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Strategic Insights On:

**Sports**

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## Sports

Sports marketing is a true team effort. Yes, sports are a passion – it's fun – it's exciting, but when clients turn to us, it's because they realize it's a business. And, the business of sports can include professional athlete branding, increased ticket sales, merchandising, grants to support travel and tourism and a host of other related opportunities, strategies and tactics.

We hope you enjoy this content and evok's commitment to the sports industry. If you would ever like to be a guest writer or suggest blogs for us to write, please contact us at [info@evokad.com](mailto:info@evokad.com).



# REAL-TIME ENGAGEMENT WITH SPORTS FANS: A NECESSITY FOR ALL TEAMS

Social media is impacting fan interactions with their favorite sports teams, and the fans are expecting more engagement than ever before. According to Nielsen, 87% of American adults now own a cell phone, and social media reached almost 200 million people each week in the final quarter of 2016. Americans are looking to their favorite teams to provide them with immediate updates, ability to purchase items on their phones and interact with the players. The more technology advances, the more the fans expect. Professional sports teams need to start providing their active followers with real-time engagement, or they may find they will have less fans in the future.

## Real-Time Social Media: What It Does for the Fans

Real-time social media, as it relates to sports teams, is providing fans with current and up-to-date information. Real-time information is a must for the most loyal of fans; however, teams have to be willing to accept the bad with the good. Not all news is positive, yet it still needs to be disseminated with the same speed and intensity, or a team could look like they are hiding from their fans – the expectation level is high for all news and information.

Advancing technology allows players and coaches to answer any questions from fans in real time and significantly impacts fan loyalty. When a fan gets a response from their favorite player, it just validates their importance to the team and builds a strong relationship. And, its not just team-to-fan, social media also opens up discussions fan-to-fan before, during and even after the games.

## Importance of Real-Time Marketing

Sporting event attendance has decreased in the recent years, and fans are not as loyal as they once were, so the interaction makes them feel part of the team. It's also not just one connection or one interaction, it is an engagement process that teams create — over time, the fans will begin to trust in your brand and be loyal to the team, win or lose.

## How to Improve Engagement

There are many ways to improve your engagement, but one of the most important is timeliness — most fans expect answers within four hours. Fans that expect instant gratification will build trust in the brand when they routinely get timely responses.

Authenticity is also an opportunity for most teams. Relying on the 19-year-old social media intern to be the voice of Cam Newton isn't always the best policy. It is important to have the actual players engage with the fans through social media; fans want to hear from the players themselves to create those personal connections.

It is important that the content is genuine and not conflicting with the team brand. It is a strong rule of thumb to have brand managers approve all content before it is posted.

Collaboration is a great way to extend brand message. Teaming up with sponsors or companies that also cater to your fans can heighten interest from new and old fans alike. When the NFL teamed up with EA Sports, video game developer for Madden NFL, which has an exclusive deal with the League to bring football excitement to video game players, they also teamed up with local charities and provide financial assistance to their communities.

Lastly, to improve the overall experience and fan-brand engagement, many teams are providing contests, some even to win apparel, tickets to a game or the ultimate experience of traveling with the team for a road game. Thank those fans that do engage as it has never been so important.

In recognition of these engaged fans, the Seattle Seahawks named their fans the 12th man on the field, and a number 12 flag is raised before every home game. The result? The Seahawks' stadium is one of the loudest in the world and has even literally made the earth shake.

## **Trending Topics**

Technology is changing daily and social media marketing is changing in sports. Here are some of the most recent trends we are seeing in sports marketing. Some examples include:

1. Virtual reality is being used so fans can get up close and personal. The fans can ride a horse in the Kentucky Derby, drive a car in a NASCAR race, be on the field at an NFL game or play against their favorite tennis pro.
2. Augmented reality is also being used more by sports teams. The Denver Broncos launched their "Come To Life" campaign where fans can take a photo of a code on a cup and be transferred into an interactive world where they can take a tour of the locker room, go out on the field, take a picture with your favorite player and even win prizes.
3. Real-time social media marketing is very important to a sports team because teams must strike while the iron is hot. Capitalize on this week's win, as one never knows when the next one is coming.
4. Fewer fans are using TV to watch sports in favor of digital channels, finding alternatives that provide a more personalized experience where they can get real-time stats, chat with other fans and stream games, often those blacked out in their local DMA.
5. Mobile notifications are being used with more targeted information, along with engagement activities.

As stadiums across the country struggle to fill their seats, the best sports teams will keep the fans engaged, pre, during and post game, and in return will build an even more loyal fan base.



# MARKETING TO THE MODERN FEMALE SPORTS FAN

Sporting events have long been seen as, primarily, a man's activity, not only those who participate but also the fans. Research suggests that when people are asked what they think of when asked about sports fans, most people envision several men gathered around a TV or at a sports stadium. Times are changing and women are changing the channel from soap operas to professional sports in a shift that will keep marketers and publishers on their toes. Here's how:

## Stereotypes

Sports marketers for years have disregarded women in their marketing efforts; they were not even a thought in their commercials, ads or even apparel. Female athletes are also victims to this stereotype and often do not earn as much money as their male athlete counterparts. An NBA player averages \$4.5 million, while the average salary in the WNBA is \$72,000. On average, women make 77% of what males make for playing professionally, the same sport.

Many people are noticing and giving women the credit they deserve, for instance in a press conference, tennis player Andy Murray had just lost to Sam Querrey in the quarterfinals at the All England Club, and the question from a reporter started by referring to Querrey as the "first US player" to reach a major semi-final since 2009. Murray quickly corrected the reporter and stated he was the first "male player" not the first "USA player," as several American women have reached this level of play. The reporter had just discounted the fact that a woman had accomplished the same thing as a man.

## Women in Advertisements

Male versus female endorsements show that women have been an afterthought; they do not pick up as many deals as male athletes and when they do they are paid much less. On Forbes' recent list of the world's highest-paid athletes, Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams were the only women to crack the Top 100, racking up \$23 million and \$13 million in endorsements, respectively. While impressive, those paydays pale in comparison to male tennis stars like Rafael Nadal, who banked \$28 million over the last year, and Roger Federer, with \$58 million.

Only in recent years have women even been featured in ads and commercials – historically only female tennis players got endorsements. The marketing efforts are slowly moving in the direction of female endorsements due to the realized purchasing power of women who control 80% of consumer purchases. Women also are responsible for growing the active wear market to bring in millions of dollars for retailers.

Women relate to other women that are strong and independent, and when the ad tells their story of strength women are drawn to it. Carl Jr. used Ronda Rousey in their ads and their sales soared beyond what they ever thought they would. Under Armour, Nike, Coca Cola, Adidas, Gatorade and EA Sports have all put women athletes in their advertising, representing them as strong athletic and competitive. They all have realized that their women fans are a huge untapped base of customers and will grow their sales by targeting this market.

## Apparel and Mobile Shopping

For years female fans could only purchase merchandise that was made for a man. If they wanted a shirt they would have to get the smallest male size, and the cut was not flattering to the female form. The NFL was one of the first to realize that their female fans wanted apparel that was designed for them – it was called the “shrink it and pink it” phase, where they made the jerseys smaller but they were also in pink and often with sparkles on them.

When women sports fans were surveyed, most said they loved the size and fit of the new apparel but when at a game for the Cowboys and everyone was in blue and silver, and they were in pink, it just was not what they wanted. The league has adjusted its line to now feature replica jerseys cut for a woman, as well as couture pieces and high-fashion accessories. The changes to the line started during the 2010 season with the League’s “Fit For You” campaign, resulting in increased sales.

Mobile shopping is also on the rise for sports merchandise. In recent research, it was found that 65% of sports shopping came from mobile shopping—the sales especially spike just after a team wins a big game. When the team wins, the fans want their merchandise quickly, and their mobile devices make it happen. Sports marketers need to target mobile shoppers, female fans as well as their male fans to generate the most revenue for their teams.



# MEASURING NCAA SUCCESS THROUGH BRAND EQUITY

The final teams for the College Football Playoffs series have been selected, and regardless of your personal sentiments, Alabama, Clemson, Ohio State and Washington are the teams to watch.

In a system that has been marred with controversy since the early days of the Bowl Championship Series era, it comes as no surprise that this year's selection is called into question.

Although it's tough to argue the prowess of institutions like the University of Alabama, schools like Ohio State and Penn State, for example, tow the line so finely that one controversy can knock one team (and their corresponding brand identity) or the other out of championship contention.

So, it begs the question: In light of past controversies, experienced by both Ohio State and Penn State, does a school's brand strength and equity take precedence over win-loss records in the bowl selection process?

## **It's (Almost) All About the Ws**

On December 3, Penn State defeated Wisconsin, in the Big Ten Championship game, 38-31. Although the conference title was an impressive achievement for Penn State, it did not bolster them ahead of Ohio State in the CFP rankings. Add the fact that Ohio State failed to qualify for their conference's championship game, due in part to a loss earlier in the season to Penn State, and you have the makings of a bona fide snub, right?

Well, there's far more that comes into play when ranking football teams. The 12-member CFP committee, made up mostly of athletic administrators and former coaches has a few criteria it uses to differentiate teams that it thinks are of similar quality, including:

- Conference titles
- Strength of schedule
- Head-to-head results
- Games against common opponents

With this in mind, there are also factors living outside of this criterion that can also affect the final selection process. While college football teams can't be bought or sold, that does not lessen the value for their universities, athletic departments, conferences or local economies. Individual conferences receive big chunks of money when their teams appear in post-season bowl games.

## Examining NCAA's Brand Equity

Two years ago, each of the "Power 5" conferences – the SEC, ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac-12 – raked in a base amount of \$50 million for post-season play.

The five smaller conferences in the "Group of Five" collective – American Athletic, Conference USA, Mid-American, Mountain West and Sun Belt – split a total of \$75 million.

Additionally, conferences received a \$6 million bonus for a team selected to play in a semifinal game, so it was prudent for the Big 10 to lobby to have both Ohio State and Penn State in the playoffs this year. With Ohio State in, and Penn State out, though, it helps to look at each brand in more detail.

### The Penn State Nittany Lions

According to bestcollegevalues.org, Penn State's alumni base ranks 28th in size, while Ohio State ranks 38th. College Magazine ranked Penn State's alumni base's engagement number one, over prestigious Ivy League schools such as Dartmouth, Harvard, and in-state neighbor, UPenn, while also placing it ahead of Big Ten rivals, Northwestern and Michigan. The size of an alumni base can translate into increased ticket purchases, merchandise sales, and travel.

Scandal broke in early November 2011 when former assistant football coach, Jerry Sandusky, was indicted on 52 counts of child molestation. Additionally, three school officials (including school president Graham Spanier and athletic director Tim Curley) were charged with perjury, obstruction of justice, failure to report suspected child abuse, and related charges.

Shortly after the scandal broke, Spanier resigned. The Penn State Board of Trustees terminated the contracts of Curley and of the longtime head football coach, Joe Paterno.

On July 23, 2012, the NCAA announced the following sanctions against Penn State:

- Five years probation.
- A four-year postseason ban.
- Vacating of all wins from 1998 to 2011-12 wins in all. This had the effect of stripping the Nittany Lions of their shared Big Ten titles in 2005 and 2008. It also removed 111 wins from Paterno's record, dropping him from first to 12th on the NCAA's all-time wins list.
- A \$60 million fine, the proceeds of which were to go toward an endowment for preventing child abuse. According to the NCAA, this was the equivalent of a typical year's gross revenue from the football program.
- Loss of a total of 40 initial scholarships from 2013 to 2017. During the same period, Penn State is limited to 65 total scholarships – only two more than a Division I FCS (formerly I-AA) school is allowed.
- These sanction impacted the not only the athletic program, but the alumni base and the brand value, too. And, even though the NCAA has since rescinded much of those sanction, the brand is still has a long road to recovery.

### The Ohio State University Buckeyes

Even though Penn State may have the larger alumni base, the size of the base doesn't necessarily translate into a measurement of "best fans." Not only is it important that the fan base attends home games, the inclination to travel with their team to attend bowl games is even more important.

In 2015, the average attendance of Buckeye fans for away games hovered around 102,000. Given the fact that Ohio State's horseshoe holds about 102,000 people at capacity, Ohio State fans are very loyal; so much so, Huffington Post examined flight searches to the Discover Orange Bowl, in which Ohio State was playing, in Miami Gardens, Florida, and found they were up 64 percent.

A further testament to Buckeyes fan loyalty, the 2016 College Football Playoff National Championship game generated more money for Arizona economy than any of the state's previous college football championship games, according to a study by Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business.

Keep in mind that Ohio State played, and lost, that year while still being able to draw ardent fans from nearly every corner of the country.

Ultimately, we're confident the CFP Selection Committee considered wins and losses, strength of schedule, and whom they felt were the four best teams in the nation.

But, this year, like many times before, it was not a clear-cut decision, and we wonder what off-the-field brand attributes also impacted the final selection.



# AD TRENDS FOR THE BIG GAME THIS YEAR

This Sunday marks a monumental football game 50 years in the making and is one advertisers are primed to spend big bucks on. Live from CBS, this year's broadcast is expected to draw in over 110 million viewers across the world. It's no secret that the annual event is, more often than not, about the advertisements during it and the cultural experience, so brands with extra spending money are using that to their advantage. Assessing metrics and public reaction from last year, agencies and companies are thinking smarter and playing to their strengths with these new tactics for this year.

## Very Familiar Faces

From E-Poll Market Research's findings, there are at least 33 celebrities involved with the commercials during the 2016 big game. Perhaps in an attempt to switch gears from the overall somber tone of last year's ads, this year seems to be the year of funny and famous figures. With an assist from likeable stars, some ads have been released ahead of time and racked up views while a shorter cut will debut Sunday night on-air. This week, we've seen snippets of Steven Tyler with Skittles (the first celebrity spokesperson the brand has used), Helen Mirren with Budweiser, and Amy Schumer and Seth Rogen with Bud Light. Although, historically, spots with celebrities have performed lower than those without, this year might change the tide.

## The Price is Right (for Some)

It's a pretty penny to have a spot during the big game on Sunday. Up 11% from last year, an astounding \$5 million is needed for a 30-second spot. While that is an incredible amount for media—for some as much as a third of their annual budget—for some brands, it's a price worthwhile. Live sports are one of the last safe bets for high exposure on TV. With such a large audience paying close attention to ads, the high cost is guaranteed to draw eyeballs and make an impression, especially for game-watchers responding on social media.

## Advertising Outside of the Big Game

In the past few years, there's been more to simply airing a spot and waiting to gauge reactions. Squarespace, after a successful campaign with Jeff Bridges in 2015, has tapped Keegan Michael-Key and Jordan Peele of Key and Peele for a 3-hour feat for a second screen experience. As the characters Lee and Morris, they'll comment on the game with only one caveat: they don't have the rights to do so at all. Live-streaming from [realtalk.squarespace.com](http://realtalk.squarespace.com), the event will tie in with the Squarespace's ad during the game. This year, we'll see more advertisers capitalizing on the huge audience directly before and after the game to save money as well as online to jump in on the big game action.

Will advertisers' efforts and large sums pay off? The only way to find out is to tune in to the game on Sunday, join the conversation online and wait till the next day to see what's the buzz at the water cooler.



# GROWING U.S. VIEWERSHIP OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE

The Tour de France is the most prestigious cycling race in the world, reaching more than 15 million spectators and over 1 billion television viewers from all over the world. But, could they reach even more, particularly in the highly sought after U.S. market?

However global the event may be, the majority of the sponsors for this event are sports or media related, and vastly European, primarily French. Although the reach of this event is extensive internationally, its ability to market products and places to this broad audience has been, thus far, very underutilized, particularly in the U.S. market. With the amount of coverage and viewership this race receives, is there an opportunity to capitalize on the beauty, culture and cuisine of French, Dutch and Belgian countryside to draw in U.S. viewers?

U.S. viewership for each stage of the race was approximately 400,000, in comparison to almost 2 million Americans that watch the Food Network and Travel channels regularly. The Tour de France could be missing a huge opportunity by not cross-promoting their travel, food and wine industries to the hundreds of thousands of Americans who are not as familiar with cycling as the European market. As a consumer, would you be more interested in the Tour de France if it presented information on food, wine and travel, or even if it was promoted through one of the cable channels you already watch?

## Discover New Travel Destinations

You don't have to be a marketing guru to realize the Tour de France is not just a cycling competition; it's a 3-week televised tour of France that takes viewers on a visual vacation from as north as the Netherlands to as far south as the French Alps. So, why isn't it advertised as such?

It's easy to see how a cross-promotional relationship between the Travel Channel, for example, and the Tour de France could be a win-win. With 2.5 million Americans planning to travel to France in 2016, it's likely that they are seeking out information about their destinations prior to their trip, possibly from the Travel Channel or other potential cross-promotional partners for the Tour. The stunning scenery the coverage of the Tour de France offers, accompanied with the information the Travel Channel can provide on the tourism industry of France, could prove immensely useful to an American traveler.

Additionally, the French tourism office could also use this cross-promotion to not only promote the Tour de France, but also other French attractions that may not shine as bright as the Tour does. While professional cycling does not have a widespread fan base in America the way football or baseball does, incorporating travel may just open an eye or two and get cycling a foot in the door.

## A Taste of the French Countryside

Over the past decade, Americans have become increasingly fascinated with food. From millennials and their love of farmer's markets, to the ever-growing community of self-proclaimed (and even professional) foodies, discovering authentic French cuisine via a partnership between the Tour and, for example, the Food Network, could prove extremely successful.

Along the over 2,000 miles traversed along the journey of the Tour de France, the local cuisine changes just as quickly as the scenery. Highlighting the variety of cultural differences in dining would be seen as enlightening and adventurous to the food-loving American viewer wanting to try new, foreign foods. A cross-promotional partnership focusing on the tastes of France could not only boost viewership of the Tour in the United States, but even increase tourism to France in search of that authentic French cuisine. This cross-promotion has the ability to reach a segment of viewers virtually untapped by the sports networks.

### **Uncork the Possibilities**

In 2013, the U.S. surpassed France in the consumption of wine. Shortly following, in 2014, France took the lead from Italy in world wine production. In short, Americans love to drink wine, and the French love to make it! Can you guess what we're about to say next?

The wine industry in the U.S. is not only booming at more than \$13 billion but also growing at an astounding rate. Combining two of the things France is most well known for – great wine and the Tour de France – is a marketing no-brainer. The course of the Tour passes through many various growing regions, vineyards and wineries, and promoting the varied French offerings has the opportunity to increase tourism from oenophiles, as well as boost French exports of wine.

While the Tour de France will undoubtedly continue to grow its U.S. audience organically, if they want to win the Antargaz prize (yep...look that one up and learn about the Tour) for marketing, it's time to lead with what their audience already knows (and loves). To the American viewer, especially one with a propensity to watch and enjoy international sporting events, travel, food and wine are major points of attraction, and could just be the push they need to book that French holiday they've always dreamed of.



# RECRUITING'S RIGHT HAND MAN - HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CHANGED THE LANDSCAPE FOR COLLEGE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

***"It's tech warfare in college football today."*** – JON SWARTZ

What's a 'small' school to do when they're determined to secure a high school athlete against recruiting leaders like The University of Alabama's Nick Saban? Social media. There is no doubt that college football is arguably one of the most successful business models in the world. The fundamentals of the game haven't changed much, but the emphasis placed on recruiting is more important than ever. Schools from around the nation are competing for the best of the best in young, talented athletes and the rivalries between programs are becoming more transparent. For perennial powerhouses like Alabama and Florida State, recruiting is a relatively simple process as the name itself carries most of the weight during the recruiting process. But what happens when a lesser-known program, such as Vanderbilt or Washington, tries to compete with the 'commanders-in-chief' of recruiting? The bottom line – until recently, they couldn't.

The tides have turned in the college football recruiting process, and it's all because of how social media has allowed these schools to have equal access to players across the nation. According to Andrew Kulha, Bleacher Report journalist, "The world of college football recruiting is ever-changing and schools try to gain any sort of competitive edge they can. Social media is the key to unlocking the secrets of powerful recruiting. It's the low hanging fruit, if you will, for coaches and coaching staff who are willing to put forth the effort, but may not have the rich recruiting history to back them up. The ugly truth about sports is if you don't have ammo to back up your proposal, consider yourself irrelevant in recruiting. This is where social media can help schools, with limited recruiting backgrounds, tout powerful and influential pitches to young athletes."

Not a believer in the influence social media has on recruiting? Consider the usual suspects who remain relevant in college football. A rich history in athletics is always one of the key factors in trying to recruit a player. The huge fan base, a prosperous academic community, and an electrifying, state-of-the-art facility are all part of influencing a recruit to attend the school. However, those factors only go so far. The real key is communication. A high school athlete wants to feel important; He wants to feel like he is the center of your universe. The most powerful and efficient form of communicating with Generation Y athletes (or anyone in this age group) is through social media.

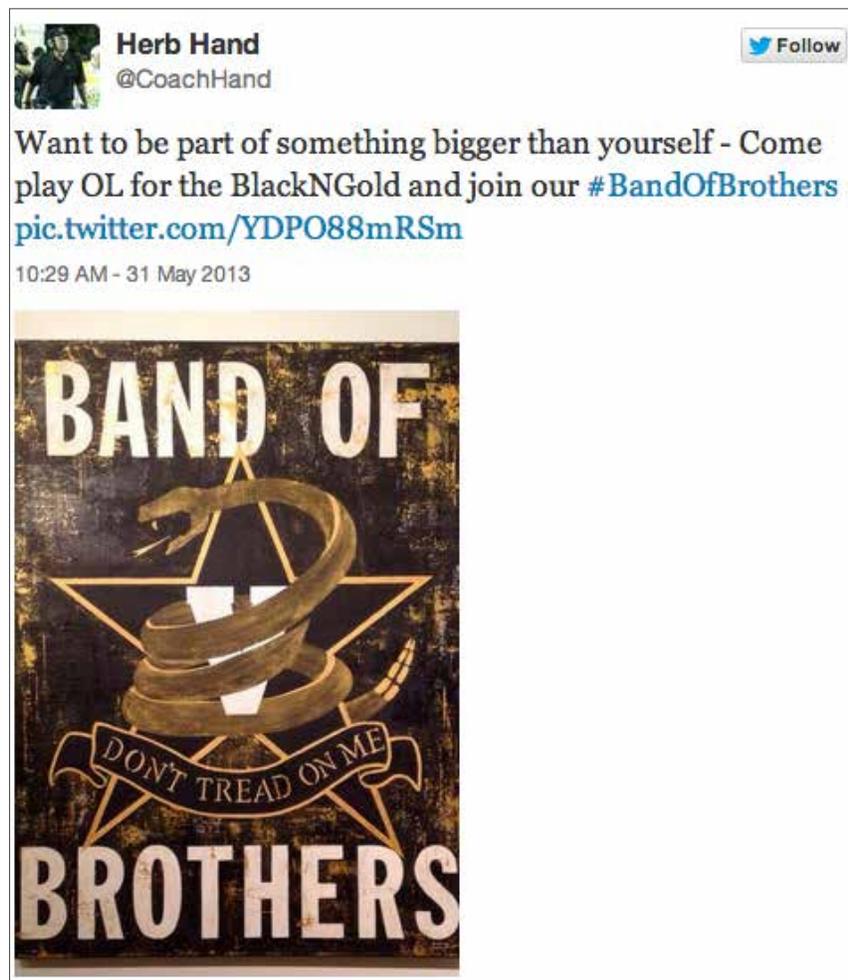
There are several proven instances where the Internet has played a major role in recruiting success for lesser-known programs with a limited budget.

Take Vanderbilt as an example: a history-rich academic university, but a relatively new player in competitive recruiting. With Vanderbilt being a member of the illustrious South Eastern Conference (SEC), recruiting can prove to be extremely difficult for the school as they compete against Alabama, South Carolina, and Florida in securing recruits. Vanderbilt, however, has seen a surge in four and five-star recruits on their freshman roster within the last five years. Coach Herb Hand has helped bring life back to the program. Hand has taken the Commodores from a two-win season in 2010 to a nine-win season in 2012. What's changed to produce such a notable program turnaround?

Much of Coach Hand's success can be attributed to a surge in team talent. That talent was once a recruit, who had to make a decision between schools. There is a reason why those players chose Vanderbilt as their school of record. Coach Hand says, "The access is 24/7." What he means by this is that strong and continued communication with the recruits is the best thing you can do to gain their attention and earn their respect. It's a balance between traditional marketing tactics and technologically savvy connections. "The overnight emergence of social media - in particular Facebook and Twitter - has created a new world in recruiting, one without a defined blueprint," says Bleacher Report writer, Adam Kramer.

Coach Hand connected with those high school players on a deeper level, much more than what his competitors were doing. He has recognized the generational shift in young adults' ways of communicating. "Our target audience is kids who are ages 15 through 18, and social media is where they are communicating," says Hand. Alabama head coach Nick Saban has publicly acknowledged the fact that he has no idea how to send a text message, let alone a tweet. It's this type of disconnect that allow coaches such as Hand to capitalize on their competitors' recruiting flaws.

In 2010, Vanderbilt landed Kenneth Ladler, a three-star recruit from Stone Mountain, Georgia, who had previously planned on attending South Carolina. He signed with the Commodores on signing day, proudly placing that hat on his head. Through creating a strong relationship with Coach Hand, he felt that Vanderbilt would be his 'home away from home'. "I don't want it to be just about X's and O's, because that's not the type of relationship I have with my players," Hand says. Earlier this year, Coach Hand crafted a creative tweet to high school players that has caught the attention of many. It states:



While Coach Hand is sending out tweets with clever hashtags and creating meaningful relationships online, Alabama and South Carolina have yet to expose real expertise within the socialsphere.

Many more coaches have also bought into the idea of social media marketing as a strong recruiting tactic. University of Washington Head Coach, Steve Sarkisian, has taken the time to understand what social media has to offer the program, "It took a couple of years to get most of our coaches to buy into social media, but their presence in the Twitterverse has helped tremendously." Boston College Head Coach, Steve Addazio, utilized social media to implement a branded hashtag campaign to catch the eye of recruits. He created the #BeADude campaign, a phrase he 'borrowed' from the mantra of Don Brown. Addazio says, "We are following what's going on in competitive schools, what's going on in recruiting, what's the chatter, what's the buzz. We use it for marketing, we use it for information and communication, and right now we are back in full stream."

All of these coaches have one goal - to win. The college football industry no longer survives on just a name. You have to put yourself out there, make a splash, and allow people to engage with your football program - or on a larger scale, you're brand. Many businesses can learn from this stream of underdog success. Social media gives any company or brand, no matter the size, the opportunity to equal the playing field against their competitors. The same competitive edge that coaches are seeking for their college football programs is the same advantage that businesses strive for when dealing with competitors.

As a business, there is much to take away from this example of success in reaching your market via social media. Companies should consider their overall marketing goals, and how a social media presence fits within an overall marketing plan to achieve these goals. Much like Coach Hand, through creating easy-to-access touch points with consumers, brands are growing their customer bases and creating lasting relationships with people they were previously unable to reach before social media's existence. As Digital Sherpa writer, Justin Fishaw says, "People prefer to do business with other people, not just the brands themselves."

Additionally, social media helps businesses angle themselves as experts in the field. Like Coach Hand, businesses must be present, both speaking and listening, on social media. Just as he was able to build relationships and trust with the recruits, studies show that social communities built trust and loyalty to brands, as well. In fact, a study conducted by Ian Greenleigh showed that 84% of millennials turn to online communities before making a purchase. Additionally, 85% of consumers say they will change their shopping behavior in response to social media content. Communicating in online communities is the low-hanging fruit of the 21st century. Social media is a proven tactic for driving sales, earning leads, and closing deals.