



# Social Marketing and Media in Sports and Leisure

This briefing outlines some of the main concepts in social marketing and media as used within the field of sports and leisure. It is provided to local authority chief executives, council leaders and all APSE leisure contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is of interest to all officers and members involved in the delivery and promotion of local authority leisure services.

## Key issues:

- Traditional methods of marketing leisure services are increasingly failing to reach target customers.
- Motivating potential customers involves tapping into their existing lifestyle choices
- Social media offers an attractive route to younger people and social marketing a method to encourage positive behaviour in regard to personal health.

## 1. Introduction

Gone are the days when councils could simply offer a basic range of sport and leisure services and promote them via posters and leaflets. As the activities on offer have evolved to meet the growing expectations of customers across all ages and social groupings, the ways of promoting them have become increasingly sophisticated.

Customers expect up-to-date news, offers and promotions via different social networking mediums and providers want to interact with users and non-users as much as possible to promote services, respond to opinions and develop strong relationships. Councils are using social media and other innovative techniques to target different user groups and increase uptake of physical activities – and improve health as a result. Facebook, Twitter, Survey Monkey, text messaging and branded websites and campaigns are among the methods used by APSE member authorities to get messages across and to listen to local communities.

## 2. Examples

Kirklees has introduced an interactive mobile phone game for young people tackling many of the problems associated with independent living. Limvady Borough Council is using Facebook as a key marketing tool – Active Roe Valley is a forum set up for all those with a direction interest in promoting physical activity and health and well being and to foster ‘healthy town’ objectives.

In Strabane District Council, the Abbey Theatre Facebook page now has 500 members, with its own critic who has conducted live reviews while plays are in progress. Twitter, podcasts by visiting performers, blogging, e-newsletters to patrons, u-tube, Bebo and Myspace are all used. There is also a ‘Test Drive the Arts’ project providing free tickets for new visitors.

Sefton Council has invested in a Bluetooth enabled back pack with phenomenal results. The device is worn in a back pack and walked around a shopping centre or other public venue. Anyone with a Bluetooth enabled mobile phone will receive an invitation to open a message from the Council. When used to promote the Council’s Soundwaves kids event, the numbers increased threefold from 60 to 180. Similar devices are being used across the country to promote safe drink awareness in City centre pubs and safety messages for those travelling home after an evening out.

In Gwynedd County Council, all young people in the county get a 16th birthday card, membership induction and five fitness sessions at the gym. This scheme was set up because the Council identified that young people tended to stop taking part in as many sport and leisure activities once they reached that age.

## 3. Definition

It is useful to take a step back and ask a few basic questions. What is social marketing? What are social media? Why is it especially valuable in promoting sport and leisure? And, crucially, what is the secret of getting the most out of such approaches?

It is important to get the terminology right. ‘Social marketing’ and ‘social networking’ are frequently confused terms, which appear on a regular basis in the press and media. They are used interchangeably when, in fact, they are different things.

‘Social marketing’ is now recognised by central government as a valuable tool in promoting healthier lifestyles among citizens. The National Centre for Social Marketing (NCSM), was set up in 2006 as a partnership between the Department of Health and Consumer Focus, an executive non-Departmental Public Body of the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), to promote the subject and provide guidance to the health service and others.

NCSM defines social marketing as 'the systematic application of marketing, alongside other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals, for a social good'. It views the key features as: customer orientation with behavioural goals; and using understanding of human behaviour to gain insight into what motivates people. This entails understanding factors that compete for their time and attention and intervening with a mix of marketing methods targeted specifically at specifically segregated audiences.

'Social networking' is the interaction between a group of people who share a common interest either using social contacts to network or using internet network groups (such as Facebook, Bebo and Twitter) to network and communicate between consumers and businesses. 'Social media' are those networks, tools and technologies themselves by which social marketing and networking is achieved.

#### 4. In Sports and Leisure

In the sport and leisure context, social marketing therefore means identifying target groups of potential customers and using marketing channels including social media to put messages across in ways that people relate to in order to motivate them to participate in sport and leisure activities and thus improve their health and wellbeing.

When she spoke at an APSE conference earlier this year, Kelly Evans of the NSMC urged local authority sport and leisure providers to use all the information at their disposal to understand what 'moves and motivates' different target groups. Her advice was to be creative, clever, funny, interesting and attention-grabbing' in your approach, using a range of media and methods to get messages across.

Social marketing needs to be undertaken in a strategic way. The NSMC provides information on the key stages in social market, starting with the scoping stage, which should establish clear and practical goals for changes in behaviour that are sought. After developing and implementing a strategy, it is important to evaluate its success in terms of outputs and outcomes.

#### 5. Newcastle Case Study

Social marketing is at the heart of an innovative four-year campaign to boost physical activity among Newcastle residents.

The project, launched in May 2009, aims to encourage 'more people to become more active more often'. It is funded by Newcastle Council, Newcastle Primary Care Trust and Sport England and brings together providers from the public, private and voluntary sectors to deliver physical activity opportunities under the name Active Newcastle.

Active Newcastle has set a target of raising participation in physical activity so that over 30% of adults and 50% of young people are taking part at least three times a week by 2013. It aims to promote involvement in sport and leisure as part of the city's community development, cohesion and sustainability goals as well as improving residents' health and well-being. The most economically deprived wards, BME communities and females are being specifically targeted.

The website [www.activenewcastle.org.uk](http://www.activenewcastle.org.uk) is central to the whole campaign and has generated three million hits in the first twelve months. It features postcode search facilities for events, microsites for specific activities and includes promotion of free and discounted activities. The site will eventually allow each registered user their own home page sign-in, which will post individuals to the nearest and most suitable physical activity based on their preferences.

Su Cumming, head of community sport at Newcastle City Council, commented: "We asked ourselves how could best engage with local communities in the modern multi-media context and found this interactive website was the right model to access the community and make communication friendly and interesting. For the audience we were targeting, we decided it would not just be a council entity but draw in all the partners and bring everyone together." She believes the interactive site is good use of resources compared with printing materials out.

A company called Foundry Media was commissioned to develop the site. Focus groups of local residents said information should be updated regularly and be quick and easy to find. Their feedback helped create a brand, visual design and content which gives the site a fresh and colourful identity.

A social marketing approach examined the emotional as well as the practical barriers stopping people getting active. Consultation among a cross section of local people examined attitudes and barriers to physical activity, such as confidence and body image, as well as factors such as cost, lack of time and childcare responsibilities. It found that residents wanted to see images of 'people like them' at all ages and backgrounds and life stages - not studio images of unrealistically young, slim and attractive people - on the site. Other innovative features of the Active Newcastle site include 'iexercise', a digital fitness management programme with tools to keep track of health and fitness and receive encouragement from others via social networking.

The site features latest news, what's on, voucher deals, competitions and videos and enables users to sign up to feeds on Twitter. Incentives are used such as free water bottles when people sign up for activities and email follow-ups after they have taken part in sessions. Ms Cumming advises: 'It is important to always have something new on the website. It's about retention as well as attracting people.'

As Newcastle is a host for football events during the 2012 Olympics, the Active Newcastle project uses the Games as a catalyst to promote involvement in sport. The '500 Days 500 Lives' programme is about using physical activity to change 500 people's lives in the 500 day run-up to the opening of the Olympics. The 2012 gallery on the photo-sharing site Flickr enables positive images from Active Newcastle to be posted in the run-up to the Games.

## 6. Telford & Wrekin Case Study

A mixture of customer orientated marketing methods was used to increase participation in physical activity and raise awareness of health issues during the Woodside Gets Active campaign in Telford & Wrekin.

Woodside Gets Active was an intensive, three-month partnership project by Telford & Wrekin Council and the local Primary Care Trust to increase take up of sport and leisure activities among children and their parents in a deprived area with high incidences of obesity.

The project had a £15000 budget to run and promote a programme of activities, including events in schools, local 'health walks', free swimming and 50% discounts at health and fitness centres. Evaluation showed the programme was well received among target audiences. It resulted in an increase of 8,000 visits to centres from the same period the year before. The campaign also provided valuable insights into how to operate future to encourage behavioural change. Clear behavioural goals of one hour physical activity per day for children and half an hour five times per week for adults were set.

Events which incentivised participation were supported via a strategic approach to marketing and public relations. This included news releases, press inserts, direct mail, beer mats, posters and banners. Understanding matters from the customers' perspective was key to the success of the project. Focus groups with children and their parents, consultation and street questionnaires revealed that combining physical activity opportunities with weight management programmes was the best way forward for adults, for example, and so the local weight loss clinic worked alongside sport and leisure services.

Gaining deep understanding of customers also showed that events were taking place at the wrong times and fears of not being fit enough were putting people off taking part. Programme managers were therefore able to develop a range of promotions to overcome barriers. Geographic and demographic segregation helped target messages and activities specifically according to what motivates different people. An example of this was running an aerobics class for men at the local pub, where activities such as darts and cards were competing for their time and attention. This proved a popular way of reaching a specific hard to reach group.

## 7. APSE commentary

APSE supports in-house services and improving the financial bottom line of the leisure service has to be an incentive to managers. In a time when the talk in local government is all about cuts and reduced budgets, in what remains a discretionary service, it is important not to forget that generating additional revenue can reduce that burden, in some cases substantially. Social marketing is a valuable tool in an increasingly complex and demanding market

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