

people
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FOCUS

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I studied Sports Marketing at the University of Northampton from 2010-2013. During this time, although social media was very much in its infancy from a business and commercial opportunity angle, it was quickly evolving so my degree taught me a great deal about social media and digital.

Following University, I worked at a sports agency in Northampton. Social media was included in the agency's package to clients so I was very quickly thrown into the world of sports social media. It was during my time at the agency that I saw the shift of social media growing into an important professional tool, rather than just for personal use.

Six years ago I started working at Somerset County Cricket Club (SCC). This was a great opportunity for me as I'm a big cricket fan and was raised in the local Somerset area, it has also continued my growth in social and digital.

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What are the main changes in social media you've noticed since the start of your career?

The growth of digital platforms and the number of people that are on the channels is phenomenal. For example, when I started working for SCCC the Twitter page had 23,000 followers and it now has 150,000. Similarly, for Facebook, fans have grown from 60,000 to over 500,000 in just 6 years. This also means the whole game has changed in terms of who we're talking to, as well as the opportunities that come with engaging with a vast audience.

"Everything has changed! And it's changed very quickly, in 2016-17 there was a definite shift in the speed of growth and importance on social media."

An overarching change is the digitalisation of cricket and the sport. Technology has helped us build our offering and give fans the best possible service with things such as live streaming and player-related content.

A big change can also be seen in the stigma attached to working in social media. The perception of a Social Media Manager used to be derogatory and seen as a job for interns or those on work experience to send a couple of tweets, but this has now disappeared. It's now very much a respected, demanding and skilled role. Just because Twitter is accessible to everyone doesn't mean that everyone is an expert at it.

What is a typical day like for you in your role?

Working in sport from a social and digital angle is very demanding. In the summer the calendar depends on the sporting schedule, rather than Monday to Friday. At SCCC there is a game most days of the week, so my role involves travelling to the matches and covering them to give fans the best online experience from what's happening on the field. The match days are very full-on, covering before, during, and after the match, and that's very on and off throughout the summer. On a typical match day, 30-40 tweets will be sent, and that will occur 100 times over the summer.

During the winter, the role shifts to working a lot harder to keep fans engaged, as there's no action on the pitch, so creating content isn't necessarily as easy. There is much more of a wider business angle in terms of membership, ticketing, and sponsorship campaigns.

It's a never-ending cycle, and the off-season is only a couple of months so I usually take this as an opportunity for some time off!

What tools do you rely on to fulfill your role?

A video editing app on your phone is one of the most essential things. I use InShot which is a great tool to turn things around in seconds. With sports, you face the constant quality versus time dilemma. I have to ask myself, "do I get this clip out instantly, or wait a bit and have something better quality?" A lot of decisions are made on the fly, but with 150,000 followers you need to turn it around within 30 seconds otherwise someone else will, then you lose out!

Which part of your role do you enjoy the most?

"The buzz of social, even after 6 years, is still there. The role has certainly developed into a wider digital role but, when creating the instant gratification of reach and engagement you still get that buzz."

And being able to work with professional athletes on a day-to-day basis and the journey they've gone on is fantastic. We work with the athletes on their accounts and developing their brand, with as much help as they need and want.

The social media landscape has certainly changed a lot, such as with the awareness, and the opportunities that an online presence gives you.

It's important to help players early in their development to teach them the best practices. A lot of athletes are scared of social media, but others are keen to ask lots of questions to get involved and get their name out there - which is great!

What do you see as essential to achieve success in social media?

The most important thing is to have an absolute true understanding of your audience. It may seem very simple and obvious, but being ingrained in what sentiment is likely to come out of each content will help you to build a powerful strategy, as you know what works and what doesn't.

It's important to use stats and analytics, but it's equally important to have a true understanding of what your audience wants from you as a brand and club, and then not to over-sell or under-sell. So, know your fan base and what their expectations are, and use data to supplement that and shape your strategy.

"Don't get caught up in reading social media, analysing trends, and knowing the latest buzzwords. At the core of success is communicating with your audience to form the absolute best understanding."

And know that this knowledge is constantly adapting, it isn't an acquired tick, and move on. The changes in cricket habits are a clear example, if you'd have asked me two years ago if we would be on TikTok I would have said it's a long way away, but we've seen big changes and it is important to strike while the iron is hot.

What are the different challenges you've faced in your roles?

A lot of people will expect different things from social media, such as appeasing different areas of our fan base, responding to customer service, and posting videos, it's not easy to stay on top of it all. With platforms like Twitter on your phone it's also very easy to jump in at any time of the day, particularly as you want to do everything perfectly it becomes a 24/7 job. This is certainly something that is my biggest challenge and I need to be better at it. I think once the pandemic is over it should get easier.

"Any advice on how to create more of a work/life balance then fire it my way!"

The pandemic also raised the profile of digital and accelerated its growth. At SCCC we could start live streaming when playing behind closed doors, which was a massive development for our digital output. This also meant there were, and still is, a lot more eyeballs on what we produce!

What advice would you give to someone starting their career in social media?

Make sure that you're doing it for the right reasons and have a passion for delivering content.

And, don't get caught up in the XYZ of social media 101, it's so easy to get engrossed in the different statics, channels, and strategies but it can be a lot more simple.

If you had to choose just one social media platform to use, which would you choose and why?

If I had to choose one platform it would be Twitter, as sport and Twitter go so well together. The chronological-based timeline offers the perfect appetite for sports fans to provide second-screen experiences and deliver a fluid and digital experience based on a sport.

Who would you miss the most from LinkedIn if they left the platform?

"When the Fishmonger comes home he doesn't really eat fish" I don't spend much time on social media for personal use as I become so embodied in it for work that I try to switch off from it when I can.



Do you have a favourite podcast that you'd recommend?

I often listen to cricket podcasts as it's a great interest of mine. To stay up to date with changes and new features being introduced on social media I keep an eye on Facebook groups as I find the little nuggets more useful.



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