



2010 ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATION




Many years ago, at my first NACDA Convention, I received some sage advice. A well-known athletics director admonished me to remember that the same axioms and tenets used to establish the foundations of successful businesses are the very principles and practices needed to fortify and sustain successful athletics programs.



Ken Beazer



Nearly 20 years later, his words relating to branding, positioning and marketing have never been truer. “Timing is everything,” he said. “When the opportunity to strike and enhance your brand and market position comes around, you have to move swiftly, or risk losing any momentum you have worked hard to generate.”

With his words still embedded in my memory, I truly believe this is where the NCAA Division I Football Championship Subdivision currently finds itself. We have excellent selling points and a host of vehicles with which to advance those selling points. There has been no greater time to be part of this subdivision than now. The newly expanded playoff structure and championship timeline offer multiple opportunities to boldly move the FCS brand forward and advance our position within the market. If done effectively, these efforts can provide expanded exposure, while enhancing the overall experience of our student-athletes.

The FCS level of competition has increased substantially over the years, warranting the expansion from a 16-team playoff to the new 20-team structure. The quality of play and caliber of the student-athletes competing at the FCS level is remarkable. The recent trend of football attendance increases at many of our institutions is an outward expression of the general public’s appreciation for the high level of play we put on the field every weekend.

There has been ongoing discussion relating to development of the FCS brand, positioning that brand and taking advantage of the marketing opportunities now available. These discussions have identified several ideas and practices that, if employed in a timely manner, would greatly increase the likelihood of success and advance the brand awareness of the FCS at this opportune time.

While these discussions have identified both micro and macro approaches to increase FCS brand awareness, it must begin within each of our own communities. Our brand of football should be recognized within every community where an FCS program resides. If our brand is not overwhelmingly understood within our region, then we have no tangible identity to start from.

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We must realize that there is a market and a great interest in a football format that crowns a champion through a playoff structure. This is a major part of who we are, which as a result, becomes a component of our position within the market. The FCS level provides a high caliber of NCAA Football that ends with a champion being crowned through a playoff. This is a viable niche. Whether our institutions reside in large metropolitan areas or in small communities, there is a built-in market for what we do.

Obviously, working with and forming good relationships with local media outlets is important to the overall success of getting our message out. Relationships are vital in this area and constant, effective stewardship with the media should be the hallmark we strive for.

However, we need to also realize that in the “New World Order” of today’s media, we have become the media. Technological advances have turned each athletics department into actual media outlets, the first choice for news for many of our fans. Facebook, Twitter, online media guides, photo galleries, streaming, live game stats, etc., all provide unfettered content control of our message. In essence, an effective Internet presence allows each institution the autonomy to shape and form its message.

Another grassroots effort that can have a high impact upon expanding the footprint of our brand is community service. There is an extreme need to get our football student-athletes out and involved with community projects. We cannot expect our communities to take active ownership in our programs if we do not get actively involved within the community.

Community service creates a nexus, a veritable bond and ownership between our team and the local fan base. This bond not only increases our market, it also has a tendency to render gate receipts less susceptible to the usual ticket fluctuations that are a direct result of wins and losses. In other words, it builds fan loyalty. Furthermore, community goodwill also buys fan patience and stability, two requisite components for any long-term plan to build a successful program.

There are many other key actions each FCS institution can employ now to promote and expand our brand. The key is to swiftly and actively engage our local constituencies now before this existing window of opportunity closes, thus thwarting the current momentum we have worked hard to achieve.

Thanks for this article to Ken Beazer, director of athletics at Southern Utah University and member of the FCS ADA Executive Committee.