players, supporters, business partners and sponsors. Communication can also be a tool in which the clubs brand can be built up, its reputation can be developed, it can develop loyalty with its stakeholders and it can "sell" the club to potential customers.

There are many channels of communication that need to be considered include web sites, twitter, facebook, e mail, direct mail, newsletters the Press and possibly local radio. Like all activities the club needs to decide which channels are the most effective for them bearing in mind the resources they have.

### **The Channels of Communication and how we use them:**

#### The Press

The local press is an essential "tool" in the clubs communication strategy. The club can build a relationship with a range of newspapers and magazines to a) build up the brand awareness of the club b) build up the reputation of the club through the stories published about the community programme and other events at the club c) build up sponsorship value through photographs that appear in the newspapers (it is a good idea to keep all newspaper cuttings about the club since you will be able to use these when discussing sponsorship) and d) providing information to existing and potential customers about the games.

However, it should be recognised that every publication is targeted at a specific segment of society, both geographically and socio economically. The club will need to carry out some research to find out a) which publications are closely aligned to geographic footprint and b) which publications are closely aligned to the profile of your potential customers.

Finally, the club needs to spend time building a relationship with the newspaper and its staff. The club needs to understand what the needs of the newspaper are. It might be that they focus on community activity and you will be able to send them weekly reports about community activity or it might be that they carry reports from local sports teams

#### Radio

This may not be relevant to all of the clubs but it worth researching. Radio stations are very similar to newspapers in that they all have specific target audiences and target different geographic areas. The club also needs to recognise that the licences given to radio stations vary; some will have a great deal of "talk/discussion" content whilst others will be pure music. The club will need to research the radio stations to understand which one is best suited to form a partnership with.

As examples; The Commercial radio stations will be keen for you to advertise with them but this is expensive. The local radio station will be keen on getting content about the games and community activity from you.

#### The Web site

There are ten main reasons why your clubs needs to have a web site and these are outlined below. However to ensure that it does work properly the club needs to make sure that it a) projects a professional image b) is updated on a regular basis c) that you promote it to all stakeholders.

#### **Main reasons:**

- 1) The web site is open to the world 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Therefore it can be constantly building up interest in the club, providing information about the club, finding new customers and building up loyalty with existing customers.
- 2) It can be easily and cheaply updated. This means that you can regularly change the stories (this will keep the interest from your customers to encourage them to return), you can communicate with your customers about changes in kick off times etc and you can sell them merchandise, summer schools etc.
- 3) It is an essential aspect of your customer service since you will keep your customers informed about the club. This will strengthen their loyalty to the club and will result in a greater commercial income from them.
- 4) Professional image. If the web site is good then it will be visited by thousands of individuals. It is an easy way to project a professional image of the club.
- 5) Sales tool. Everyone who is interested in the club will at some point look at the web site. The site is therefore an ideal platform from which to sell club inventory be it merchandise, tickets, or summer schools.
- 6) Finding new customers. Individuals who aren't existing customers will at some point look at the web site. If it is professional and informative they could be attracted to the club to become involved.
- 7) Gathering information. Many web sites are linked to e-zines and can provide a portal through which individuals can sign up for the e zine. The information collected can then be used by the club to target individuals through e mail to come to a game, buy some merchandise etc.
- 8) Value for Sponsors. If you are able to attract high numbers of unique users each month to the site then you will be more easily be able to convince advertisers to use the site or to provide more value to sponsors by including their information on the site.
- 9) The cost of running the web site is relatively low and therefore the value for money is high!
- 10) The club can be promoted globally at a very small cost!

The decision to be made by the club is what they can actually achieve with the resource that is available. The club needs to be realistic about this and only attempt to achieve what the resources will allow unless they will project an unprofessional image.

*IRFU Welcoming Clubs Programme; An IRFU initiative which provides clubs with a road map and training for the "team off the field" to assist them in running their sports club as efficiently as possible.*

## **Social Media**

Social Media, like the web site and e mail marketing is one aspect of your communication strategy. It can be an extremely useful communication tool for the business but like the web site you need to know why you are using it and put in a resource to use it effectively.

Using social media is not simply a way of collecting people together. It should be used as a way of communicating with your market place. There are several benefits of using it as follows:

- 1) The reach of social media is phenomenal. There are 24 million people in the UK on Facebook and the average user has 130 friends.
- 2) Unlike e mails the individual is inviting "the disturbance" into their lives and the viewing of communications is very high.
- 3) The club is able to target groups of people with a common interest and with a common demographic ( we know that 64% of individuals that use Facebook are under 34 and 68% of people who use LinkedIn are over 35).
- 4) You can very quickly engage with a new market if you become involved in the "right conversations". It is a cheap and easy way to build your brand awareness.
- 5) You will communicate directly with your market place, they will tell you what they do and don't like or what they are interested in. This customer feedback is essential if you are to offer customer service since you will be able to react to negative comments.
- 6) If you are actively involved in participating in this area then you will be able to develop new relationship with new potential customers who will tell you about their "wants and needs"
- 7) It is immediate communication with your market place. For example 50% of facebook users log on every day.

The strategy here needs to be planned carefully since the areas has so many opportunities you may spend a huge amount of time for limited reward if the approach isn't planned.

## **E mail marketing overview**

E mail marketing is a form of direct marketing which uses electronic mail instead of the post. With the use of a CRM system the communication can be personalised and segmented so that only the information that is relevant to an individual is sent to them. This also means that if you have some basic profile information about a person you can understand their wants and needs and target them to sell them what they want.

E mails can therefore be used for;

- Communication
- Building sales
- Developing Loyalty

## **Newsletters/e-zine**

The value of these will depend on a) the size of the data base you have b) the quality of the information that you are able to include in these. It is recognised that only 23% of e mails from sports clubs are opened. This compares with 9% of general marketing e mails. These communications are effective means of a) developing loyalty b) selling club inventory and c) providing information. However, if they are sent out every week without there being "fresh" information included the open rate will drop. Bearing in mind the fact that supporters/customers will be getting information from the web site and social media channels you will need to consider the value of these newsletters.

Our view would be that they are sent every two weeks but always include exclusive offers and news in order to keep the open rates high.

Sending out the e-zine

A majority of web site providers will now include the provision for e-zines to be sent out within their offering. If you build up your data bases then there is also the option to work with an e mail "distributor" to effectively send out the e mails on your behalf.