SPORTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PREDICTIONS 2010
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Compiled by Jason Peck
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Sports and Social Media Predictions 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Sports and Social Media Predictions 2010

"I’ve asked some people I know to share their thoughts and predictions for sports and social media in 2010."

2009 has been an exciting year in the world of sports and social media. We’ve seen explosive growth in this area, fueled by media coverage, athletes and celebrities who have started participating, new initiatives by teams, new events and fans who are thirsty for content about their favorite sports, teams and athletes.

This year I’ve been fortunate to form closer bonds with some of you who are very interested in the intersection of sports and social media. It’s been great chatting and learning from you via phone, email, Twitter and at events.

Around this time last year, I read Peter Kim’s document (http://www.scribd.com/doc/8944081/Social-Media-Predictions-for-2009) with predictions from some very smart people about social media for 2009.

Inspired by Peter Kim’s idea, I’ve asked some people I know to share their thoughts and predictions for sports and social media in 2010. Thank you all for your contributions. I hope we can continue to learn from each other and collaborate on other projects in the future.

Jason Peck
http://www.jasonfpeck.com
The “Social Media Experiment” will continue in 2010 as brands and organizations redefine their approach to utilizing it as an engagement medium. While the major social media players continue to look for the next great monetization model, brands that focus on leveraging social media as a means to deliver exclusive content, engage in healthy dialogue with consumers (via direct feedback and customer service), and instill a little humor and creativity will come away the most pleased with their investments.

2010 will be defined by the rise of online video and photo sharing. As new mobile handheld devices (iPhones, Droids) and Flip Video cameras equipped with WiFi technology fly off the shelves, consumers will actively continue to upload their lives on YouTube and Flickr.com and share them with the rest of the world via Facebook, Linked In, Twitter, and niche social media platforms.

Social media will help brands “Go Local” and “Go Global” simultaneously… it’s pretty amazing how that happens, isn’t it? Sports leagues will use unique viral pieces and social media campaigns to drive growth and fan avidity in Europe and the Far East while teams will use a similar approach to strengthen their connection with fans in the local community. The smartest U.S. brands will look to benchmark the mobile marketing practices of our European and Asian counterparts, who are paving the way with some innovative campaigns.

The X Factor of 2010? Google Wave. It will be interesting to see if all of the hype and anticipation around the Wave will be enough to convert millions of consumers into Google social media enthusiasts. Stay tuned!

Brian Gainor founded Partnership Activation Inc., as a means to provide sports business professionals with consultation of industry best practices and innovative sponsorship/marketing concepts. Since its inception, Brian has used PartnershipActivation.com and the Partnership Activation 2.0 newsletter as portals to educate and network with those working in sports business around the globe.
“Teams and leagues will attempt to build communities using their own proprietary networks, but Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn will continue to dominate through their alliances and new applications.”

The keywords for 2010 will be adoption, convergence and usage. All social media sites will continue to add applications and connectivity between each other. This will provide easier navigation for the user and faster adoption. Early adopters will continue to lead and communities will continue to grow but at a faster rate. Teams and leagues will attempt to build communities using their own proprietary networks, but Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn will continue to dominate through their alliances and new applications.

Early adopters will be more inclined to use social media to communicate and e-mail will decline as a primary method of communication.

Properties will copy each other and share best practices for growing communities and monetizing the access to their community. They will start to more effectively use social media to gain psychographic insights to their fans/friends/followers. Social media experts will drive the PR efforts and much of the marketing.

Dan Beeman, Sponsorship Insights Group’s Founder, has personally sold more than $10,000,000 in sponsorship and has collectively managed nearly $100,000,000 in sponsorships and partnerships. His specialty is customizing programs and opportunities for properties to develop revenue-generating partnerships through creative leveraging of their assets.
As a licensed sports agent, I have a lot of interest in keeping track of developments in social media. Social media has the power to enhance and the power to corrupt. Agents should be scared because it takes all power out of our hands. As much as we guide our clients and inform them of the best practices regarding the use of social media, all it takes is one drunken Tweet for an athlete’s image to go off the deep end.

Sports and social media are a perfect match. Sports entities whore themselves out for increased exposure and profitability. Social media, if navigated correctly, provides both ends. Facebook and Twitter are here to stay, but I believe that we will start to see a clear distinction between the two. Twitter will become the predominant home of athletes while Facebook solidifies itself as the base for brands through its Fan Pages.

Athletes are busy. On any given day, they are most likely either traveling to a game, playing a game, practicing, training, out throwing their money away at clubs, or possibly even working on starting up outside ventures. They do not have time to load up the laptop and deal with all of the extra material that Facebook provides, which the majority of the population craves. However, those athletes always have their cell phones on them. Limited to 140 characters, which they hardly ever meet, Twitter has and will continue to become the method of choice for athletes to broadcast their message to their followers, aka, the world.

Facebook, on the other hand, is perfect for sports brands. It is a great platform for contests, picture storage in neat and documented photo albums, updates on promotions, etc. While athletes want the world to know what they are doing at this particular second, brands do not have the same need. Instead, they care about the longevity of their message. Facebook is better than Twitter in this capacity.

So where are sports and social media going? They are becoming more attached whether I, as a sports agent, like it or not. And I happen to love it. I hate the fact that my clients can hurt their image with one silly Tweet, but also enjoy knowing that if they leverage the platforms effectively, they can bring so much additional value to their brand and persona. Everyone is more interconnected. Athletes to brands, agents to brands, athletes to agents, etc. It sure makes for interesting discussion amongst the various parties on board.

Darren Heitner is Founder and CEO of Dynasty Athlete Representation, a full service sports and entertainment agency, and Founder of SportsAgentBlog.com, the #1 free online resource for sports agent related topics. For more information, visit http://www.DarrenHeitner.com.
2010 will see the rise of podcasting & video blogging in the sports arena. There was a time when “New Media” was just euphemism for “video,” but that is rapidly coming to a close. Kige Ramsey may have been the first and the The Basketball Jones may be the best (for now), but there’s a lot of room for sharing content innovatively through video. FlipCams are becoming as standard as cell phones and now come in HD with built in WiFi. All they need is a good stabilizer, and the technology will be so easy it will become the new standard of the day. So, sports blogging personalities will grow even more prominent than they currently are - which is good and bad depending on the personality.

The question becomes how you attempt to monetize the new audio and video shows that develop. Networks are still struggling to find a foothold on how to do so with blogs themselves. When content producers expand beyond the written word, they are poised to grow, and marketers will still be playing catch-up to adapt to the evolving media.

There could also be a consolidation of independent voices. Yardbarker was one of the first in pitching the collective audience of independent blogs to marketers, and now have an editorial content agreement with FoxSports.com. SB Nation has rapidly expanded its stable and continues to grow in terms of size and quality. Upstarts like Bloguin and FanSided are trying to chip away by mimicking those models, but it’s probably only a matter of time before the likes of ESPN begin outright buying networks as a whole.

Some sort of mobile sports social media app is poised to take off... especially as more non-AT&T phones get Android (b/c AT&T sucks it long and hard at sporting events, killing iPhone effectiveness at lots of big games). Mobile and internet game viewing will hit mainstream adoption and stories about the ubiquity of live sports video will make the rounds on the Nightline, CNN, 60 Minutes circuit.

From an athlete’s perspective, seeing as the major 4 sports all have their bargaining agreements coming up again in 2011, next year may be the last year for sports, period. If that doesn’t light a fire under people’s asses to maximize their talents and abilities, what will? That may very well include a player announcing his free agency signing decision on Ustream or Livestream, and relief pitchers becoming hugely popular when they figure out they can Tweet from the bullpen. Personal athlete branding will explode out of their necessity (and eagerness) to create a supplement market for
themselves. Unfortunately, this will result in a saturation of smarmy online sports marketing “gurus” and “experts” pitching little more than common sense disguised as know-how to athletes, teams and leagues with disposable income.

Finally, Bill Simmons and Shaq will appear at Blogs with Balls.

Don Povia, Chris Lucas and Kyle Bunch are co-founders and organizers of Blogs With Balls. Through the first-of-their-kind independent sports & new media gatherings, the trio has formed partnerships with ESPN, Sports Illustrated, FoxSports.com, NESN, Yardbarker.com, SB Nation, Lijit and other prominent media and online companies. In addition to the inaugural event in June 2009, BwB oversaw the sports community track at BlogWorld & New Media Expo, the world’s largest industry-wide tradeshow and conference dedicated to promoting new media.
“Would you hire an intern to be your lead media buyer for television and billboard ads? No. It’s the same thing, different medium.”

My Mom always said, “Half of the world is searching for the other half of the world, but you don’t know how to find them.” Social media maven Brian Solis emphasizes that before even planning an online marketing strategy establish your identity. Most brands don’t even strategize; they just jump on a bandwagon. But lets say you are developing a strategy, before that DISCOVER your identity that you plan to communicate in this strategy. I hadn’t even thought of charting out my brand identity before planning. I figured my identity is obvious. Surf brand means you’re a surfer right? No, not necessarily. You must establish your brand to stand for something. A cause. Something bigger and selfLESS than selling a pair of board shorts.

Share…. Stop self-promoting and start listening. Share information that you know delivers value because you have been listening to what your audience wants. Whether it is employees, customers, twitter followers or Facebook fans. The way to effectively intrigue people to take action…. And buy… is fueled by first being inspired.

In a panel ZexSports produced about increasing revenue using online marketing, the agency bigMETHOD shared...Everything is shifting to online. Big companies and small companies. It’s about your messaging. The tremendous advantage any brand is going to have for their marketing and advertising spend in social media versus traditional media is...

1. You’ll get real time metrics online. In a magazine you have no clue how many eyeballs actually turned to page 43. It’s tough to know.
2. You will really be able to see the ROI of your spend, what you acheived with your budget allocation. Online there is a call to action integrated in every piece of communication.

Syndication and subscription is down on action sports magazines. Back in the day I’d cruise Thrasher to see the sick tricks, now there is instant video gratification on YouTube. Newsstand sales are tanking. Action sports brands are afraid of the shift. For having the enthralling sought after “risk taker” image, just about all of the action sports brands haven’t lived up to it and instead continue to play it safe sticking to what they know; print advertising. The only one who really gets it in this industry is Tony Hawk. Brands are starting to freak out and scan Criagslist for some quick fix solutions to have a presence online. Everyone needs to start from ground zero and a newbie intern won’t cut it. Sorry. Would you hire an intern to be your lead media buyer for television and billboard ads? No. It’s the same thing, different medium. Time to ride into a new type of branding. Be humble and understand it’s a new world.
Espree Devora is founder and CEO of Zexsports, a digital media company focused on brands looking for solutions to help target the youth market via local action sports events; skate, surf, snow, moto, bmx. Photo by Jessy Plume with InTraffik.
"I think in 2010 you will see much less of the "phenomenon" of social media and more business figuring out if there is any way to make money with brands."

The "Social Media Experiment" will continue in 2010 as brands and organizations redefine their approach to utilizing it as an engagement medium. While the major social media players continue to look for the next people have to get some kind of ROI on what is going into the development and the time that social media consumes, and as of today very few if any smart brands have figured out a way to monetize what they are spending.

Now I do believe all of these elements can be part of the bigger picture, and you see teams and brands and even athletes using social media as part of an aggregated strategy. You will probably see more of that aggregation and less of a rush to one piece of social media as the answer to all ones prayers. For every Dwight Howard who has been a success there have been hundreds of failures, and thats to be expected. Will it continue? Yes. in what form? Hard to say, thats for people smarter than I. It's probably going to be very detailed, very localized quality and opposed to the shotgun approach being applied today.

Joe Favorito is a 23-year industry veteran in sports and entertainment marketing who is old enough to remember ditto machines and rotary phones. He is now a consultant for brands ranging from Bloomberg LLC, Ketchum Sports and the International Baseball Federation to Wizard Entertainment and Fantasy Sports Ventures. He is also on the graduate faculty of Columbia University and maintains a best practices site at http://joefavorito.com
“Traditional sports social media channels (i.e. Facebook, Twitter) will become more like the traditional media channels - by becoming less personal, less exclusive, and more PR-oriented.”

Over the next few years you are going to see three trends in social media as it relates to sports, some of which you are already seeing happening to a certain degree today:

1. Traditional sports social media channels
(i.e. Facebook, Twitter) will become more like the traditional media channels - by becoming less personal, less exclusive, and more PR-oriented. Social media was built on being open and free-flowing, and fans following athletes feel like they are getting an up close and personal look at their heroes as a result. But that “openness” has not been without its consequences; Tweets and Facebook updates are one and the same with reporter quotes and press releases. Unfortunately, more and more sports properties will continue to clamp down on the free flow of information through social media, develop official policies, and ultimately Facebook and Twitter will become just another politically correct PR channel.

2. Social media will become less and less “social”. It’s an age of personalization, and you are already starting to see more and more social media programs become less about appealing to everyone and more about appealing to individual needs (i.e. Twitter lists). Services such as Octagon’s Twackle Twitter platform will become more appealing to sports properties, and I think you’ll see more and more individual Team/League/Property/Athlete “channels” that cross multiple social media platforms and are designed for and targeted to just their fans.

3. Sports properties will sink more into online content production, and less into traditional mass mediums. Television, print and radio are still the easiest ways to reach the mass public, but with numbers continuing to shift towards the web, sports properties will continue to shift more dollars into producing high quality, high production value content exclusively for the web - streaming video, gaming, etc.

J.W. Cannon is a veteran marketer and sponsorship professional with over 10 years of experience in engaging consumers with high-profile brands such as The Home Depot, Bank of America, AutoTrader.com and ING. J.W. is currently the Director of Sponsorships at ING U.S. Financial Services - a Dutch financial services company. Find him on Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/khuda1
If those in sports are not continuing or starting to invest in social media by next year they are missing out on opportunities to grow. The potential available through these online outlets is too great to pass up. I think this past year has proved that social media is not a trend that is dying out soon. The leagues, teams and athletes who want to get ahead of the game will be finding new, creative ways to market themselves through social media in 2010.

I predict we will see even more opportunities for sports fans to engage in real-time interactions. This may be facilitated in more controlled ways as social media policies are put into place, but still can be developed. A stadium that used to have a small handful of tweeting iPhone users is now an audience ruled by this majority. Social media will have no choice but to become a standard element of sports marketing.

Lewis Howes, a previous two sport collegiate All-American is also the NCAA All-Division Record Holder for the most receiving yards in a single football game (418 yards, the current unofficial World Record). He graduated from Principia College with his degree in Sports Management and has been involved with the sports industry since his retirement from professional football. He founded the Sports Executives Association and SportsNetworker.com which helps him connect sports executives around the world both online and through events.
“As fans and sponsors have deeper interactive experiences in other categories of life, you can be sure that sooner or later, they will turn to their sports teams and say: why can’t we have a relationship like that?”

Will Social Commerce hit Sports in 2010?

2010 could be the year in which sports teams crack the code and begin making serious money from social media. This seems like a no-brainer. Social media is a HOT topic. Facebook and Twitter have created a lot of buzz which is helping social media to be taken more seriously by almost everyone in sports.

In these favorable conditions, 2010 could very well be the year in which we see some teams moving social media from the periphery to the center of their marketing strategies. Instead of buying billboards and TV ads to sell tickets, teams could ditch traditional media and tap the social graph to help fill their arenas. And on the sponsorship front, rather than just selling traditional inventory, teams could build social-based digital promotions designed to engage fans both online and offline.

On the other hand, even with mounting evidence supporting social media strategies, it is entirely conceivable that 2010 will not bring any major MONEY MAKING revolutions to team-based social media. Here’s why:

1. Television is still the revenue center of the (major) sports world. Team I.P. and content will remain highly regulated until a new business model emerges.
2. The unpredictable nature of user (and athlete) created content is still a concern for many teams.
3. Many team executives are too busy trying to sell tickets and traditional sponsorships in a down economy. They don’t have time to worry about exploring new digital opportunities.

These challenges are very real, but the social media world is advancing rapidly, with or without the teams. And regardless of what teams COULD do with social media, one thing is certain: they had better do something, or they risk losing fan and sponsor interest.

Sports fans and sponsors will expect more from sports in 2010.

Sports teams are not immune from disruptive technologies. They do not exist in a vacuum. As fans and sponsors have deeper interactive experiences in other categories of life, you can be sure that sooner or later, they will turn to their sports teams and say: why can’t we have a relationship like that?
Pat Coyle is Founder of the online community at www.sportsmarketing20.com, and President of Coyle Media, a company that helps sports teams generate sponsorship and ticket revenue through Websites, social media, E mail and mobile. He can be reached at pat@coylemedia.com or via Twitter @sports20.
Ridden with fear of losing control of their “message,” the sports industry earned a black eye in 2009 for its late adoption of leveraging the web’s social movement. The year was characterized by restrictive guidelines and policies, scattered experimentation and interaction, and most alarmingly, a lack of listening or even interest in the conversation.

There were some bright spots, however, that leave hope for 2010; and it starts with the athletes. Gaffes aside, athletes are directly connecting with and engaging their fans, raising their profiles, and generating business opportunities outside of their respective team contracts and endorsement deals. We’ll see many more athletes across all sports embrace social media next year, and the creative bar on strategy and execution will be raised significantly.

Teams, leagues, conferences, media outlets and sports properties will continue to recognize the opportunity cost of sitting on the sidelines. In 2010, we should see more purposeful and goal-driven social media participation. In addition to enhancing fan interactivity and the overall fan experience, I think these constituencies will integrate social media in activating marketing and sponsorship campaigns, driving ticket sales, delivering content, crowdsourcing for idea generation and feedback, and building community.

I don’t foresee a full court press, but I do see advancement in the sports and social media space. If the NBA continues to make social strides and ramps up interaction, the industry might not have to look outside the space for a set of best practices. Only time will tell.

Peter Robert Casey is a Sports Blogger for the Huffington Post, and covers the interplay of basketball, social media, and marketing at PeterRobertCasey.com. Casey is also the first media credentialed micro-blogger in college basketball history. He provides live coverage of St. John’s University basketball contests and all collegiate basketball tournaments at Madison Square Garden.
“In 2010, I think properties will begin to define or evolve their social media policies - both how they want to interact directly and what efforts if any they want to support.”

In Crossing the Chasm, originally published in 1991, author Geoffrey Moore makes the argument that there is a big gap between early adopters and the early majority of mass consumption. Moore discusses that aside from the vastly different product expectation levels among the groups is the dynamic where mainstream adopters of a technology are hesitant to try a system that is not used by their peers as they generally look to one another as references. These factors make it difficult to “cross the chasm” but once a successful leap to adoption is made, there is strong loyalty from satisfied mainstream adopter base and let’s face it, that’s where the potential revenues lie.

When asked to discuss Sports and Social Media and where I see it going in 2010, Moore’s book jumped to mind as I reflected on what we saw from the sports and social media landscape this year. We certainly saw more and more mainstream “adopters” join the social media wave. How many mainstream media outlets now list their Twitter username in broadcast or at the end of articles? How many athletes are now using social media realizing they have a direct voice to the fans? Admittedly some better than others in both cases but you can see the dynamic shifting not just in sheer numbers of new adopters but in the status of many of these new adopters. As Bob Young, founder of Red Hat and Lulu.com said for several years we worked together, many of these new adopters are “ands” in that they bring content AND a new audience.

So as we cross into this new frontier, the rules are changing. Inside a sports property, you talk about “controlling the message” when it comes to how, when and what information is distributed and that is perhaps the single biggest shift that we saw in 2009. The Bengals first round pick ends his holdout - do the Bengals release it? Fox Sports get the scoop? Nope. Chad Ochocinco announced it on Twitter. In 2010, I think properties will begin to define or evolve their social media policies - both how they want to interact directly and what efforts if any they want to support (even if passively- credentialing?)

Moving forward, controlling the message means active participation and some level of transparency to allow deeper, more sustainable audience engagement. A thicker skin will help also as you have to take the “bad” with the good. I quoted bad because the old adage applies here: when they stop yelling at you, that’s when you should really be worried (as someone who has been yelled at in these instances on the property side in various roles in my career, I write the last sentence with great compassion!)

I also think in 2010 you will see more properties/companies dive in to social media and the ones who are in will take on more “tries” a
big question: How do we put our content and/or personalities out there but still get some piece of the revenue pie? You can hope that people come to your content on their own or as social media now allows, you can push it out to a wider audience - and by extension let them carry it even further. It’s a new world take on content syndication ... the business model just needs to be built out to match.

Social Media is having an impact. LinkedIn changes how we network, Facebook and Twitter change how we engage with fans or audiences and Flickr, YouTube, Ustream and blogs change how we publish content. We saw a big segment of sports take the leap to cross that chasm in 2009. 2010 should be a fun year as we take the next big steps!

Rob Katz is currently a principal in iAudience, and he has 15 years of experience in senior sales, business development, media/web and marketing roles. Since beginning his career with the Florida Marlins during their inaugural season, Katz’s career includes work with the Tampa Bay Rays, VF Corp, Homestead-Miami Speedway, the PGA Tour’s Ford Championship at Doral and co-founder of Convizion (Collegiate Images). You can connect with Rob on LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com/in/katzrob) or @robkatz on Twitter.
“If 2009 was the year of “diving in,” then 2010 will be the year when we swim with a purpose.”

Over the past year, we’ve seen a tremendous boom in the use of social media by professional sports organizations. Almost every team, league and sports-related business had made an attempt to join the conversation through Twitter, Facebook or some form of social network. There is no question that these companies are starting to recognize the importance of engaging with the fans, and we continue to see creativity in how they leverage these social channels.

Looking forward to 2010, I think we will see another important shift in the social media landscape. If 2009 was the year of “diving in,” then 2010 will be the year when we swim with a purpose. There’s only so long that companies can justify the time and resources that social media engagement requires without creating specific goals and refining their methods to achieve those goals.

I believe that you will see a significant increase in the importance of measurement in all social media campaigns, including both hard, analytical measures (followers, visitors, page views) and more open-ended, brand-centric measures (sentiment, reaction, buzz). I also expect a greater emphasis on how social media will directly generate revenue and/or reduce costs. We’ve seen small examples of this in the “diving-in” phase through discount codes, tweet-ups and other similar promotions. Moving forward, I expect to see more concrete revenue goals tied directly to social media campaigns and specific social media budget line items designed to save money in the overall marketing budget.

Russell Scibetti (http://twitter.com/rscibetti) is the founding editor of TheBusinessOfSports.com, an industry blog that covers a wide range of current topics in sports business. He is a graduate of the Arizona State Sports Business MBA program, and has spent the past three years working in database marketing and CRM for both collegiate athletics and professional sports franchises.
First of all, it’s important to denote that sports has been a notoriously late adopter in a movement that most brands genuinely don’t have a good grasp on in the first place. I think it’s time for all brands, sports included, to stop participating because of the buzz and start working to define their goals and forthcoming strategy as it relates to social media.

So what are some of the strategies that I foresee impacting the sports world in 2010?

1. Well defined strategies to enhance monetization past just slapping a sponsor’s logo on a Twitter page or team community. Integration will play a critical role in this growth as brand’s look to participate with these ‘social’ communities. For example, look at what Marquette has done with this interactive site designed to increase ticket sales, but also build out video content and engage a vibrant community of Golden Eagle fans.

2. Mobile. I think mobile will continue to enhance the way fans experience games and brands will look to combine with new media agencies who can help increase fan interactivity in-house and with those that can’t attend via their mobile devices. “Smart phones” and fantasy applications will also be a hot issue. Leveraging mobile for monetization; however, will remain a bit in the future for most brands.

3. Brands will start fine-tuning their measurement efforts instead of just counting Twitter followers, Facebook fans, etc. The key will be picking a couple of metrics that are most important to determining if goals are being satisfied and not ignoring the fact that ROI (as in $$$, not influence or interaction) is usually the best, and possibly the hardest, metric to obtain.

What else?

Social business will emerge. The savviest athletes will continue to find ways to enhance their brand via social tools. The athletes who’ve had social media forced on them will abandon ship. Teams will navigate, but few will likely solve, scalability issues. FTC guidelines and organizational policies will continue to confuse and conflict.

Oh, and Anastasia Ashley (http://twitter.com/Anastasiaashley) will ask me out via Twitter.
By day, Ryan Stephens is the Director of Community for Sports Media Challenge where he uses his experience with social technologies to create marketing strategies for athletes, Division I programs, and other sports industry brands. By night, he’s a marketing consultant, passionate connector and voracious reader who is obsessed with physical fitness, Texas Country music, and being overly critical of movies.
2009 was a landmark year for the long overdue marriage between sports and social media, and naturally it had its share of highs and lows. Thousands of athletes, teams, leagues, and agencies leveraged online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to provide unprecedented access and up-to-the-minute info to eager sports fans across the globe. Leagues and networks introduced internal social media policies, athletes such as former Chiefs RB Larry Johnson paid for Twitter transgressions, while others built up massive multi-platform fan followings that attracted corporate sponsors and marketing dollars.

As monumental as last year was, this next year is shaping up to be even bigger now that athletes and teams have established substantial followings to engage in creative new ways. Since we specialize in social media services for professional athletes at Activ8Social, I will be focusing my 2010 predictions on three topics specifically relevant to them.

PROMOTIONS:

Even with Facebook’s new restrictive promotions guidelines, you will begin to notice more social media contests, campaigns, and sweepstakes featuring professional athletes. These one-off promotions offer powerful sponsorship activation opportunities for brands looking to align with popular sports personalities that carry loyal and well-defined fan bases. A few recent notables include Fantazzle’s partnership with NY Giants receiver Steve Smith to promote its weekly Fantasy Football Games and Klondike’s partnership with NFL superstars Chad Ochocinco and Terrell Owens for their “Thicker Shell Face-off and Online Roast”. Both companies found a clever way to capitalize on athlete social media fan bases to trigger consumer interest and participation. Social media also allows athletes to create interactive real-world experiences that truly resonate with fans such as Shaq’s “Twitter Tag” and Lamar Odom’s “Scavenger Hunt” for Lakers playoff tickets. Promotions such as these offer great ways to increase awareness and attract new supporters, but the true winners will be those who can find a way to continually entertain and provide value to their followers.

LIVE VIDEO:

Look for increased adoption of live streaming video services such as Ustream by athletes, which is truly the most raw and authentic social media channel. Video is a natural progression for players looking to
lend authenticity to their social media presence and reach the next level of fan connection. Although the relative percentage of athletes using live video services will remain small, many more will begin to experiment and find value in scripted broadcasts and “off-the-cuff” video interaction with fans. This medium’s most effective value-add to athletes is the ability to engage in simple fan Q&A via the streaming Twitter and Facebook feeds. As more prominent athlete personalities use live video to attract fans, other athletes will follow in the typical cycle of platform adoption.

MOBILE:

Mobile is the future of social media and sports media consumption. As high-speed mobile broadband networks and mobile devices capable of live streaming video proliferate, individual athletes with global fan bases will begin to recognize the power and reach of our pocket-sized friends. By 2010, eMarketer predicts mobile subscribers to reach 4.9 billion worldwide, which is more than twice the amount of internet users. Unique applications like the “Chad Ochocinco Experience” that offer fun ways to interact and connect with athletes are the future of content delivery to fans. There’s nothing more convenient than having one-touch access to your favorite athlete through your iPhone or Blackberry. Only a handful of players can justify having their own mobile application, but expect to see similar ones pop up for other “larger than life” sports personalities such as Shaquille O’Neal, Dwight Howard, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, or Lance Armstrong. Any big-name athlete with global appeal would be a fool to not adopt mobile.

Steve Cobb specializes in the online activation of professional athletes and other sports clientele through the use of social media networks and digital marketing campaigns. He has a strong grasp on the emotional connection that sports elicit from fans and the importance of aligning brands with athletes and teams in an authentic manner. As a Partner at Activ8Social, Steve seeks to empower corporate brands to leverage social media properties in order to cultivate this passion and enhance image.
Let me first start by saying that writing this article has been challenging to say the least. How does one summarize their thoughts on the future of social media in sports with all of the changes we have seen in the past year already. I initially considered writing about new technologies that may have a big impact in 2010, but rather, decided to keep it simple and focus on the human element. In order to look forward to 2010, I have to quickly look back to see where we have come from to understand where we are going. The past year has seen Twitter become mainstream, Facebook reach numbers in excess of 350M active users, athletes are starting to understand they can control their own brand online and many teams/leagues are still trying to figure out how to “control” social media. If 2009 taught us anything, it’s that social media is not a fad, rather, it is an essential part of a marketing and communications strategy. And, the sports world is in a tremendous position to leverage social media to it’s fullest because of it’s inherent fan base. But, all that being said, the sports world still has a long ways to go.

As I am located north of the border, I will share insights using examples from projects I have worked on with the Calgary Stampeders and most recently, the 2009 Grey Cup Festival (Canada’s SuperBowl). Both entities implemented a social media strategy that included establishing social accounts, implementing social media driven contests (http://stampsconnect.com/promos) (http://greycupfanconnect.com) and building websites that leverage the popular social websites that millions of people are already using. (http://stampsconnect.com) (http://greycupfestivalconnect.com). They embraced the fact that the fans now control their brand online. And, by creating platforms that aggregate content and allows fans to easily share their opinions (good and bad), they have generated an open conversation that tells their fans that they care about what they have to say and, in turn, allows them to respond to their fans. If 2009 was the year for the sports world to start experimenting with social media, 2010 will be the year that we see the sports world realize that social media is not just about technology and ROI, it is about people, relationships and trust!

In 2010, I believe we will see many sports organizations truly embrace social media by allocating the appropriate resources necessary to implement an effective strategy. Fans want to know that their favorite team or league is listening and there are many online tools that allow sports organizations to deliver the content and platforms their fans want without it being a huge drain on existing resources. That being said, they can’t just throw their social media responsibilities into the hands of their IT guy or Marketing department alone. Effectively integrating social media into a marketing mix requires a complete change in the way that sports teams and leagues market to and communicate with their fan base and there must be someone responsible for ensuring their social media efforts align with the team/league goals.”
change in the way that sports teams and leagues market to and communicate with their fan base and there must be someone responsible for ensuring their social media efforts align with the team/league goals. I believe we will finally see this shift happen in 2010 and as teams/leagues start to engage with their community of fans through social media, they will see many opportunities to monetize their efforts in the form of sponsorship, advertising, ticket sales and merchandise sales.

Trevor Turnbull is an online entrepreneur who’s experience includes sales, online marketing, advertising, and social media. Trevor owned his own website development company (http://onewebsite.ca) before transitioning to work for a large interactive agency (http://zu.com). During his time with zu, Trevor worked with the CFL’s Calgary Stampeders and helped them implement a social media strategy and a cutting edge website that aggregates content from popular social websites (http://stampsconnect.com).
Thank you for offering me the opportunity to write about my predictions for social media and sports in 2010.

There are multiple distribution platforms for consuming sports: television, radio, in person, sports web sites, and the athlete, coach, and team tweets. The balance is heavily skewed towards television and radio right now, but as people increasingly spend time online, it isn’t difficult to predict that they are going to consume more information through social media, in an intermediated fashion, as opposed to directly.

A current example of this is Alan Hahn of Newsday, who provides running commentary of Knicks’ games, along with the scores, while they are in-progress. He is providing. For those that want to keep up with the Knicks, but who are also multitasking and doing several other things, this is a perfectly acceptable way to stay on top of the game, yet possess enough in-game knowledge to speak about the game intelligently afterwards.

Purists might say that tweets (or Facebook status updates) fall far short of capturing the full experience, but knowing what goes on in games is a particular social commodity that is fungible, and can be approximated through social media.

When someone says that “I heard the Animal Collective concert was amazing,” they didn’t hear it, they read it, most likely on a social network. Sports is going to see more of this level of engagement. I would like to see these conversations embraced and encouraged, rather than dismissed. The business opportunity: who is going to do the best job of providing value to consumers who want to connect with an athlete, team or league?

As CEO and founder of FanFeedr, Ty Ahmad-Taylor brings over fifteen years of experience in interactive media and journalism to provide the overall creative vision and strategic leadership for the FanFeedr website and associated services. Before founding FanFeedr, Ty served as SVP, Strategy and Product Development at Viacom, where he was the product lead and manager for a variety of MTV properties and content, such as MTV.com, VH1.com, CMT.com and MTVmusic.com.
I hope you enjoyed these thoughts and predictions. Thanks again to everyone who contributed.

Please let me know if you ever want to chat or if there is anything I can ever help you with. You can find me at:

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Happy Holidays and I hope you have a great 2010!