

12 ways for athletes to find social media success



Whether you're a decorated Olympian/Paralympian or your career is just getting started, you can benefit from social media. Unfortunately, many athletes lack the time and knowledge to benefit from this new medium. That's why we've assembled a guide to help you navigate social media easily and efficiently.

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Why should an athlete have a social media presence?

- **Social media allows you to build a fan base:** Social media not only allows you to connect with your existing fans, but it also enables you to branch out to connect with people you've never met, like other fans of your team, supporters from your hometown, or just people who like your sport.
- **Social media allows you to secure sponsorship, speaking engagements and other opportunities:** Since most amateur sports don't get a great deal of media attention outside of the Olympics/Paralympics, potential sponsors often shy away from sponsoring amateur athletes because they can't see the

return on their investment. Thanks to social media, however, you can reach thousands of people who may never set foot in your competition venue, increasing your sphere of influence and your sponsorship potential. Social media also offers a platform for you to share your key messages and showcase your talents to potential public speaking clients. (If you want more information on social media sponsorship, check out <http://podiumplatform.com>).

- **Social media connects you to the traditional media:** Today, journalists rely on social media for story ideas and sources. Some athletes even report that the news media picked up their social media content. Thanks to Twitter, you can communicate directly with members of the media. Try tagging a newspaper, TV or radio handle (ex: @CTVVancouver) or a reporter's handle (@CTVPerry) in your next newsworthy tweet and see what happens!



- **Through social media, you can tell your own story:** Every journalist who covers your sport has an agenda or is looking for a particular angle, which may be at odds with the image you want to project. Social media allows you to remove the middleman and tell your story directly, the way you want it told.

But, isn't my life boring? What do I have to offer?



As an athlete, you know that your day-to-day life isn't all that glamorous. With the towering mountains of laundry, the restrictive diets and the cramped apartment shared with your training partners or teammates...you're not exactly a prime candidate to appear on an episode of Cribs. But just because you don't have Tiger Woods' mansion or Johnny Weir's fashion taste doesn't mean that your life isn't inherently interesting.

In fact, what's just another day to you is an exciting peek into the life of a high-performance athlete to your followers. Let's face it: even if you're just starting out your elite athletic career, you're still on a life path that many people only dream of.

What you can offer:

- **An engaging story.** An athletic season is a real-life story with ups and downs, comebacks, setbacks, tests and triumphs. It's no wonder athletes are starting to get their own reality shows.
- **A behind-the-scenes look into a unique world.** People love the idea of getting a sneak peek behind the headlines into the world of high-performance athletes.
- **Motivation.** Many people choose to follow athletes via social media because seeing someone putting in the hard work necessary to achieve their dreams is extremely motivating. Someone trying to run a 5K for the first time, for example, might be inspired by the lengths that an elite triathlete has to go to achieve a personal best. Many athletes bolster this feeling by providing inspiring content like quotes.
- **The feeling of being part of something bigger.** How many times have you seen a follower on your social media accounts post content that supports breast cancer awareness or spreads the word about a potential health problem? It's no secret that people love to feel part of a larger community. In fact, a recent study showed that 73% of people shared content because it allowed them to feel connected to others with similar interests and concerns. Following an athlete as he or she prepares for Olympics/Paralympics/World Championships gives your fans the sense of being connected in a small way to a global sport movement.
- **Health/fitness/sport tips and tricks:** Many athletes provide training tips or share products that work for them, which anyone who plays the sport or is involved in physical fitness can appreciate.



To learn more about why people share social media content and learn how to create shareable content, check out our [“Creating ‘shareable’ social media content”](#) module.

12 great ways for athletes to find social media success

- 1. Create key messages or goals:** As an athlete, you know the importance of planning. By creating a few key messages or goals to guide your social media efforts, you'll remain focused and communicate with a purpose. Brainstorm a few goals or key messages and check in periodically to ensure that you're staying on track.
- 2. Create a distinction between your personal and public life:** To maintain your privacy and limit potential social media controversy, create a professional Twitter account and Facebook page and adopt strict privacy settings for your personal accounts. Remember, however, that nothing is truly private on social media and everything can be screencapped. If you wouldn't want to see it posted on a billboard in Times Square, don't post it. Many bloggers and other social media personalities take the distinction between their private and public lives one step further by creating a persona that runs their public accounts; (the singer Beyoncé, for example, has her alter ego Sasha Fierce). By creating a persona who's like you but polished/more professional/more focused, you can add an extra filter between yourself and your keyboard, preventing social media gaffes and allowing you to stay focused.
- 3. Tell a story:** If you've ever seen cave paintings or watched a child demand that her favourite book be read one more time, you know that humans are hardwired to love stories. Whether you're communicating through video, blogging or just tweeting, your audience will feel more emotionally connected with you if you use stories. Your stories don't have to be epic in scope. You could, for example, talk about how you got involved in sport, tell a funny anecdote about a training mishap, or share what you've learned about a recent loss.
- 4. Show yourself in action both on and off the field of play:** While it's important to show yourself competing, many athletes who are active on social media report that their most popular social media content documents their day-to-day life: waiting at airports, training in the gym, enjoying a sunset or hanging out with teammates.



5. **Let your personality shine:** Many athletes and celebrities are so scared of social media controversy that they edit their accounts down to the point that they feel inauthentic. If your tone reminds people of a robot or a telemarketer, your followers will grow bored. **Remember:** having personality doesn't mean putting on an act. If you're funny, let your sense of humour come out. If you're more cerebral, engage your followers in thoughtful conversation. After all, the most popular social media accounts feel authentic.
6. **Use correct spelling and grammar.** On Facebook, correct spelling and grammar goes a long way, especially in improving your professional tone. On Twitter, however, it is more common to shorten words, use abbreviations and fit in hashtags, as long as you don't get too carried away. Not everyone is familiar with the latest abbreviations, especially ones that are sport related, so keep it simple and legible or else you may lose your followers in translation.
7. **Engage with the larger sports community.** Social media is a dialogue not a monologue. Take advantage of social media's connectivity by engaging in conversations with your followers. To increase your social media reach, remember to connect with your allies by tagging them in your posts, share their content and engage in conversations with them. Your provincial sports organization, national and international governing body, teammates, and even your competition and training venues are excellent allies that can help you spread your reach.

8. **Be consistent:** One of the biggest mistakes that athletes make is only updating their social media accounts at big events. Unfortunately, building a social media following is a slow, incremental process.



You'll have more success posting a few times a week than you will if you post only when you have big news to share. In fact, idle social media accounts can actually hurt your efforts because you appear disinterested and stagnant. For more information on how to increase your social media followers, check out module 2 - [7 ways to increase your social media followers](#).

9. **Don't reveal too much:** Check with your coach and support staff to understand what aspects of your training or life shouldn't be posted online.

Training plans, game plans, training results and injuries should generally be left off social media. **Remember:** high-profile tournaments like the Paralympics or Olympics often have specific guidelines around social media use.

10. Focus on the process: Young athletes have a tendency to focus on results/medal counts and make bold predictions about their success on social media. At best, this behaviour makes you appear boastful. At worst, your tweet will write a cheque that your performance can't cash. Instead, focus on the aspects of your performance that are under your control. For example, instead of saying "I can't wait to get out on the track and win a gold medal," you could say, "I've been training hard and I can't wait to perform today."

11. Be appropriate: As a social media manager, I sometimes have to intervene when athletes cross the line on social media. (Given that 94% of employers use social media in their job searches, this is an issue that can impact you outside of your athletic life, so it's best to learn the lesson early). Though it's common sense to the vast majority of athletes, it bears repeating: your social media account is not the place to fight with your boyfriend, or share unflattering photos of yourself intoxicated, or to send appreciative tweets to adult entertainers. Before you post, remember that you're a representative of your sport.

12. Remain positive: Studies show that positive social media content gets more views, shares and likes than neutral or negative content. This doesn't mean that you have to put a ray of sunshine on every tweet – after all, it's not easy to be cheerful when you're dealing with a tough loss or setback—but when in doubt, choose positivity.



Are you an athlete who has had some success on social media and has a tip to share? Have a social media problem that isn't addressed? Email arley@bcwheelchairsports.com and get in on the conversation.

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