



2015-16 OFFSEASON SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIC PLAN

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1. Situation Analysis:

After a successful 2015 indoor football season, the Bloomington Edge are now three months into the offseason. The on-field personnel, players and coaching staff performed with an immeasurable amount of heart in the spring season, fighting for what would have been Bloomington's first X-League championship title. Despite falling short of the playoffs, these men still showed what Bloomington Edge football is all about. Now, as members of the front office team, it is *our turn* to perform with that same heart, shifting our attention and attitudes towards preparation for the 2016 season and beyond.

With the recent purchase of the team by Dr. Omar Khokhar, M.D., key front-office personnel in place for 2016, and a successful transition into the Champions Indoor Football League (CIFL) we must start to plan behind the scenes for what will be a critical factor in the team's long-term success: fan engagement and sponsor relationships across diverse social media platforms.

Without fans coming to our games and sponsors endorsing our brand, we would not have the ability to put a successful team on the field. And that's why, during this off-season – we must consider how we promote our team to the Bloomington-Normal community. To do that, we must ask ourselves some tough questions: “Who are we targeting in our off-season social media campaign, and why?” “What do we want to achieve with an amped-up social media effort?” “Besides our fans and sponsors, who else do we know that are stakeholders and can benefit from our campaign?” “What is the intended outcome for our campaign?”

These are all questions that need to be answered intelligently, with special reflection given to our new ultimate goal, broken down in three parts:

- a.) *Maintain relationships with current fans and sponsors while starting new ones*
- b.) *Grow user engagement and reach on all of our social media platforms*
- c.) *Increase fan attendance at games*

The last question asked, “What is the intended outcome for our campaign?” strikes home as the most important question to ask -- and our three-part ultimate goal together seems to give an accurate answer. However, if we are to execute an offseason social media campaign that achieves our ultimate goal of maintaining relationships while starting new ones, growing user engagement and reach on all of our social media platforms, and increasing attendance at games, we need a clear idea of how we are going to do that.

One way to gain insight for our plan is by assessing our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). In the table below, we can analyze the current state of the Edge's social media (and website) performance, focusing on what we already succeed in doing (strengths), what we do not succeed in doing (weaknesses), internal and external conditions that we can take advantage of (opportunities), and what could harm us if we don't take action (threats).

Bloomington Edge: Social Media SWOT Analysis

(Figure 1)

<p>(Internal)</p> <p>Strengths (positive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership involvement • Established "Fan" base (2,600+ likes Facebook, 500+ Twitter) • Play-by-play game coverage (posts and tweets) • Team updates (Facebook timeline) • Social media plugins and buttons on website • Photos and videos on website 	<p>(Internal)</p> <p>Weaknesses (inadequate)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small "Fan" base • Fluctuating Fan engagement • Inconsistent posting (non-gameday posts on Facebook and Twitter are rare) • Lacking in photos and videos on all platforms (small click count) • Not enough traffic leading to website
<p>(Internal & External)</p> <p>Opportunities (helpful)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful 2015 season and new ownership purchase • Successful transition into CIFL 	<p>(External)</p> <p>Threats (negative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current strategy to improve user reach (who sees your page) and engagement (likes, comments, shares, follows)

Internal & External: Factors that make an impact on the franchise. In social media, this might be situations that influence the number of fans or followers liking/unliking or sharing/suggesting your page, which consequently affects team visibility, media and sponsor recognition, and game attendance.

What this table tells us is that while we have ownership that is passionate about being involved with social media and our play-by-play game coverage is popular -- we do not have a large enough online presence, and our fans are not engaging enough with our platforms outside of games. Our Twitter and Facebook content does serve as advertising and a source of team news, and we do host social media buttons on our website that lead to our social media platforms, but there is room for improvement as far as our online presence goes. Some ideas, which will be discussed further in the tactics section of this plan --

include posting more photographs and videos on our website and posting more advertising content and news links on social media that click through to our website. Additionally, since we have already established relationships with over a dozen sponsors and thousands of fans, one of the only biggest threats to our team's social media strategy is merely not having one planned out -- and that can be a dangerous thing.

The future is bright, however, as the CIFL shows promise as a 12-member league that hosts teams familiar to the Edge. The league presumably would have a greater return on investment in social media through our team's revamped social media strategy. If we gain more fans, so will the league. Through this current situation, we can see another dimension for understanding what actions we need to take, how to take those them, and why.

2. Objectives:

As mentioned in the SWOT Analysis (Figure 1), our Facebook Page has 2,600+ "Likes" and our Twitter page has 500+ "followers". While more "Likes" and "followers" can certainly be a goal, our primary objective is to collectively multiply fan engagement with all social media platforms by 25% by January 30, 2016. We will achieve this through posting content that progressively accumulates online participation while encouraging family-friendly, in-person interaction with the team at planned events. Once we reach January 30, we will collect data and review our strategy so we can determine the best way to proceed in engaging our fans.

Our secondary objective is to establish stronger relationships with Very Important Sponsors (VIS) through two "sponsored" tweets, Facebook posts or Instagram photos from sponsors onto any one of our platforms each month until March 2016. This sponsored content plan will then change at the start as the 2016 season begins, with sponsors creating gameday content for each home game.

3. Audience:

According to the Pew Research Center "Social Networking Fact Sheet", 74% of online adults were using social networking sites as of January 2014. Of that 74%, 76% are women and 72% are men. The largest age group (comprising of both men and women) is the 18 to 29 year old range. 78% of all adults graduated from some college, while 73% have a college degree or higher. Social networking sites are also appeal those without a college degree, with 72% of all adults having only a high school diploma and 79% earning less than \$30,000 a year.

The Pew Research Center’s Fact Sheet information gives us a good base for what to look for as our target audience begins to unfold. Yet, there is a distinction between the social media audience for all online adults, and the social media audience for our specific and diverse Bloomington Edge social media platforms. Thus, if we begin to uncover data from these platforms, we can start to see some hardcore truths about them.

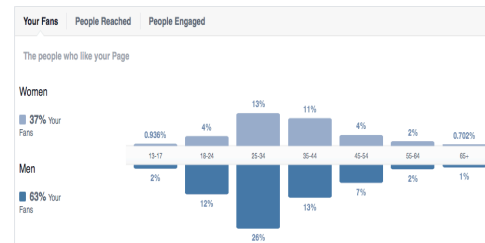


Figure 2

Starting with Facebook Insights, the Bloomington Edge Facebook Page has data (Figure 2 graph on right) that shows 63% of people who “Like” our Page, or Fans -- are men, while 37% are women. Of the 63% who are men, the age group with the most Likes are the 25 to 34-year olds, which constitute for 25.8% of our Fans. This same age group is also represented by 13.3% out of the total 37% of women, which is the largest age group of female Fans. The next largest age group with the most Likes is the 35 to 44-year olds, represented by 13.3% of men and 11.3% of women.

One age group that seems to hide from us, however, is the 18-24 year olds, with 11.9% of Fans. This is likely going to be the more tech-savvy and influential age group that will have the most power over our Page reach and Like performance.

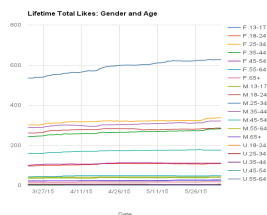


Figure 3

In addition, with regards to Like performance -- we can also use the graph on the left (Figure 3) to view how our Page “Likes” have performed throughout the Page’s existence, which are separated by gender and age. *(Note: “U” stands for Unknown, as some Facebook users may not disclose their gender when registering an account on Facebook.)*

With all information under consideration, we can confidently identify our Facebook target audience as adult males aged 18 to 44 and women 25 to 44 who are presumably college-educated, earn an income of at least \$30,000.00, enjoy attending sporting events, own a smartphone, and are likely to spread word-of-mouth through social media.

Now that we know our Facebook audience, we must ask another question: Who do we target on a platform that's often refers to its all-important, short, 140-character posting feature (tweets) as "texting on the web"? To answer this, we need to go straight to the source: Twitter itself.

Twitter Analytics tells us via our profile's audience insights page that 85% of our followers are male and that their top interest is in NFL football, which comprises of 78% of the total audience. 74% of the audience consumes sports news, 73% attend in sporting events, and 59% follow college football. Their first language is English, their lifestyle fits in the category of online buyers, and their top mobile carrier is Verizon (41%). In device categories, which measures the number of mobile operating systems or other platforms used by our followers, 61% use iOS. Another 61% use Android, while less than 1% use Blackberry phones and tablets. 1% use the mobile web on other devices, and 53% use desktop and laptop computers. (The percentage total adds up to over 100 because our audience uses multiple platforms.)

Now let's turn to a nationwide Twitter demographic to compare and contrast with our own Twitter audience. Starting with education level, 54% of Twitter users have completed high school. 31% of users have a bachelor's degree, and 14% possess a master's degree. In the occupation category, 33% of users work in professional and technical positions while only 8% are students. 19% of users earn \$75,000.00 to \$99,999.00, 57% are married, and 72% own their own home. Twitter users are online buyers, ethnic explorers, and their top mobile carrier is AT&T (42%), next to only Verizon (35%).

Using this information, we can identify our specific Twitter target audience as adult males and females aged 18 to 44 that are at college-educated, married, and earn an income of \$75,000.00 to \$99,000.00. They like to watch their favorite NFL team during the season. They are homeowners, own their own smartphones, eat a variety of foods, and are likely to purchase merchandise as well as game tickets and spread word-of-mouth -- through mobile use of social media.

Our last social media platform that we use is Instagram. Since we are just starting a new profile with content posted, we do not have the ability to analyze our own profile data. However, we can still find out who to target through a social media blog called jennstrends.com. The blog's creator, Jenn Herman, mentions in her bio that since the blog's creation, she has become a globally recognized expert in Instagram marketing and social media marketing and that her blog has won awards for being a Top 10 Social Media Blog in 2014 and 2015. She has also spoken at multiple social media conferences and has been featured in several publications nationwide.

In regards to Instagram, Herman calls it a photo-and-video sharing site, developed for mobile use with the intention of users taking photographs or videos and uploading the media instantly through the Instagram app. This allows users of the app to connect with family, friends, people they work with, and even with people who just have similar interests.

In one of her published blog posts titled “Instagram Statistics for 2014”, Herman provides detailed and in-depth data on user information, engagement levels, and brand information by industry. As part of her post, she created infographics for all three aspects of social media statistics from reports she cited. Rather than repeating data here for all three aspects, let us just focus on one: user information.

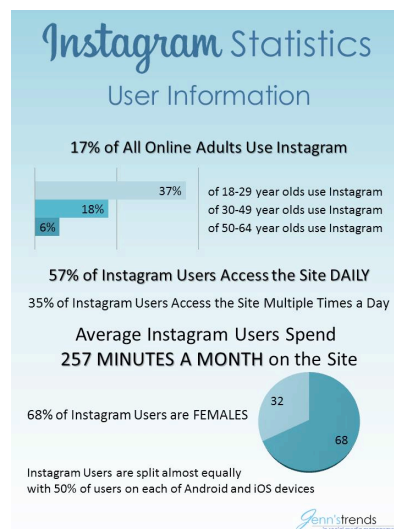


Figure 4

This infographic (Figure 4) is devoted to 2014’s user information data and shows us relevant demographic information, most notably that 17% of all online adults use Instagram, with 57% of users accessing it daily. Breaking down the data on all users, 68% are female -- which gives us an extensive market for growing our female fan base. Further exploration reveals that of the 37% of all users fall within the 18 to 29-year old age group, while 18% fall within the 30 to 49-year old group, and only 6% fall within the 50 - 64-year old group. It also does not seem to matter which kind of smartphone you have, as users are split almost equally at 50% for both iOS and Android, according to Herman.

With this data, we can identify our Instagram audience as females aged 18 to 49 who are married, love sports, and have children under the age of 10 who are involved in sports themselves. These women earn an income of \$30,000.00 to \$70,000.00, are online buyers, own their own home, and are

ethnic explorers. They dream of living in a foreign country someday, own their own smartphones, and like to spread word-of-mouth on their smartphones.

Concluding this section, we can label fans who engage with our social media platforms as a primary audience. But because there's more than just fans that engage with these same platforms, we have a secondary target audience: health and service organizations as well as educational institutions that have been sponsors for the past three years and can enhance our team's image as an organization that truly cares about the community. This is a secondary target audience because It's important to find ways to give back to these important sponsors and grow in relationship with each other, as fans will take notice.

4. Strategy:

At this point in the process, we know our team's social media strengths and weaknesses, we recognize what opportunities we can take advantage of, and what threats we can protect ourselves from through proactive action. We have specific and measurable objectives for our strategic plan, and we know who our specific and diverse audiences are on each platform and how to target them. Now we must move onto the heart of this plan, which is the design of key plays (strategy) to be executed (tactics).

To achieve this successfully, we need to tie in everything considered up to this point to ensure that when we implement this plan and all the tactics are executed, everything runs smoothly. Thus, if we refer back to our SWOT table (Figure 1), we can recall that we have strengths such as passionate ownership, an established "fan" base, popular play-by-play coverage, content leading traffic to our website, etc., we also have weaknesses. Among those weaknesses listed were: a small fan base, fluctuating fan engagement, inconsistent content posting for non-game days, and not enough content leading to our website.

We also saw that despite our weaknesses, the future seems bright and after the purchase of the team by a local doctor, we have positioned ourselves to strategically take advantage of the opportunity of being a new team in a new league. This information, combined with our objectives as well as target audience -- gives us more of a game plan for our strategy, which should be short and concise x's and o's, setting up the plays that will be executed with tactics. So without further ado, here it is:

- 1.) Introduce ownership to fans and produce brief updates on the organization, along with family-friendly posts for fans to engage with
- 2.) Create content that showcases relationship-building with colleges and elementary schools

- 3.) Review which kinds of posts are popular and generate the most interest from fans and sponsors, and begin community appearances - post content from appearances
- 4.) Generate preseason content promoting in-game benefits for fans while publicizing Edge 4 Kids football program and Junior Dancers

5. Tactics:

SEPTEMBER 2015 - NOVEMBER 2015

Create simultaneous and standalone content messages for different platforms using a variety of media for first three months. See below:

Facebook:

Share brief updates on the organization and develop family-friendly posts for fans

Content Ideas:

- a.) Announcements of plans to install new 12x18 video boards & enhanced Wi-Fi, as well as new home game jerseys
- b.) Post YouTube video montage of best plays from 2015 season
- c.) Facebook reminders of Edge community events
- d.) Start team blog on WordPress and connect to social media plugins
- e.) Post photographs and video of Halloween scavenger hunt/social media event (item “d” in Twitter content ideas)

Twitter:

Initiate efforts to humanize the team through in-person interacting with the community while promoting merchandise

Content Ideas:

- a.) Tweet updates with photographs or videos depicting Edge players and other relevant personnel building relationships with colleges and elementary schools
- b.) Tweet photograph of new Edge jersey
- c.) Attend “Make a Miracle” nonprofit fundraiser Oct. 17 benefitting Miracle League of Central Illinois and tweet our attendance
- d.) *Host social media event where fans participate in a Halloween scavenger hunt assisted by Bloomington City Transportation (fan locate footballs around the city with Edge logo and tweet winner receiving award -- i.e., free tickets to a game)

e.) Establish partnership with Bloomington Hy-Vee grocery store and have Edge staff hold field goal contest on outside parking lot at Hy-Vee Market Grille, where Hy-Vee customers can kick field goals tickets for prizes. One example prize is 10¢ towards fuel savers card. Hy-Vee agrees to mention us on Facebook and we will donate part of the proceeds to charity. We will tweet contest and raffle updates on Twitter, including name of contestant.

Instagram:

Generate content appealing to female target audience during major calendar events while also regularly delivering team-focused content

Content Ideas:

- a.) Football/fall-themed photograph contest for fans
- b.) Post photograph on NFL kickoff day with a promotion and message that we cannot wait for the 2016 season
- c.) Post photographs or video of fans trying to locate footballs in Halloween scavenger hunt/social media event

NOVEMBER 2015 - MARCH 2016

Continue to create simultaneous and standalone content messages for different platforms using a variety of media for last four months. Review overall progress January 30, 2016. Continue to build community involvement and start direct-selling campaigns for merchandise and tickets.

Facebook:

Begin aggressively marketing merchandise through public events attended by team members that promote healthy activities and goodwill during holiday season. Provide fans venue for extracurricular football-related activities, such as Christmas party and Super Bowl party.

Content Ideas:

- a.) Handpick coaches and players to run in Bloomington's 2015 Turkey Trot or Jingle bell wearing new jerseys and upload post-race photographs onto Bloomington Edge Page with link to purchase jerseys online
- b.) Share new WordPress blog posts beginning Thanksgiving extending through the new year holiday (publicize donation efforts at OSF and write stories about players' personal lives and what they have overcome)
- c.) Host Edge Christmas or New Years' dinner party for fans - have fans use social media to check in

- d.) Upload photographs of staff or players at Christmas or New Years' dinner party
- e.) Host Edge Super Bowl Party at U.S. Cellular Coliseum and have fans upload photographs with hashtags to show participation and fan devotion to specific teams (Edge and NFL team)
- f.) Generate excitement for start of season by sharing preseason WordPress blog post on players preparing for first game

Twitter:

Adapt Facebook holiday content tactics for Twitter. Tweet links to blog posts in Twitter feed.

Content Ideas:

- a.) Tweet player-coach participation in Bloomington's 2015 Turkey Trot or Jingle bell wearing new jerseys and upload post-race photographs onto Bloomington Edge profile with link to purchase jerseys online
- b.) Share new WordPress blog posts beginning Thanksgiving extending through the new year holiday (publicize donation efforts and write stories about players' personal lives and what they have overcome)
- c.) Tweet photographs of players and coaches pitching in at OSF and helping donate food to homeless during holiday season
- d.) Share new WordPress blog posts during holiday season (publicize donation efforts and write stories about players' personal lives)
- e.) Host Edge Super Bowl Party at U.S. Cellular Coliseum and have fans upload photographs with hashtags to show participation and fan devotion to specific teams (Edge and NFL team)
- f.) Generate excitement for start of season sharing preseason WordPress blog post on players preparing for first game

Instagram:

Adapt Facebook and Twitter holiday content tactics for Instagram. Duplicate Super Bowl party tactics. Publicize Edge 4 Kids youth football program and Junior Dancers with photographs from practices.

Content Ideas:

- a.) Upload post-race photographs from Bloomington's 2015 Turkey Trot or Jingle Bell Run with message and link marketing new jerseys
- b.) Upload holiday-themed photographs depicting community involvement at OSF for those in need for the holiday season
- c.) Upload photographs of staff or players at Christmas or New Years' dinner party

- d.) Host Edge Super Bowl Party at U.S. Cellular Coliseum and have fans upload photographs with hashtags to show participation and fan devotion to specific teams (Edge and NFL team)
- e.) Attend Edge 4 Kids and Junior Dancers youth football practices and upload photographs from practices
- f.) Upload photographs from Edge team practices before first game

Calendar/Timetable:

As illustrated in the tactics above, there is a two-part plan of execution broken down into four-month periods to increase fan engagement by the start of the season. In that plan, we begin by producing “simultaneous and standalone content messages for different platforms using a variety of media for first three months”. Several of these content action items (beginning in September and concluding in November) are meant to open a dialogue between the team and the fans (which includes starting a new WordPress blog), setting up for engagement with our platforms to increase over time.

Once those first three months have concluded, we will start to shift our attention towards achieving the goal of increasing fan attendance. Noting that the holiday season as well as the Super Bowl falls within this time frame, the content we produce is geared more towards making money through merchandise and attempting to compel fans to buy tickets for the 2016 season (thus the emphasis on holiday-themed content and hosting a Super Bowl Party).

Budget:

Some of the action items listed as tactics will cost money. To how total costs have been figured, see below:

- Starting a WordPress Blog = \$20.00
- Hosting a Halloween Edge Footballs Scavenger Hunt = \$100
- Hosting a Christmas or New Years’ Party = \$100
- Hosting a Super Bowl Party = \$750

Total Cost = \$970

Evaluation:

Evaluating of this plan means having a way to determine whether our objectives stated at the beginning of this plan has been met. Since this is a social media strategic plan, we will utilize two ways of evaluating our team's success with this plan:

- Reviewing our progress on January 30, 2016 with social media analytics, with start-of-season review in March 2016
- Compiling news clips reporting on significant events where a large volume of fans engaged with our team and social media platforms

This evaluation marks the end of the of this social media strategic plan for the 2016 season. It is now time to implement the above-mentioned strategies and tactics and adhere to the budget outlined for this plan (only making changes that fall within reason and responsibly moves us forward). As stated in the situation analysis, it is ***our time*** to perform and show our fans what Bloomington Edge football operations are all about. Go Edge!!