

# 7 Radical Rules to Leverage Online Sports Fan Buzz

**WOM Wednesday Teleconference**

April 30, 2008

Presented by

**Kathleen Hessert**

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# Overview

According to Sean O'Driscoll, General Manager of Microsoft's Community Support, "Word of Mouth is the single most important driver of every decision we make as consumers reinforcing the fact that one customer's perception is statistically significant." However in sports, fans also wear the jersey, fly the colors, paint their faces and sing the fight songs even when they're tone deaf! They're a distinctly different breed and if they're important to your brand, you need to understand why.

## 7 Radical Rules to Leverage Online Sports Fan Buzz

1. Fans & consumers are not the same thing
2. Sports fans are always right, and sometimes that's a good thing
3. Even the smallest fan voice can have big influence
4. Look for ways to influence and not just influencers
5. Sports fans come for the highlights, but stay for the game
6. Creative Authenticity is better than just creativity or authenticity alone
7. Sports fans like to keep score!

*Sports personifies passion and community providing a rich environment to harness "influential" word of mouth conversations to enrich your brand*

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Founder & President  
Sports Media Challenge  
Buzz Manager

## 7 Radical Rules to Leverage Online Sports Fan Buzz

### #1 Fans and Consumers are not the same thing

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#### WWE

January-February, 2008

Monitoring for WWE's initiative into providing High Definition broadcasts of their various weekly shows and pay-per-views.

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**"I have ordered every Wrestlemania since X-7 but I think I'll pass this year. My cable bill is already \$160 a month. I don't need to add another \$70."**

-foxhound.metalgearsolidus.com

#### Observations:

Some of the WWE's most "loyal" online fan-base would appear to not actually be paying customers for the pay-per-view shows, instead electing to wait for free versions of the events to be posted to video sites or to be made available via peer-to-peer sharing networks.

On non-wrestling oriented sites the fan commentary was mainly focused on technical feedback. Wrestling fans enjoyed the production values, but felt that it hid the lack of a quality product in terms of substance. The differences between the sentiments on sites with different themes highlights how WWE could use the information across different parts of the company.



#### Lessons

- It's much easier to lose a customer than it is to lose a fan
- When a fan complains in an online forum, we have to determine if they're dissatisfied as a consumer or as a fan.
- Having true "fans" represents the ultimate in brand affinity.
- Some fans feel that any money spent towards any sponsor is money that goes towards helping the player/team/league, but most fans do not.

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### #2 Sports fans are always right and sometimes that's a good thing

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#### Nationwide NASCAR Series Spring, 2007

Nationwide Insurance asked us to monitor the name transition from Busch Series to Nationwide Series. Knowing NASCAR fans to be very brand loyal, the primary concern was backlash.

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**"Well friends.....I have a new name for the drivers that come down from the Cup series to race with the Nationwide boys....instead of Bushwackers they shall be called, Nationvaders. Pronounced like "Space Invaders"."**

-wkyracing.blogspot.com

#### Observations:

The term "Buschwackers" was prevalent among NASCAR fans, referring to drivers who raced primarily in the Nextel Cup Series and also the Busch Series. With the transition in naming rights from Busch to Nationwide, one point of discussion that came up was what to call these drivers. Mainstream media took to referring to the drivers as "claim-jumpers", which was a term that Nationwide felt was too negative in the insurance business to be so readily linked to their brand.



Online NASCAR fans had other ideas. Not liking the "claim-jumpers" tag, the discussion progressed across several fan blogs and message boards and eventually the term "Nationvaders" was settled on. Seeing it as another opportunity to link the Nationwide brand to the vernacular of the fans, efforts are now being made to see that the "Nationvaders" become the norm among media and fans.

#### Lessons

- With the visibility that an average fan can now achieve, they are defining the conversation.
- Listening to the conversation can often yield solutions to problems that had not even been realized.
- Acceptance changes from sport to sport so it pays to have an idea of how a particular audience behaves.

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### #3 Even the smallest sports fans can have a big amount of influence

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Penn State University  
October, 2007

While doing continued monitoring, a YouTube video surfaced, which apparently featured several Ohio State fans being pelted with beers by Penn State University students.

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**"On behalf of the 99% of Penn State fans that are nice people capable of showing respect to opposing fans, I'm sorry. This is not the Penn State I know and love."**

-BlackShoeDiaries.com

#### Observations:

The original YouTube video was featured on a smaller college football site before being picked up by the larger college football sites and eventually the largest general sports blogs. The original site "discovering" the video then took it upon itself to continually report every bit of information that came out of the PSU Athletic Department for commentary. PSU made a concerted effort to understand the direction of the conversation by monitoring the online conversation.



Over the next several weeks following the incident, the most active Penn State fan blogs regularly featured posts apologizing for the fan behavior and requesting that the incident not reflect upon the rest of PSU's alumni and fan base. Several college football fans on other non-PSU sites noted how well represented PSU was by their fan blogs despite not being officially endorsed by the school.

#### Lessons

- Catching, tracking and understanding how a "scoop" will move can buy time.
- Smaller sites are constantly trying to push their material and larger sites are constantly searching for more material.
- Understanding how information "cycles" from one site to another is critical in monitoring for public relations purposes.
- When dealing with disparate communities along the same vertical, it pays to understand which ones are really your fans.

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### #4 Look for ways to influence not just influencers

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#### Southern Methodist University Spring 2007

During online monitoring of SMU's fans, a very active conversation appeared criticizing SMU's decision to increase parking prices for the next football season.

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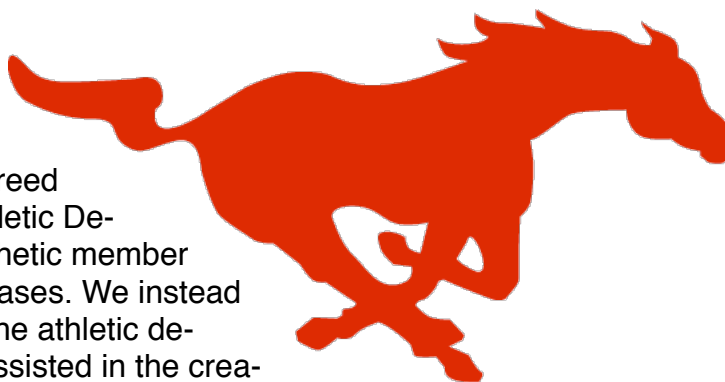
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**"Thanks for coming on here and explaining the new plan. I don't know how these changes will effect the boulevard and I'm eagerly awaiting my season ticket renewal to go over the plan myself."**

-Comment on SMU's official athletic department blog

#### Observations:

After SMU raised the price of parking in the popular Boulevard area, SMU fans complained loudly on the PonyFans.com message boards. The raise in prices seemed to be a matter of greed on the part of the university. The SMU Athletic Department requested that we find a sympathetic member of the board to voice the reasons for increases. We instead suggested that they post the reasons on the athletic department blog, which we had previously assisted in the creation of, and leave it open for discussion.



The response was almost immediate. Several comments appeared on the official blog, but the conversation on the message board was markedly less harsh. While fans were not overjoyed with the increase, some came around to the idea that the money would be helping the school and most acknowledged that the Athletic Department should be commended for recognizing the fan concerns.

#### Lessons

- Most blogs and forums are doing their best to stick their most influential conversations into the limelight. They want to be heard.
- Rather than try to influence a particular person within a community, recognize when you're in the position to spark that influential discussion yourself.
- Sports fans can be sympathetic to the financial situations of their teams. Don't underestimate them!

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### #5 Sports fans love the highlights but they stay for the game

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#### T-Mobile/NBA All-Star Game February, 2008

Monitoring for T-Mobile's activation surrounding the All-Star Game and the Fave Five promotion featuring Charles Barkley and Dwyane Wade.

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**"That's the hardest product category in my mind to do something really good with. The spot was smart and funny and it had two athletes actually delivering lines well."**

-shootonline.com

#### Observations:

Commentary regarding T-Mobile's activation was generally positive and discussion on sports sites showed that Dwyane Wade and Charles Barkley were very closely associated with the "Fave Five".

T-Mobile

The T-Mobile website had a feature that gave users the opportunity to "remix" the T-Mobile commercials. While there appeared to be good usage of the site, there was very little discussion regarding this feature found. No evidence of remixed videos being shared was found. Fans generally appeared very engaged in the commercials

#### Lessons

- Putting together a flashy activation may catch a sports fans' eye, but even a little more substance goes a long way.
- Smart fans know pure "linkbait" when they see it even if they willingly fall for it at first.
- "Reach" is overrated if there's no substance to secure a conversion

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### #6 Creative Authenticity is better than just creativity or authenticity

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#### Chris Bosh YouTube video December, 2007

In an effort to increase his popularity, and perhaps just to participate in the social media space, Chris Bosh releases a YouTube video of himself playing the part of a used car salesman.

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**“I voted 4 ya every day and I aint even a raps fan lol. Chris would have got in if KG werent traded to the east!”**

-Comment on YouTube.com

#### Observations:

The video was obviously homemade and resonated immediately with fans. The overall production was distinctly amateurish even compared to some home videos found on the Internet, but it resonated so well as to make a notable difference in the NBA All-Star voting and several mentions in mainstream media.

Bosh built a good base of subscribers to his YouTube channel on the basis of this video and the video where he plays a haughty English professor. However, most of the videos on the channel have not received the same acclaim as his character pieces.

#### Lessons

- Fans don't really mind if there is a big marketing firm behind what they're seeing, but they like it better if there isn't.
- Marketing doesn't have to be expensive or edgy to be effective
- There doesn't have to be a lot of glitz for it to be picked up and passed around.

Chris W Bosh - Send Me To New Orleans All Star Game 2008



Rate: ★★★★★  
2,546 ratings

Views: 596,878  
[watch in high quality](#)

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### #7 Sports fans keep score for you learn to read the stat sheet

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#### NBC Sports NFL Blog Buzz September-January, 2007

NBCSports.com requested an editorial piece for the website to compliment the Football Night in America feature that could reflect the sentiments of the football fans.

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**"Very cool! Thanks for letting me know. I like this feature a lot -- NBCSports is lucky to have this. I'll be sure to link it up today."**

-Dan Shanoff

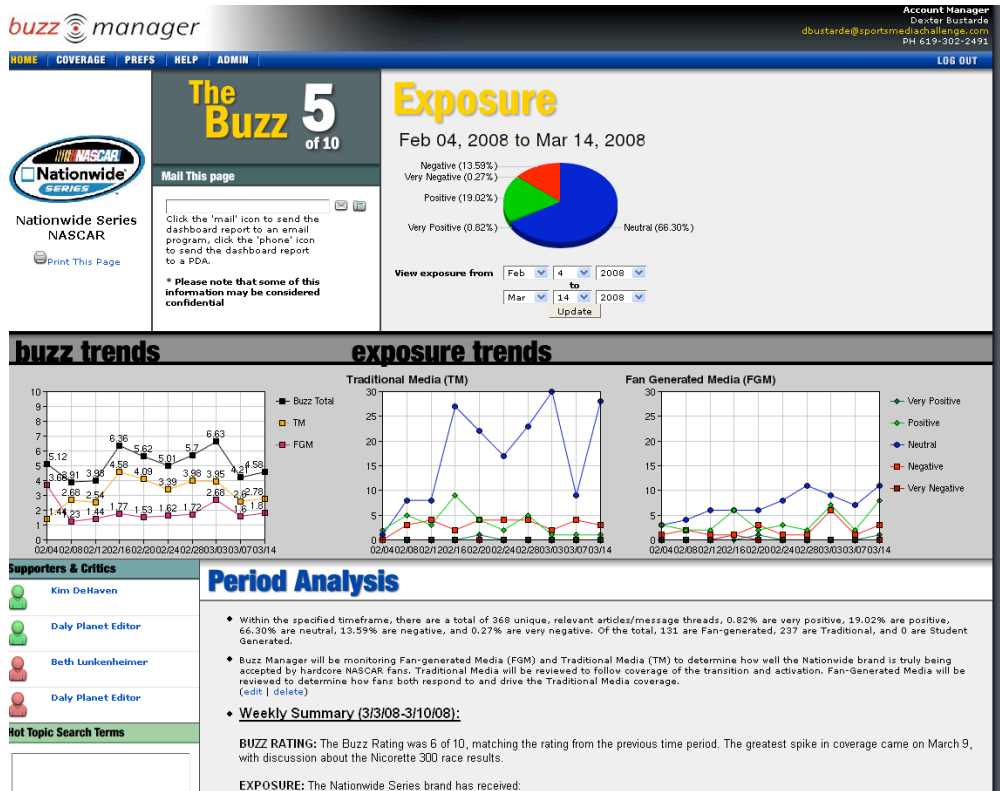
#### Observations:

Sports Media Challenge sampled general sports blogs and football blogs to get the top five topics of the week. While there was some hesitation as to how bloggers would react to having their written material be used in such a way on a media site, the response from bloggers was extremely positive. Bloggers sent in requests on how their site could be featured and were grateful for the additional exposure. Most bloggers even went so far as to see what statistics from their site could be made publicly available so as to make their site more visible and measurable to SMC's future efforts.



#### Lessons

- Online sports fans actually want to be measured.
- They want to demonstrate their influence.
- They want to know where they rank and what they can do to improve the rank.
- Couple the publicly available data with your own internal data.



## About Buzz Manager

Buzz Manger is a leading-edge business intelligence tool that mines, monitors and measures fan-generated media conversations and mainstream media exposure. With the explosion of online word of mouth in blogs, social networks and other fan forums, this service provides a comprehensive web based solution to interpret and leverage the buzz around brands in the sports, entertainment and lifestyle markets. Ultimately, Buzz Manager keeps brands aware 24/7 of their reputation, the status of hot issues, fan sentiment and key influencers for public relations, marketing and other business applications.

Buzz Manager enables you to track fan-generated media (FGM) and traditional media. You'll know how much fans, or critics are talking and exactly what they are saying. Much more than a web clipping service, Buzz Manager combines breakthrough technology and human intelligence to provide in-depth analysis that enables organizations to follow issues and act on information to enrich & protect their brands and those of their sponsors.

## About Sports Media Challenge

Founded by President Kathleen Hessert in 1988, Sports Media Challenge has been in the forefront of media and communication training and consulting for many of the world's leading athletes, coaches, executives, teams and leagues including college, professional and Olympic sports. SMC has built a track record of successfully guiding clients to maximize public exposure while minimizing its risks. With the explosion of the Internet and the advent of social media, SMC has led the way for sports brands looking to make their mark in this new and exciting arena.



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