

How Sports Marketing Partners Helps Athletes Become More Social

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Steve Schwartz had learned the business of broadcasting and sports marketing inside and out during his career. Steve had held multiple sports-related sales and marketing positions in more than a decade with DISH Network, DirecTV and Fox Cable Networks.

But it became clear to him that social media opened a world of possibilities for athletes. So he set about turning himself into a social media expert, and nearly a year ago, when he set out on his own and began Sports Marketing Partners LLC in Seattle, social media strategy was a major part of his arsenal.

“This social media thing was really taking off and wasn’t going away anytime soon,” Steve said. He quickly grasped the potential. “Social media is nothing more than another common medium, like TV or radio, another way for any of us to reach out and communicate to others. It’s the 21st century version of the soapbox.”

Seattle Seahawks receiver Doug Baldwin was impressed. “I was introduced to Steve through a mutual friend, and once we spoke I quickly realized he had a very profound business mind,” Doug said. “When we sat down to discuss a possible relationship, he presented a very professional and detailed business plan. I was impressed with his delivery and tact.”

Doug became Steve’s first client.

Doug had been on Twitter since 2009, but Steve encouraged him to expand his reach through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube. “He’s broadened his voice,” Steve said. With Steve’s assistance, Doug really took to sharing content with his fans, giving them peeks behind the scenes that make for attractive content on social media. Doug has 195,000 Twitter followers now.



Doug Baldwin’s Twitter page

“I decided to work with him on my social media objectives, and immediately I had a plethora of empirical data to support that I had made a good decision,” Doug said. “As time went on, we expanded the plan for

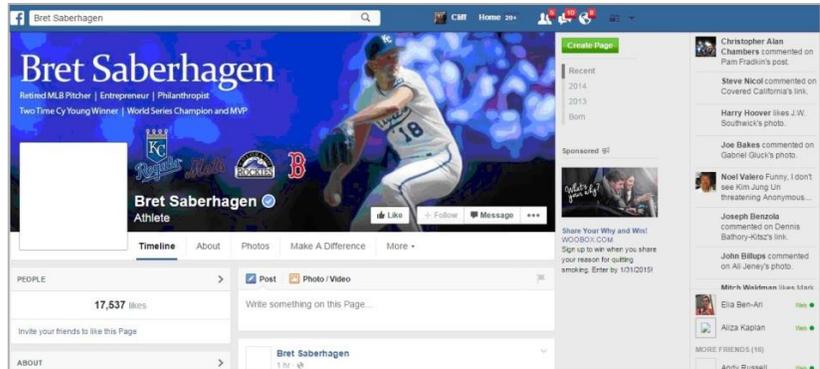
my platform. That plan has developed into a real tool for me to peel back the curtain on my life to show my fans and the public who I am as well as providing an avenue for many endorsements.”

Steve officially launched Sports Marketing Partners in January, and has picked up several other active and retired athletes, including former major league pitcher Bret Saberhagen.

“Bret saw the value in getting back in circulation and reconnecting with his fans,” Schwartz said.

Among other things, Schwartz helped Bret start a fan page on Facebook, which now has about 18,000 followers.

For Bret, the timing was fortuitous. Months after Bret became Steve’s client and grew his social media presence, the Kansas City Royals went on a deep post season run, all the way to the seventh game of the World Series. That, of course, revived interest in the stars of the last Royals team to make it to the World Series, in 1985. Bret started the seventh game of that series, which has a happier ending for Royals fans in no small part due to Bret’s pitching.



Bret Saberhagen’s Facebook page

“He had me running around quite a bit, which I don’t mind,” Bret said. Bret bounced from appearances for Dick’s Sporting Goods, to ESPN for interviews, to a stream of radio and TV appearances, to throwing out the ceremonial first pitch before game 7.

“I’m surprised that more people aren’t taking advantage of his services,” said Bret, who added he’s recommended Steve to several people he knows. “He’s so great at what he does.”

There are drawbacks to the attention. Athletes, even decades after their retirement, can be approached for an interaction or reaction at anytime and find that moment broadcast for everyone to see a few moments later. Fortunately, as this clip shows, Bret has the poise to handle it.

Steve says social media has become a routine part of any athlete’s branding strategy. It’s critical value added to any arrangement between an athlete and the organization he or she is working with. “I can’t think of a single partnership where the partner didn’t ask for or require a social media component,” Steve said. “Companies realize the huge value of being part of the conversation between the athlete and his or her fans – as long as it’s authentic.” ■



Sports Marketing Partners, LLC
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