
SPORTS MARKETING GETS SOCIAL

Exploring the game-changing world of endorsement marketing and how to execute a successful campaign, from tipoff to the final buzzer.

Choosing someone to endorse your brand isn't much different from choosing a coach to develop your playbook. Ultimately, it boils down to preparation, insight, execution, and the ability to make adjustments when necessary. In this white paper, we'll take you through our best tips for developing a game-winning endorsement marketing strategy.

INTRO

In the contingent environment of endorsement marketing, brand managers take big risks when it comes to teaming up with a spokesperson, placing control of their brand's image, and its success, in someone else's hands.

According to Plunkett Research, the leading provider in category-specific data, the sports industry is valued at approximately \$422 billion, with sports advertisers spending over \$27.8 billion annually. In an industry with such high stakes, shouldn't your brand have all the intel it needs when making critical marketing decisions? Especially when it comes to establishing key partnerships?

This white paper discusses how brands can gain predictive and actionable insights through social media channels and analytics tools. Insights that will give brands a competitive edge in identifying and signing prospective endorsers. We'll also talk strategies for how brands can use authentic athlete partnerships to engender deeper relationships with their consumers. And how they can be better prepared to mitigate and address any potential risks that come with signing an outside spokesperson.

Having the right tools and knowledge can help your brand create a successful sports marketing program, built on strong, memorable, and authentic relationships with your community. Online and off.

FINDING THE CONNECTIONS

In a day when each athlete has a bigger or more engaged Twitter following than the last, the metrics that matter are more than simple numbers. **The most authentic—and sophisticated—marketing partnerships are those built on identifying influencers who embody characteristics similar to your brand’s, whatever those may be.**

By combining social listening tools with audience research and analysis, you can maximize your brand’s ability to strategically select partnerships. By researching and analyzing prospective endorsers, you can uncover underlying values and predictable behavior patterns in even the most seemingly unorganized social presences.

Take, for example, the chain of events that happened between rapper Rick Ross (@TeflonDon305) and his former sponsor, Reebok. [As reported by the NY Times](#), Reebok signed Ross to an endorsement deal in March 2012 in an effort to appeal to an urban/hip-hop demographic. Just over a year later, Ross has been dropped from his Reebok deal after the fallout surrounding the rape-promoting lyrics in his song, “U.O.E.N.O.” In the song, Ross raps, “Put molly all in her Champagne, she ain’t even know it. I took her home and I enjoyed that. She ain’t even know it.” Feminist group UltraViolet organized a petition that urged Reebok to sever ties with Ross. Within 24 hours the petition garnered more than 50,000 signatures, and within a week, Reebok announced its decision to end the deal.

2.0 CONTINUED

Not only did social media sit center stage in the campaign urging Reebok to end the relationship, it could have played a larger role in foreseeing the risks in offering Ross the endorsement deal in the first place. A preliminary analysis of Rick Ross' social presence reveals a pattern of blatant objectification of women, along with a slew of crude, unsolicited sexual advances and multiple drug references, all of this in the months before (and following) the beginning of his endorsement with Reebok.



Unlike the endorsement deals of the past, when all a brand needed was a signature, a sound bite, and a photo, today's complex and two-way social media landscape necessitates that brands consider much more than just an endorser's audience and reach. Brands ought to consider the values, actions, behaviors, and prior endorsements that a potential partner brings to the table. Because the ethos of that person, ultimately, is a major contributor to the ethos of the brand as a whole, as perceived by consumers.

It's not about choosing an endorser who opens your brand up to a new target market. It's about choosing someone whose existing values mesh harmoniously with the values of your brand. And that's a connection worth investing in.

RISK VS. REWARD

As the saying goes: high risk, high reward. While mitigating the risk in the introductory phase of selecting an endorser goes a long way, it's still essential for brands to closely monitor the surrounding conversation, brand sentiment, click-through rate, impressions, reach—and any other metrics that matter—throughout the duration of the endorsement campaign. Active monitoring allows you to listen and learn in order to adjust tactics on the fly. That's where 4D thinking comes in.

“BY MONITORING AND PLANNING YOUR BRAND’S INITIATIVES ACROSS ALL CHANNELS, IT GIVES YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO PUT INSIGHTS INTO ACTION IN WAYS THAT WILL GENERATE THE RIGHT RESULTS FOR YOUR BOTTOM LINE.”

Marketing campaigns don't exist in silos, which is why campaign management shouldn't either. Plan B's innovative 4D approach, for example, monitors the impact of marketing decisions across a brand's **paid, owned, and earned** channels, mixing and phasing programming over time. With this approach, efforts are synchronized through appropriate channels and adjustments are made when and where necessary to optimize marketing spend and creative output.

It all starts with being prepared. When situations go awry, brands should have a strategy in place that governs their reactionary measures. This includes developing a custom governance framework that dictates the proper course of action, should something potentially damaging happen, as well as providing the proper training and resources to handle any situation.

But the 4D approach is about much more than just a good defense. Sports brands know that a good offense is just as critical. By monitoring and planning your brand's initiatives across all channels, it gives you an opportunity to put insights into action in ways that will generate the right results for your bottom line. Using real-time monitoring, you can discover the granular data and intelligence to form the foundation for your brand's big picture approach. So whether the focus is on social media, web presence, paid outlets, or all of the above, seek to create synergy among each of your brand's marketing arms.

MULTIPLYING BRAND LOVE

Let's assume the best. Your brand has strategically selected a great partner whose personal values are in sync with the brand's, and who offers an authentic endorsement of your products or services. Now, how can you take your game to the next level?

Part of amplifying the message means encouraging conversation around specific targeted themes. And the best way to do this is to enlist your community's help. Using social listening, you can help your brand determine which topics and themes already appeal to your community, which is the first step in figuring out how to cultivate conversation surrounding the new endorsement.

For example, if you find in a social media listening exercise that your brand's community already talks a lot about their own workout regimens, and often uses hashtags like #nodaysoff, it makes sense, then, to incorporate this theme and hashtag into the new conversation. Not only does it demonstrate that your brand is listening, but that it actually understands and wants to provide the community with more of the type of conversation they already enjoy.

4.0 CONTINUED

The culmination of these efforts, in an ideal scenario, is a community buzzing with excitement about both the brand and its endorser. In which case, the next logical step is amplification. When community members feel that a brand appreciates their support, it makes them that much more likely to continue actively supporting. Whether through retweets, limited-time promotions, or personalized messages, it's meaningful for both brands and their endorsers to show the community appreciation for their support.

At the end of the day, developing a successful endorsement campaign isn't so different from preparing for a big game. The power of research and insights combined with the right team and the right strategy is what makes a powerful –and winning– approach.

Chicago-based creative advertising firm Plan B® [the Agency Alternative]™ is a full-service, on-demand marketing partner—offering forward-thinking marketing managers a fully transparent, collaborative partnership that helps today's brands evolve at the speed of change, improving their marketing efficiency and shortening time to market. Plan B designs, develops and delivers innovative, fully integrated, and highly strategic campaigns with a unique “4D” approach that lets brands listen and learn, optimizing their investments with consumer-driven insights derived in real-time.



Plan B's 4D approach was developed to help clients manage the ever-expanding universe of trans-media marketing possibilities. While not every client program requires a true 4D solution, it's our ability to think in 4D, keeping the proverbial dots connected, that makes us such a valuable partner—especially as utility players in many of our client's greater marketing support teams. **Learn more at ThisIsPlanB.com, or by contacting Patrick Pope at Patrick@thisisplanb.com, or by calling 312.222.0303 ext: 229.**