

FCS ADA | CORNER

SOCIAL MEDIA EDUCATION IS ONGOING TASK

It was just a few years ago when Facebook swept across the college athletics landscape. Athletics administrators across the country were puzzled about how this new media phenomenon would affect their campuses and student-athletes.



Ron Strollo



Unfortunately, there were numerous negative incidents that caused administrators to start monitoring the Facebook pages of student-athletes and implementing educational programs regarding social media. Although many Facebook issues have subsided, Twitter has now become the new media outlet of choice and new issues have emerged. With the revolving door that is college athletics, educating our student-athletes and ourselves is a never-ending process.

I, for one, am not the social media guru (much to the dismay of our media relations staff) but I realize the significance of a positive social media reputation. Therefore, I feel social media education is vital not just for our student-athletes, but our staff as well.

Although our student-athletes are usually between the ages of 18 and 22 and are considered young adults, they are YOUNG. We must remember that sometimes young people do foolish things that, in their mind, are harmless and fun. But that “fun” can lead to trouble. This is where our education comes into play.

This year, we instituted a social media educational seminar for each of our teams administered by our compliance staff. During these meetings, our student-athletes watched a power-point presentation that outlined our social media policies and repercussions of violations and provided examples of poor social media judgment. Our media relations staff also advises our student-athletes regarding social media.

We informed our student-athletes that “before participating in any social media activities (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.), understand that anything posted is available to anyone in the world. Any text, posting or photo placed on a social platform is completely out of your control the moment it is placed — even if you limit access to your site.” They were also notified that Facebook and Twitter pages were going to be monitored.

I want our student-athletes to be active on social media, but they need to be cognizant that they are some of the most visible representatives of our institution. Social media missteps as a college

student may have a long-term effect. Such ill-advised actions may cause someone to lose a scholarship and/or be harmful to their employment status.

We also try to educate our athletes on advantages of social media, such as networking. Just about every industry has a Facebook or Twitter page and having a positive social media image can enhance a person’s job opportunities.

You can’t go anywhere nowadays without seeing a company’s Facebook address or Twitter handle. At games, at the grocery store or the mall, social media marketing is everywhere.

From those days of uneasiness at the genesis of the Facebook explosion to now, the perception of social media has taken a 180-degree turn. It has gone from being banned at some places to being a vital component in our marketing plans. Our marketing director and media relations staff have been using social media to promote our teams for more than four years, and each year we delve deeper into each platform. We joined Facebook in 2008, but from the summer of 2012 until February 2013, our Facebook “Likes” more than quadrupled from 2,900 to nearly 12,800. Since joining Twitter in 2009, @YSUsports has been followed by more than 3,100 people.

Those two platforms help us tremendously when reaching our fan base. When we advertise game promotions, ticket sales and fundraising events, our fans are notified instantly through those mediums. We get to control our message and image while engaging our fans. Just recently we started Instagram and Pinterest accounts to help showcase and highlight our university, student-athletes and gameday atmosphere.

When we played and upset Pittsburgh, 31-17, in football on Sept. 1, 2012, #youngstownstate was the seventh-most trending topic on Twitter that night, and ignited a 53 percent growth in followers from August 2012 through January 2013.

Social media is here to stay and it will continually grow from year to year. New platforms will mean new challenges and new opportunities. It is up to us to try to stay ahead of the curve. We must continue to provide the necessary education for our student-athletes so they can enjoy an outstanding college experience. Continuing social media education for us helps in that endeavor.

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