The NFL's Campaign: An Internet Marketing Success

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The NFL partakes in many campaigns each year. Although the league obtains great methods of marketing, especially throughout the Super Bowl, each year it launches something different and more appealing. All companies face some kind of downfall occasionally, and after the NFL became aware of its biggest flaw, they decided to take action and change the way fans and the NFL communicated with each other. Rather than creating loose bonds between the two, the league decided on a much more beneficial approach to keep relationships close and personal for those intrigued. More importantly, the league reached out to create these bonds via the Internet. By marketing the league on social networks, NFL officials presumed their major issue would ultimately resolve. They figured this was the smartest way to gain knowledge of the fans and enhance those relationships, after previous failed attempts.

With any campaign, some may worry if the results bring positivity to the company. Thus far, results for the NFL's campaign bring positivity to the league. Internet marketing for the NFL flourished, allowing individual players to communicate more freely with fans, other players, agents, and journalists (Social media scores, 2011).

Originally, the NFL tried to launch an email campaign, attempting to reach the dedicated fans and develop a better relationship with them. This idea, the league's first attempt at direct marketing, seemed brilliant and the league became excited to see the results. The email campaign worked, as far as gaining subscribers and keeping them. "What the league found instead was that it had the same challenges as any other organization looking to connect with its customers: identifying who they are, how to reach them and what to do to keep them coming back for more" (Perez, 2011).

The email campaign did not have an effect the NFL suspected. They needed something more interactive and appealing to the fans, rather than the league emailing the fans to scope out their clicks within the specific email. This campaign made sense at first because the league would gain and obtain knowledge about the fans that would help them direct specific advertisements towards the individuals. However, emailing the fans would not satisfy the NFL because knowing how to approach individual fans and understand their personal curiosities still set the league back. No establishment of personal connection with any of the fans occurred. This would hold back the NFL from their expectations, and put their attempt at strengthening their fan base on hold, while they searched for a better solution.

The league concluded that in order to create a successful marketing plan, certain aspects needed close examination. "Not only did [the campaign] need to draw people to its hub site, and build a virtual community for its approximately seven million monthly visitors, but it also sought to use the technology to really get to know those fans" (Perez, 2011). This concept, deemed "one of the most important goals of any marketing plan" by all marketing teams, helped the NFL reshape its ideas and find the perfect solution (Perez, 2011). By solely using email as a way to reach fans, the NFL could not gather any information about the individual fans other than which links they clicked and who visited the NFL's web page. When the league decided to use social media as a way to contact the fans, the campaign allowed for fans to reach players and teams, and vice versa. The NFL became able to track feedback from fans on a personal level, for example their thoughts and feelings about games, fundraising, and other events. This holds true for fans, as they

acquired the ability to recognize the thoughts and feelings the players and teams had about events within the NFL.

Each team makes an effort to maintain a strong bond with fans. This becomes tricky because each team has millions of fans, and when the fan base gets broken down, even each player obtains their own group of fans (Social media scores, 2011). The NFL's decision to use Internet marketing as a solution to communicating with fans resulted positively. Specifically, the company turned to social media.

Each team creates their own social media page where they keep up with posts from fans, and freely reply to those posts. Each player does the same. "Everyone has a Twitter account, every team has a Facebook page, players are making YouTube videos, teams are participating in blogs" (Social media scores, 2011). Fans show their appreciation to whichever player they support the most, from posting about the player on their own social network page to wearing the player's jersey and holding up signs at the football games. Rather than the relationship between the fan and the player being based solely on the fan showing appreciation and recognition of the player, the tables turned and with players running their own Twitter pages fans tweet to their player of choice and the athlete may respond directly to them. This allows the players to keep a personal relationship with the fans, who feel more involved with the NFL. The same goes for each team in the league. Each team runs their own Facebook page, where they can post about games, upcoming events involving the team, news within the NFL, and update fans about the successes and downfalls of the team. Instead of watching ESPN or browsing multiple websites to discover news for the NFL, fans can now follow players on Twitter or check out their team's Facebook page.

The teams can go about using social media in many ways. "For example if the team account were to be used as just a news base, other players and personality accounts related would fill in for the gap of human connection" (Social media scores, 2011). Regardless of how the team decides to use their account, each player obtains the right to create their personal page to connect with fans. When trying to build stronger and more personal relationships with NFL fans, this helps tremendously. Although the likelihood of players meeting the majority of their fans hardly exists, being available through social media helps the players and fans connect. Fans feel more involved and more appreciated.

The voices of not only fans, players, and teams, but as well as commentators, journalists, and agents, made their way to the fans. Anyone affiliated with the NFL can now speak out via social networking. "Commentators can submit Facebook posts discussing current stats" and considering many Facebook users keep up to date with their pages, this helps the fans check in with stats while staying in touch with their personal lives, and being able to discuss NFL related material with friends and family all on the same site (Internet Marketing Inc., 2011).

Social networks also allow the NFL to seed its commercials. The league can post previews of commercials and events on youtube and Facebook. This helps the interactions between fans due to the ability to comment, share, and like the content. After the network user, as well as fan of the NFL, proceeds with one of these actions, those affiliated with the NFL that run their own social network site can see who spreads a good word about the league and gather the information needed to continue producing effective advertisements. Suggestions such as there being a "growing artfulness to the tactic" shapes the way seeding may be viewed (Heine, 2012). Seeding, especially on social

networks, helps the NFL gain recognition and the content that becomes available to the fans engages them even more into the upcoming events. For example, leaking Super Bowl commercials on the Internet and not just television allows a broader audience to become more aware of the upcoming events.

Many wonder about the effectiveness of Internet marketing, especially on social networks. The potential to help a company thrive lies within social networks. For example, Taco Bell launches a campaign for their new taco through Twitter. Many people talk about Taco Bell within their tweets. Because of this, "Taco Bell used Twitter because the majority of social conversations around Taco Bell happen on Twitter" (Lacy, 2012). Taco Bell held a contest, which involved hash tags used on tweets. If Twitter users incorporated the hash tag "#Contest" in their tweets about Taco Bell, their town would get entered to win a visit from a Taco Bell truck to experience the company's new product before anyone. "Taco Bell required the use of #Contest to enter so that retweeting users knew that they were supporting a contest" (Lacy, 2012). Although Twitter users frequently talk about Taco Bell within the website, this contest made room for even more talk, creating a better interaction with those that enjoy Taco Bell. Just as well, as the Taco Bell campaign on Twitter became successful, IKEA launched a campaign on Facebook, which also resulted rather well. "IKEA target[ed] its own large audience of Facebook fans. But there [was] a second level: Once the IKEA fans signed up, they were enticed to invite their own friends, thus exponentially enlarging the scope of the campaign" (IKEA enlists, 2012). IKEA created the campaign in order to draw in customers, offering a reward to those who spread the word to people they knew. With this campaign, potential arose for more fan engagement. However, "the push created a

literally rewarding experience for the customer," which keeps the fan interested in approaches lying in the future of the company. This proves that companies benefit from Internet marketing through social media. The NFL's approach to its campaign has been resulting positively, and the league can gain confidence by reviewing cases like Taco Bell and IKEA's campaigns.

Each Internet marketing campaign differs. Nevertheless, certain aspects to campaigns, in general, guarantee success. Reports indicate "one of the characteristics of the best advertising -- no matter what platform -- is that it tells a story" (Diaz, 2012). Advertisements should create a new train of thought for those the campaign tries to direct its attention to. In addition, "one smart strategy to give your Facebook campaign legs and sharing value is to extend it into the real world" (Diaz, 2012). The NFL does this by engaging fans with players and teams. To the fans, interacting with the players and teams gives them a sense of reality because the basis of interactions comes from the personal level on which the social networking provides. Extending the campaign into the real world allowed the NFL to "learn how to be truly social" (Diaz, 2012). As the name implies, in order to fully use social networks, one needs skills to help them socialize freely without creating a bad reputation for who ever they represent; whether it be the teams they play for, the league in general, or themselves.

The NFL successfully uses Internet marketing on social networks. The teams and players connect with fans by accepting as well as responding to feedback. "Many companies essentially operate one-way communication channels" and "failing to engage social media contacts can essentially waste the ultimate value of the channel" (Most businesses not, 2012). One-way communication does not allow for gaining trust. The

NFL's Internet marketing campaign succeeds due to the dual-communication, providing trust and interest between fans and the league.

Social networks, especially Facebook, will help the NFL throughout its Internet marketing campaign. According to a report, "businesses using Facebook will see more rapid and accurate information relating to the amount of users accessing their social media content and the engagement it garners" (Social marketing alert, 2012). The NFL's campaign already surpasses others'. By using Facebook, the NFL can manage information that the users provide for the league, helping them develop marketing techniques to help their campaign even more.

In fact, the success of the NFL's campaign encouraged the company UnderArmour to lean towards Internet marketing as well. "Inspired by the Super Bowl's social media success, UnderArmour turned to Twitter to complete their marketing takeover" (UnderArmour's social takeover, 2012). The NFL influenced other companies by using the Internet for a marketing campaign, showing its success and proliferation.

The NFL turned to social media in order to communicate more freely with fans. After the league's email campaign fell through, it developed this campaign to maintain strong affiliations with fans. The teams and individual players run their own social network pages, letting them choose how they would like to keep fans updated about information varying from specific players to the NFL in general. Once the teams and players reach their fans, the relationship between the two becomes stronger. This marketing campaign helps build trust between the fans and the NFL, a necessary element of a marketing campaign.

Internet marketing for the NFL began recently, allowing for increased interaction with fans to gain more commitment between the NFL and its fan base. Due to the success of the campaign, the league can develop other Internet marketing campaigns to gain information on the fans, which helps the marketing teams develop strategies to direct advertisements towards individuals based on their personal interests and engagements. The current campaign already shows success, and league sees a bright future, as the campaign still progresses. This technological growth continues to expand, and with people engaging in the popularity of the Internet and social networks, advertisements work effectively. The NFL now maintains the power to succeed in Internet marketing campaigns.

Percent of Interest Among Social Network Users

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Tumblr.
- MySpace
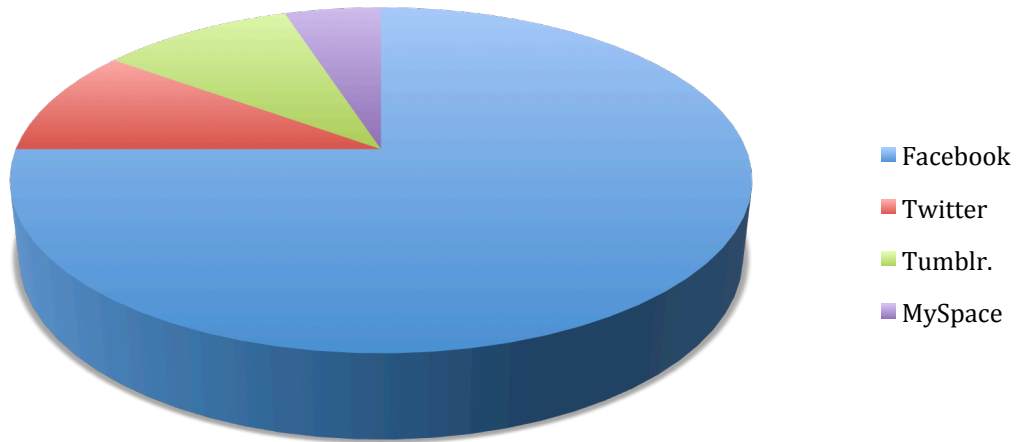
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Popularity of National Sports Leagues

- NFL
- MLB
- NBA
- NHL

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