

A GUIDE TO LOCAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BRITISH BASEBALL AND BRITISH SOFTBALL

The most cost-effective way to recruit and retain players and volunteers and promote the sports across the UK

by Michael Jones

Introduction

Many baseball and softball clubs often say that recruiting and retaining players is the hardest part of their plans to grow and develop. On top of that, failure to secure sponsorship or external funding also plays a large role in limiting how far teams and clubs can go.

However, using the media routes outlined in this document is one of the most cost-effective ways to attack those problems.

Contrary to popular misunderstanding, creating an effective media strategy is not overly difficult nor does it require a large effort – usually around two hours each week, spread throughout the week.

However, it does require a long-term approach, and to be effective you must accept that things won't change overnight. Instead, you are creating something for the long run to help benefit the sports here in the UK, and specifically your club and teams.

This document is an updated version of a previous Local Communications Strategy produced about 10 years ago by Josh Chetwynd, former GB player, Channel 5 MLB presenter and an esteemed author and historian of British baseball.

It will begin with activities such as the development of the club website, the use of social media and the creation and dissemination of newsletters (electronic or published) to help create and maintain your community.

From there we will go on to the traditional media in your local area – newspapers, regional television, radio, local newsletters and the like.

We will then go on to consider how to generate content that can promote upcoming club or league activities and how to record information so you can make a media portfolio that will enhance sponsorship and marketing opportunities and help your club secure funding from Local Authorities or businesses.

Finally, we will look at how you can measure the impact and reach of your communications work.

The overarching goal of clubs helping to generate content for websites or local media is to enhance the visibility of the British Baseball and British Softball communities, meaning more people know about them and more people will be excited to get involved. Growth of BBF and BSF leagues can lead to improved opportunities from larger organisations that can see the importance of our sports both to local communities and to national sporting development.

The suggestions in this document are just that – suggestions. There's no right or wrong way to go about promoting and publicising your activities. But there are some good and established practices that have already enhanced the ability of a number of clubs and leagues to recruit and retain members and to take advantage of sponsorship and marketing opportunities.

The suggestions below are both realistic and achievable within the generally small resources, both in terms of time and money, that British Baseball and British Softball clubs tend to have.

Contents

- 1) What is media?
- 2) Websites
- 3) Social media
- 4) Newsletters, leaflets and emails
- 5) Traditional media:
 - Community newsletters
 - Local newspapers
 - Regional radio
 - Regional television
 - National media
 - Other (including blogs and fansites)
- 6) Cuttings and portfolios
- 7) Pitching for sponsorship and funding
- 8) Engaging with the British Baseball and British Softball community
- 9) Measuring your communications impact
- 10) Creating local press releases for baseball and softball

1) What is media?

Media isn't just the local newspaper or the regional radio station. Media includes websites, Twitter and Facebook accounts (see social media), handouts and leaflets as well as more traditional routes.

Websites and social media accounts are far easier to control in terms of content than independent media outlets that clubs can only submit content to without guaranteed publication. So it's vital in building a good media profile that clubs have a strong website to use as a marketing tool.

Additionally, club websites can provide supplementary information that might not otherwise be able to fit into a press release, statement or interview. The Herts Baseball Club website is a great example of what can be done to create a great information resource (www.hertsbaseball.co.uk) while the London Mets' website (www.londonmets.org) is linked directly to the British Baseball Federation website as they use the same platform (www.britishbaseball.org), similar to that used by professional clubs in the US and Canada.

Key messaging

Key messaging is a way to ensure that everyone at the club is singing from the same hymn sheet. To avoid confusion when talking among yourselves at the club, talking to potential new members or media outlets or when posting content on the club website or with the BBF, BSF or BSUK sites, it's good to have some basic information about the club – some key things that define what the club is and how it works.

These can include:

- i) How long the club has existed.
- ii) How many teams the club has.
- iii) How many members the club has.
- iv) How many qualified coaches the club has.
- v) How many players in national senior teams or development programmes the club has.
- vi) How many national or divisional championships the club has won.
- vii) How quickly the club is growing.
- viii) The opportunities to develop and grow as a player and person within the club.
- ix) The aims of the club to enhance the sports in your area and develop a wider community.

Generally, this information can be included in a "Notes to Editors" section at the end of the document when sending out press releases (see later), but if there is a chance to weave it in to articles that you are writing, this can help promote some key agenda items that can act as a marketing tool – think player recruitment, retention, sponsorship and fund-raising.

Key message: *Sit down with your club committee and decide what you want to say about your club and how you want to say it.*

2) Websites

Websites have revolutionised how smaller sports clubs and organisations can generate coverage and interest in their activities. In previous generations, if people didn't attend the games and newspapers didn't print stories about them, very few people would have the opportunity to hear about the club and its results, both on and off the field. Now clubs can take it upon themselves to promote their successes and stories internally through a medium that will also allow the outside world to see and hear it.

Most clubs in the UK do have websites, but it's important to keep content as fresh and relevant as possible. Encourage all members of your club to help put content together, including statistics from your games, match reports, an "About Us" section and importantly a "Contact Us" section. If people can't contact you, they can't come and play, support or volunteer with you.

Websites can be easily established. A blog, for example on Wordpress, (www.wordpress.com) can be set up within a few minutes and quickly tailored with basic computer literacy.

Additionally, make sure that if you have a Twitter, Facebook or YouTube site (and it's strongly urged that you do), the website also links to these, as these are further opportunities to gather members. In the 21st century, first contact is usually done through email or social media rather than by phone or in person.

Tip: Pictures are a great way of saying a lot about your club without having to write a lot of words, so always be sure to have your camera/camera phones available on game days to generate some good shots that can be used both for the website and to accompany press releases.

Key message: *It's very difficult for a club to operate sustainably these days without a website.*

3) Social media

No one can seem to function without social media in the 21st century, so why should a British Baseball or British Softball club be any different?

Accounts should be set up, if they're not already, to ensure that you have another place for people to follow the progress of the club, contact the club or celebrate the success of the club. Generally, either the Club Secretary or designated Press Officer would be best placed to be in charge of these accounts.

YouTube and Flickr are other great ways of showcasing content outside the club website, but make sure that those checking out the videos or pictures can be linked back to the website, as this still serves as the best place for you to promote your club and provide more comprehensive information about it.

Twitter has become a good place for the British Baseball and British Softball communities to communicate outside of events on the diamonds or at AGMs or league meetings (use of hashtags is a great way to follow the progress of other clubs).

It could be worth having a Social Media Policy for your club to ensure that your members or supporters remain on message and don't inadvertently offend people, as these days everyone has an

account – including your opponents. The Essex Redbacks Baseball Club has such a policy in its Constitution, and a number of national team programmes will carefully monitor what is said by the players involved in them, as positive comments always serve as a better marketing tool than negative outbursts. Although it's easy to react quickly on social media (for example, posting the score updates at #bbfscore or #bsfscore), it's also something that can potentially be harmful to the club or to individuals in the communities (e.g. 'Umpire made a bad call. No wonder – they play for our oppo when they're not the blue').

Tip: It's now easy to update regularly thanks to smart phone technology. With one or two people linked in to official accounts, you can update even when at work, when other people who might be interested in hearing more about the club are able to respond. Plus, you can take pictures with most phones and upload them to your club website or social media accounts just as quickly.

Key message: *Embrace social media as a fantastic marketing and promotional tool as well as one that enhances the sense of community within your club, but be careful what you say.*

4) Newsletters, leaflets and emails

A great way to recruit players is by the production and distribution of leaflets. Once key messages and the way of communicating them has been agreed, why not put together some materials to hand out to potential players, supporters or volunteers? Other sports that have cultural or technical cross-overs – for example basketball, ice hockey and American football or cricket, hockey and golf – could be great areas for your club to recruit members.

Here you can also embrace technology – in this case QR codes (the square things that look like barcodes that smart phones can scan). This can link to your website, so even if the people don't read your leaflet, they may see the website.

Newsletters are a great way to retain members, as updates specifically given or sent to them can make them feel engaged with the development and progress of the club. These can be simple double-sided A4 print-outs that are distributed throughout the club, or, like BSUK's *Hot Corner*, they can be email templates sent out to people on the email list. Again, it's important to upload content to your website that you can link to. Remember: there are no excuses not to have a club website if you want to grow and develop.

Tip: For those serving on the club Committee, it might be worth considering a professional signature to sign-off emails (e.g. Chris Stephenson, Club Chairman, Warrington Weasels Softball Club, email@emailaccount.co.uk, contact number, www.clubwebsite.co.uk, Twitter: @WeaselsSoftball). This can serve as an additional perception of a professionally-run organisation as well as one that wants to be communicated with at all levels.

Key message: *Be sure to consistently update your members through news-laden emails or newsletters to help them remain engaged with the club, as well as producing leaflets to encourage new members to join.*

5) Traditional media and independent media outlets

This is where, once your internal club infrastructure is secure, you can make some real progress in terms of widespread communication of your activities.

Generally, people outside our sports will judge the success of a league, club or team by its appearances in traditional media outlets. The more appearances in established and respected media channels (e.g. national newspapers, the BBC, mlb.com), the more newsworthy either the individual or team is perceived to be.

This is key to remember when contacting the traditional media in your area.

A well-written press release about the club doesn't have to be particularly long or complex. Indeed, the press release most likely to be published in most media outlets will be a simple, short story that clearly explains the result or outcome of a game and a few of the key plays and players who made it happen, with perhaps a comment from the coach – something that good stats or a good memory should be able to generate in less than half an hour. And try to avoid jargon or phrases that aren't well-known outside of the community.¹ Remember to include the answers to **who, what, when, where, how** and **why**, and the press release will be easy enough to complete.

Make sure to include Notes to Editors at the end of the press release with information about the club, as well as times for training and details of sponsorship partnerships and initiatives you may benefit from. Sponsors love to get media coverage as it acts as free advertising, so be sure to mention them.

Tip 1: Always read or consume your local news so you know what the different local media are interested in or able to cover. If you're not based in the region or community you're contacting, or if perhaps a media outlet doesn't cover sport, then it will be incredibly difficult for them to justify publishing a story you have sent them.

Tip 2: Include a Notes to Editor and contact details for a senior press officer at the club at the end of your press releases as it makes them look more formal and will provide additional information if required by the journalist(s).

a) Community newsletters

Often overlooked by many because of their independent nature, low cost or small distribution or circulation, the community newsletter provides a great starting point to generate publicity for your club. They are usually eager to publish community-centric news, so if your club happens to be located within a certain road or estate, or many of the members live in the area, this is a great chance to get some good, positive coverage of your activities.

Remember to pitch your club as the most local or the most relevant team to the newsletter, as it is often the case that they receive lots of irrelevant content and need to remain as honest to their area as possible.

Key message: *Spend some time on a personal approach to community newsletters as they'll be more*

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See associated document on press releases below.

willing to listen than other media. Often, you can do monthly round-ups of club activities that they will be happy to publish.

b) Local newspapers

These are often weekly, sometimes daily or bi-weekly in some of the bigger towns and cities, and they are in need of news to ensure they sell papers. If they don't sell papers, they can't get advertising and then they go out of business, which means there's even less chance of baseball and softball clubs getting their stories into them!

When approaching local newspapers, the most successful partnerships often involve making a direct individual contact before eventually building up to mass emails with press releases about the club's activities. It's often better to find one particular journalist to send details of events to rather than sending them to a generic address, as that journalist will then be on the look-out for your match reports or correspondence. But if you haven't the time to personally approach journalists early on, it is now an accepted practise to mass email press releases to media outlets.

Remember that journalists work to deadlines and it's vital that you have time-relevant news or information. If you had a game on Saturday and the publication date is Monday morning, they'll need the report by Saturday night at the latest. If you send it in on Sunday afternoon or Monday, then it is highly unlikely to get published as it will have missed one deadline and won't be time-relevant to the next edition.

Tip: Before approaching a journalist, be sure to have read a few of his or her articles to help you make that immediate connection; you can say you liked the way they covered a particular event or activity. Journalists appreciate being told they're doing something good.

Key message: *Gather contacts from local papers and get in touch individually before the start of the season or before you start sending out mass press releases and photos. And make sure to get reports to them ASAP.*

c) Regional radio

This is the best opportunity for a big interview and feature for the club, although slightly harder than getting material into community newsletters or local newspapers. All radio stations are looking for audience-relevant material and provided you can give them a particular edge (e.g. the only baseball team in Somerset, the best softball team in a strong Glasgow League), they will be more likely to get you on air.

Because it is an audio medium, often live, it means that you have to make players and club officials available to speak to the presenters, either by phone or in person. While it can be difficult to place an interview, radio generally is more successful as an opportunity to market the club as your quote, story and extra information will go in as it was said and can't be easily edited out, as can be the case with print media.

Be sure to propose a confident spokesperson for the club, someone who is well-informed about the club's activities and also about the role of the BBF/BSF and BSUK in helping to develop the sports. This information is easily available by contacting your league administrator or BSUK Point Person, and will certainly enhance promotion of the sport in your area by adding more information. Try to be as

positive as possible and emphasise both the social and competitive aspects of your sport as much as you can, as you will be speaking to a varied audience with different interests.

For example, BBC regional radio will, at Drivetime (4.00-7.00 pm), have a range of listeners: grandparents sitting at home, people on the commute, parents picking up their children and employees in offices or workshops. With such a broad audience, there are a lot of people to appeal to. If you haven't time to publicise every aspect of your club or activity, be sure to direct people back to the website.

Key message: *Have four or five points that you want to make about the club (i.e. your key messages agreed prior to starting media work) and be able to slot them in to conversation with the presenter in as natural a fashion as possible. Meanwhile, make sure the club website is up to date and has easily accessible contact details for club officials.*

d) Regional television

This is probably the hardest medium to encourage to pick up a story about your team, club, league or event, but it is probably the most influential. Regional ITV and BBC stations will routinely cover top-level county cricket, the higher division football and rugby clubs and any individuals who are going far in their sport.

So the hook for television is either a big event (e.g. end-of-season playoffs being hosted by your club/a world record attempt) or a great player (e.g. a former professional now showing your club how it's done or a number of GB national team players who have helped win a pennant or championship for your club).

British Baseball and British Softball can benefit by being niche sports for most media, but are hindered when it comes to the brief evening round-up of the sporting activities of the local area, which will often include a couple of interviews with the managers of the professional sports clubs in your area.

If you are able to secure television coverage, shout about it to potential sponsors and players – it's an opportunity to come along and be on television and sometimes to put posters and banners up to be featured behind interviews or images of people playing. Ensure that your club has a banner with basic details (including a link to your website) at your facility.

Tip: TV journalists who are on Twitter or stations that have Twitter or Facebook pages will be more inclined to respond to an approach via social media as these messages are more easily accessible via smart phone.

Key message: *Trying to secure television coverage is often the hardest media approach to achieve, so it may benefit you to ensure your media contacts in other areas are strong and your website is up to date. However, be sure to maximise opportunities with regional television if they arise.*

e) National media

It is particularly hard to convince a national media outlet that a local club is worthy of column inches, airtime or images on the screen, although it **has** been achieved (e.g. Herts Baseball Club, 2010, on BBC Breakfast). This coverage reflected the niche aspect of BritishBaseball and BritishSoftball.

Generally, the story will have to be impressive for a club or league to appear, although major celebrity endorsements or appearances, record attempts or innovative offers could be ways to encourage national newspapers, radio stations or television shows to feature a story about the sport.

BSUK and the GB Baseball and Softball programmes will tend to coordinate any large-scale opportunities or the promotion of national teams, but this should not discourage individual clubs from pitching their stories. Just do so knowing that it will be extremely difficult for the sports as they stand in the UK to generate consistent coverage around reports, scores and fixtures.

Tip 1: Don't forget about phone-ins or emails to sports shows, such as BBC Radio 5 or Test Match Special. Although Major League Baseball is no longer broadcast on television by a British-based station, there are opportunities to contact the producers of the live radio coverage on BBC Radio 5, and fans of cricket are likely to be interested in other bat-and-ball sports such as baseball and softball.

Tip 2: As with regional broadcast journalists, it may be better to make contact via social media at first as these messages can be easily accessed via smart phones and could potentially be read out live on air.

Key message: *Go for it, but it would almost certainly be more time-efficient and successful to focus on local and regional media. When approaching national media, make sure it is with as brief a pitch as possible and include links to websites so they can do further background reading, but try to get four or five key points (the agreed key messages about the club or a specific event that the club is involved with) down as bullet points in an email when getting in touch with the journalists or producers.*

f) Other media (blogs, fansites etc.)

The British Baseball and British Softball communities do benefit from having a few dedicated online writers, including those who do weekly round-ups for divisions, leagues, tournaments or the entire sport in the UK.

Make sure that where possible you are interacting with these reporters to raise your online profile as high as it can be – search engine optimisation (SEO) means that your club will receive more favourable mentions when people are trying to find out about sports clubs in their area.

Regional travel and tourism and community interest websites are always looking to promote activities that are either unique or locally important to their area. Sometimes these sites can have large numbers of visitors each month (over 10,000), mostly from the local area, so this is another great way to boost regional interest and promote your club to local people and businesses, both to recruit players and members and to gain sponsorship.

Ensuring your website is up to date and linked in to any correspondence that you generate with local websites will give you even more opportunities to enhance your marketability.

Key message: *Locally-focused websites are always on the lookout for relevant content and have few reasons not to accept the information you provide. Add them to your press list for sending press releases.*

Summary

Independent media provide the best opportunities to reach an audience that might otherwise not hear about your club. They often carry a sense of authority with the readership, as they have been edited and produced by people who are ensuring that only the best and most relevant news and sports content is published.

Getting stories into regional media is not easy, but certainly provides a chance to enhance the offer that you can make to your players in terms of recruitment and retention and to potential sponsors in terms of the free advertising they can gain through their involvement with the sports.

Be sure to use your time wisely, and ensure that your club or league website has enough information to answer most of the obvious questions. If journalists do come back for a comment, be in a position to reply quickly, confidently and positively. Sometimes it is easy to take too long over a press release/report or round-up that only needs to be three or four paragraphs long.

Have information that is standardised so that you can include it on all press releases, including Notes to Editors, information about the club and how to get in touch or find out more about getting involved.

General tip: Follow the journalists or media outlets that you have included in a press list on Twitter, so that when content is posted you are able to tell people about the publication, website or broadcast in which the story about your club has featured. This provides added engagement with the story and your contacts are likely to re-tweet to their followers, providing potential for the club to generate even more followers. Additionally, media outlets are looking to demonstrate their own improved levels of engagement with their communities, and this is a win-win for all involved.

Key message: *Be time-relevant, outlet-relevant and have an understanding of the audience that each media outlet has to ensure that they have few excuses not to at least consider publishing your story or following up on the club during the season.*

6) Cuttings and portfolios

An important part of creating a media profile for your club or league is documenting and highlighting your achievements.

In order to produce a comprehensive report to present at the AGM about the success of your media work, and to offer an insight into how the club has engaged with the media and the local community, keeping a list of clippings (e.g. the URL/web addresses of the independent media that have produced stories or the physical newspaper items, audio tracks or videos where radio or television shows have interviewed or featured the club). This will provide extra evidence regarding your marketability to potential sponsors and to potential members.

Keeping track of how many more followers, likes or members of your group you have on Twitter or Facebook, or views of videos and pictures uploaded to sites such as YouTube, is also a good way to demonstrate how you are promoting your sport, and can look good when discussing growth and development with regional funding authorities.

Below is a table that could be used to identify where the club has been featured, including the media format, date and what the circulation or audience of that particular media might be.

Media outlet	Format published	Date	URL/link	AVE (£)	Circulation
Western Mail	Print and online	31/08/14	www.westernmail.co.uk/softball-school-sows-seeds-for-success	623.45	32,936
BBC Radio Lincolnshire	Radio	12/06/14	www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/bbc-radio-lincolnshire/drivetime/12-6-12	230.00	101,000

AVE stands for Advertising Value Equivalent – how much it would cost to take out an advert that would fill the same space as the article about your club. This is a great way to quantify the value of generating news and media interest about your club, and is the generally accepted practise in most PR agencies, so it is a professional way of measuring your media success. For information on working out AVE and circulation/audience figures, contact Michael Jones at: michael.jones@bsuk.com.

Tip: Try to keep a note of what events or what notable activities took place when the club has received the most coverage, and also when it has received the least. This way, you have an understanding of what the media contacts are looking for (and what they're not looking for), and how to pitch these stories for the future.

Key message: *Keeping a quantifiable tracking system ensures that you can let your members know about your media successes and the opportunities they have had to appear in regional media. Additionally, it provides a method of demonstrating your marketability to potential sponsors or funding authorities.*

7) Pitching for sponsorship and funding

Successful bids for sponsorship and funding are closely related to the ability to demonstrate that the investment will help build the sport through the club or league and that it will benefit the local or wider community.

Enhanced quantifiable press coverage, a strong website and key contacts in the media are great tools to demonstrate marketability to a company or panel that might not otherwise know about British Baseball or British Softball. Working through key messages so that everyone knows what the club wants to achieve and how it is going to achieve it ensures that people viewing the club objectively can understand this and see how funding will serve to spur growth and development.

Remember that with more funding comes greater facilities that will encourage higher retention of members and recruitment of players, which in turn makes for a more exciting prospect for potential sponsors.

Tip: Speak with funding bodies prior to putting forward a bid to establish what criteria would be expected from a media perspective. You are marketing a product (baseball and softball), so demonstrating your ability to promote them could be a key avenue to accessing grants.

Key message: *Use successes with media outlets as a way to quantify your potential as a club or league that deserves funding so that you can continue to develop and build in the local area.*

8) Engaging with the British Baseball and British Softball community

Remember to relay your successes to other clubs in our sports' communities. Everyone wants to see the sports develop, and with the tools of communication at our disposal, there is every reason to look at the media strategy that you have undertaken and whether it has been successful.

The stronger the community can be in this respect, the better able we will be to develop the sports. If you have had some success with local media, tell other clubs in your area so that everyone can generate publicity for their club and provide more opportunities for people to see, hear about and play the games.

***Key message:** We're all in this together to develop our sports and generate greater interest in baseball and softball in the UK. Sharing information and helping each other will certainly enhance the opportunities for large-scale growth and development, and intelligent use of media is a great way to begin.*

9) Measuring your communications impact

Introduction

In conjunction with your work promoting your baseball and/or softball activities across local and regional media, and through social media, you'll also want to measure how successful you've been and what impact you've been having.

The tools and techniques outlined here are common practice on the part of many top companies and institutions to establish the value of their communications, although they have been modified to highlight the best free and time-efficient options. This is aimed at reflecting the pressures under which most clubs around the country operate.

By producing a concise set of data to reflect your success in communications, you can use your media outreach as a marketing tool to both retain your players and enhance the value they receive by being a member of your organisation. And, in turn, you can highlight your community work and identity for potential sponsors, funders or grant-givers.

Importance of evaluation

Evaluating the success of your communications work is important. It's vital to keep an accurate measurement of your efforts to show where more investment (in this case volunteer time rather than spending on an employee or computer programme) would be needed.

Additionally, you can track your success on a weekly, monthly and/or yearly basis to show how off-the-field efforts have helped to grow the sport and your club.

Methods of evaluation

1) Google news alerts

Setting up an alert for your club is easy, and it should alert you every time your club is mentioned across any media. Every club should be doing this as an absolute minimum:

<http://www.google.co.uk/alerts>.

Strengths:

- If you are keeping cuttings, you don't have to buy every local paper, just the ones you've been mentioned in, which this should alert you to.
- Free and easy to do.
- Increases search engine optimisation of your club.

Weaknesses:

- Doesn't pick up misspellings.
- Publication online doesn't definitely mean publication in a paper or magazine.
- Doesn't pick up audio recordings or TV broadcasts
- No measure of influence of impact.

2) AVE – Advertising Value Equivalent

This is one of the more common forms of measurement for professionals, which works out the amount of space obtained by an article mentioning your organisation and how much it would have cost for an advert of that size. For example, a one-page piece in *The Sun* might have an AVE of £14,000, as that is what an advert would cost, while a quarter-page piece in the *Bristol Post* could be worth £250.

In the past, this form of measurement was literally measuring column inches with a ruler – which is an excellent alternative if you are unable or unwilling to guess the cost of an advert in the space covered.

Strengths:

- Excellent objective measurement.
- Easy to measure and rarely fluctuates – a flat rate across most media.
- Can justify your communications work using money as the measurement.

Weaknesses:

- Doesn't say much about the impact or influence of your club or team.
- You may miss an article and won't know how much coverage that was worth.

3) Circulation figures and exposure

Using data from mediauk.com, it should be easy enough to work out how many people are reading your local newspapers or how many are listening to your local radio stations. Here, you can factor in how many people are likely to have seen or heard your messages and therefore will have been exposed to stories or information about your club.

Strengths:

- Accurate data – this is updated each year based on circulation figures.

- Can give you a focus for what should be your target media, based on how many people you want to reach.

Weaknesses:

- No guarantee that circulation reflects people that will read your article.
- Listeners are averaged out over the course of a week, so no definite numbers on how many are tuned in at different times.

4) **Google Analytics**

By now, you definitely have a website, right? Well, make sure you know how busy your site is by using Google Analytics to establish the most popular pages, where people are going to on your site and how they get there. The statistics can't tell you everything, but they can hint strongly and give you an idea of what search terms people are using to get to your site, thus giving you some feedback on what people want to find out about.

Strengths:

- Free tool to analyse your website.
- Easy to use and lots of online guides.
- Live data.

Weaknesses:

- Limited specific user insight.

There is no reason, again, not to use analytics for your site, as it is a free way to evaluate user behaviour. You can then tailor your communications to appeal to more people and enhance your offer. Get started now at: <http://www.google.com/analytics/>.

5) **Measuring the influence and impact of a news story (The Westminster Model)**

In 2011, Westminster City Council published a [widely-praised report](#) identifying how they measured the influence and impact of their mentions in the media and across social media. They were able to evaluate behavioural changes, tailor communications and measure and act upon interaction with the Council and more. Many of the tools used are free, and although sometimes subjective, this model provides a great basis for working out your likely impact.

For this, you need to first establish where you think your target audience gets their news from (e.g. BBC national news, local radio, community websites) and give them a value based on how influential you think they are (4 for the most influential, 1 for the least). Then work out the tone of the piece, ranging from 2 for a positive piece with a quote from your club to -2 for a negative piece without a quote. For each media mention, mark it using the two scoring criteria and multiply those to establish impact.

Strengths:

- Great way to understand the impact and influence that your communications are having.
- More effective than simply measuring column inches.

Weaknesses:

- Can be time-consuming.
- Different people will judge things differently.
- Requires knowledge of what are the most influential media for your target audience, although this can likely be worked out from a combination of circulation figures and importance to the local area.

6) Social media

There are a number of tools on the market to measure social media, but the easiest and cheapest way of establishing how active your club is on social media is taking a weekly update of the number of Tweets that mention your Twitter handle, the number of posts on Facebook that include your club page and the number of fans and followers each account has. Over the course of the year you can identify trends around when more people post about your club and when more people follow or like you!

Additionally, to add a little extra value, you can also measure your total impressions on Twitter using Tweetreach (<http://tweetreach.com/>). Again, you'll need to do this weekly, but it should give a good indication of how influential you are and who is seeing and repeating your message.

Strengths:

- Constant simple analysis of interaction.
- Provides times when communications will be seen by more people.
- Measures engagement and interaction as a tool for influence and impact.

Weaknesses:

- Can be time-consuming.
- If you miss a week, you may not be able to easily recover the data.

Conclusions

These are just some of the possibilities for media evaluation that are out there, and further work will still need to be done in the form of surveys and questionnaires if you want to establish the full impact of your communications. However, these tools and techniques can provide meaningful information that is of use and importance to your club and can enhance the value of membership, as well as providing an excellent example of your awareness of your role in your local community. This is a big factor that many sponsors and county sports officials will consider when looking at the possibility of helping the development of your club.

In conjunction with the rest of this document on involvement with local and social media, this should provide the justification for working on a better media plan and reaching out to the community.

CREATING LOCAL PRESS RELEASES FOR BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL

by Michael Jones

Individual baseball or softball clubs or leagues can help themselves to raise their profile and therefore the profile of the sport in their local area through gaining coverage in local media.

In 2012, the Essex Redbacks were successful in securing media coverage for their achievements on and off the field, involving local radio and local newspapers. Importantly, this has not only elevated the profile of the club but also enhanced the satisfaction that members of the club get from playing baseball, which is part of the holistic approach to improving the sport for participants in the UK.

The Redbacks built on some existing press contacts and enhanced this opportunity by ensuring that a press release came out every Sunday/Monday morning following weekend baseball games. Journalists are hard-pushed to find appropriate stories at all levels of the industry and so any assistance they can get will be gratefully received. And if it's in the form of an easily replicable email which is well-formed and concise, there is a greater chance that they will run the story, as less effort is necessary on their part.

Reasons to improve external communications:

- Heightens the sense of pride players have in competing for their club; getting names mentioned in the paper is a big coup.
- Provides good experience for club volunteer(s).
- Results in greater coverage of the club within the local community.
- Produces press cuttings/sound-bites to demonstrate club activity to potential sponsors.
- Increases awareness of the sport and encourages more people to find out about it.
- Can help with the documentation of British baseball and softball for historic records.
- COULD lead to better overall communication of the sport to the general public, leading to better sponsorship deals for the BBF, BSF and/or BSUK and reducing costs to individuals and member clubs.

There are many other aspects to external communication – for example, social media interaction. Someone able to update Twitter or websites with scores every inning or immediately after games can heighten the interconnectivity of the British baseball or softball community.

And though preparing a press release takes a bit of extra effort on days when you may have been driving back from a game or tournament or spent time putting up and taking down fences, it's not too much of an extra ask given the benefits that can accrue.

Potential media outlets:

- Local newspaper
- BBC Regional radio
- Commercial regional radio
- Community radio
- Free community newspaper
- Community newsletter
- Student newspaper/media (if any students are playing for your club or team or if the club plays or practises on school facilities).
- Community websites and forums
- Your club or league's own website. Uploading match reports on your own website ensures that you can eventually collate all the stories from the year, plus you can ensure that there is plenty of content on your website for promotional purposes.

Contacting local media:

It is important to email all relevant local media contacts where you have them (these are usually easy to find via the outlet's website or in a print edition of the paper itself). If not, then calling the newsdesk/sportsdesk only takes five minutes of someone's lunch hour and you will almost always get a positive response as people are keen to feature local sports and local people.

Where possible, attaching a photo significantly heightens the chances of coverage. Even if the whole story doesn't make publication (online or in print), there's a chance that the sport and the club will be mentioned in a photo montage or a caption accompanying the picture.

Notes on emails:

Always send them in BCC in order to avoid potential embarrassment. Additionally, CC the Club Chairperson, Club Secretary and Youth Coaches (if applicable) so that all relevant authorities within the club have read the official press release and are prepped and briefed for follow-up correspondence.

Add an accompanying message at the top of the email thanking the journalists in advance for covering the story, or thanking them for covering it previously. It is a courtesy that pays dividends. Also ask the journalists whether they would like the story as an attachment or pasted into the email – different journalists prefer different methods, and making this enquiry can help to get even more coverage for the club. Briefly say what happened and what it means for the league standings in one sentence so they know what to expect in the press release. And always invite them to future games.

Notes on subject lines:

Something along the lines of "Halton Baseball Club Weekend Round-up 14/15-4-12" or "Manchester League clubs gain two national softball titles 10/11-8-12" are appropriate – there must be mention of the sport and the club or league in the subject line in order to be fast-tracked to the relevant contact at the media outlet. If not, the email risks being put in junk or disregarded.

Including a date/time frame in the subject line ensures that it is relevant to a specific issue of the paper or sports round-up.

Notes on content:

You will normally want to put a positive spin on baseball or softball and on the club, league or tournament you are writing the press release about. Although it's easy to be honest (e.g. "The pitcher has struggled all season and again he walked the bases loaded to put his team in an impossible situation in the first inning"), it isn't in anyone's best interests. Local journalists don't want to hear about how bad someone was, as it doesn't put a good light on the sport in their area. Instead, say something like: "The opposition batters were more patient than the pitcher was used to and they marched to a four-run lead early on". Remember: your role is to promote the club and the sport as well as to be a journalist.

Notes on stats and language:

Names are always good and stats can sometimes be useful, but try to remember that saying "Dave Ward went 3-for-5 with two walks, a sac fly and a solo dinger" is incomprehensible to anyone outside of the baseball or softball community. Instead, limit the information you provide to what is relevant and understandable: "Dave Ward had three hits, including a home run, as he led the team's offense".

Notes on photos:

It's Important to attach photos to emails separately rather than embedding them in the email. The caption you would like to use should be the name of the photo attachment, so there is no chance of these two elements being separated. Try to also name the person who took the photo (this can encourage more people to come to baseball or softball games to take pictures if there's a chance their photo could end up in the local press).

Try to include the club or league logo as an embedded picture in your email as this adds a professional aspect to the report, but also attach the logo to the email along with any photos so it can be used by the media outlet.

ELEMENTS FOR A LOCAL PRESS RELEASE

What follows is a template for a press release for local media outlets. It is designed to require as little effort as possible while still being effective, by providing the basic information that journalists need. The template can obviously be adapted or extended.

Club or league name:

Date:

Scores or results:

Headline: Something snappy but informative that doesn't require prior knowledge of baseball or softball.

THE REPORT

It is important to remember that the more names of people that have contributed to matches that can be dropped into the report, the more chance of coverage the report will get. Journalists often recognise the link between people's names getting mentioned and their friends or family picking up a copy of that week's paper.

Here is a useful format to follow:

WHAT HAPPENED:

- Who won what against who?
- Was it an important win (with regard to league standings or a tournament placing)?
- Was there a unique or important feat involved (a no-hitter, lots of home runs)?

WHERE AND WHEN:

E.g. on Sunday afternoon, May 5 at Melbourne Park, Chelmsford or the weekend of June 15-16 at Farnham Park near Slough. If a league match, was the local team at home or away?

MOMENTUM SHIFT:

Was there any tension or was it all one-sided? If momentum changed, how did it affect performance?

WHO PLAYED WELL AND WHO CONTRIBUTED MOST TO THE WIN:

E.g. the winning pitcher, someone who had lots of RBIs, great defensive work etc.

WHAT RESULTED:

Does the win/loss make a difference to league standing, placement in a tournament series etc?

RELEVANT QUOTE/SOUND-BITES:

From players, managers, coaches, club chairmen etc.

NEXT OPPOSITION:

When and where is the next game or tournament for the local team, and against which opposition?

SIGNATURE ELEMENTS:

- x) Name and title of the person writing the report (e.g. Tanya Smith, Press Officer).
- xi) Name of club, league or tournament.
- xii) Daytime contact phone number.
- xiii) Email address.
- xiv) Twitter handle (e.g. @boltonbaseball).

NOTES TO EDITORS:

These should come at the end of the press release and should provide basic background information on the club, league or tournament. For example:

CLUB NAME is a member of the British Baseball Federation. The club has existed since **DATE** and play their home games at **VENUE**. Training is on **DAY-OF-THE-WEEK TIME-OF-DAY** and available to everyone over the age of 14 regardless of ability or experience.

For more information on the club, visit the website at **WEBSITE ADDRESS** or contact the **BEST CONTACT (ROLE)** at: **EMAIL ADDRESS**.