

Make Sport Fun

Introductory guide to marketing sport and activity



Introduction

“... 175, 176!” It was 3 days before the London 2012 Olympics and today we’d just signed up another 176 more people at the Olympic Torch relay. According to my calculations 120 of those people would try a new sport or activity, and 86 of them would be active 6 weeks later.

These were just a drop in the ocean. We’d started the campaign 7 weeks earlier and already had 2,500 people registered, and we expected to help 1,250 of them become more active.

We had developed one of the most advanced sport and activity marketing systems in the world. We had a custom developed CRM system for tracking who was attending which activity and automatically following up with them. We had an online advertising campaign running which provided us with leads at an unprecedentedly low cost.

This was going to change everything. People didn’t realise it yet, but the way sport and activity programmes are run was going to be permanently changed by the results of this programme.



John Ainsworth
Greenwich
London 2012

Why marketing's hard

Before I give you any information about what kind of impact sport and activity marketing have, or any tips on how you can run a campaign, I'd like you to think about anything you've had on your mind over the last 24 hours. Anything at all, apart from sport and activity.

I'll give you a few of mine to get you started:

- the weather
- holidays
- money
- my dog
- ankle injury
- what I'm having for dinner
- moving house
- work
- shopping
- eating
- cleaning
- buying thank you card for a friend
- what pub to go to for Friday drinks with my wife

I'm sure you can think of your own long list.

And this is just the result of a couple of minutes writing. There's a ton more for me, I'm sure there are for you, and there is for everyone else in the world too.

What this means is that we've got to make sure our message about sport and activity can cut through all of these other things that people are thinking about. On top of that people see about 3000 marketing messages per day. We're competing with all these other marketing messages to get heard. It's not an easy challenge.

Now. If you've ever had a day, a week or a year when you weren't as active as you wanted to be, then think about what stopped you from being more active.

Spend about 30 seconds just thinking that through.

Here's just a few of my own ideas:

- Ankle injury
- Friend's birthday
- Bad weather
- Not sure what to do
- Want to try something new, but not sure where to do it
- Feeling lazy
- Working late
- No money for gym membership
- Not getting results I wanted
- No motivation

So what this means is that even once we've got someone's attention, we've still got to help them to get past all of these barriers. That's not easy. It's really not.

Good news

Now I'd like to focus on 3 bits of good news.

Firstly - 52% of adults want to do more activity. 52%! That's huge! There aren't many people in the position of selling something that 52% of people want to buy. So we've got a very big and very receptive audience for our marketing. If we do it right.

Secondly – I can tell you how to run a very effective activity marketing campaign. I'm not going to wave a magic wand for you, but I can tell you exactly what you need to do. Running these kind of campaigns is what I do every day for a living, and I use these tactics to get thousands of people active. It's not easy, but it's totally doable.

Thirdly – there are now some amazing resources out there to help you with your activity marketing. Here's a few tasters:

- Sport England segmentation - one of the most amazing developments over the last few years to help you understand who your audience is, and find them.
- Promotingactivity.com – over 3000 free high-resolution photos of sport and activity and marketing plans for each of the segments.
- Google Ads - it's now possible to target your advertising very precisely. You can target your advertising to people who are interested in doing the activity you're offering, and live in the area you're targeting. And it's dirt cheap.
- Social Media – Facebook and Twitter are fabulous systems for word-of-mouth marketing. If you can get people excited enough, then you can encourage them to use social media to spread the word about your offer. It's word of mouth on steroids.
- Automated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems – there are some fabulous systems out there now which allow you not only to track who you've talked to and what sports or activities they're interested in, but also to follow up with them automatically by text and email.
- Campaign sites – it's easier than ever to build a campaign website which helps people to easily find their ideal activity. This can help to automate part of the process of helping people get active, instead of having to do it manually.

And there's a lot more which I don't have space to tell you in this short introductory guide.

Fill all your new courses on day one

In Hillingdon they've been using the Make Sport Fun approach for their marketing, and are now able to immediately fill any new classes and courses they put on.

Lorna Radford from Hillingdon Council attended a teleseminar I ran in 2011 about the Go London Greenwich programme. In that seminar I explained that you should ask people to register their details with you, and tell you what activities they'd like to do (you can still download a recording of the call from www.makesportfun.com/portfolio/go-london-greenwich/).

When putting on a new Back to Sport programme she added this process into Hillingdon's existing marketing system. When you go to the Back to Sport web page there's an online form which asks you for your contact details and what activity you'd like to do. On their posters, leaflets, etc. they have a text code, and if someone texts to register they get an automated reply text with basic information about getting active, and a request to register online for more detailed information.

Lorna then emails everyone who fills in the form with details of where they can do the activity of their choice. She told me "Since starting collecting Back to Sport Forms 9 months ago we've had 333 response forms.

"The tennis sessions have been by far the most popular. We've also exceeded the netball targets. Some of the sessions are pay as you go – and some of them are paid per course. For example archery has had two beginner courses which have been filled with the new approach."

The online form also asks people about sports which aren't available at the moment, but could be organised. Archery was one of these. So many people were interested in archery that Lorna put an archery course on and emailed everyone who'd said they were interested. They immediately filled the course. They still had so many people wanting to take part that they ran another course and filled that too!

Imagine that. Imagine if you knew in advance what activities people want you to do, and if you knew the contact details of the people who wanted to do it. It would mean you could put on exactly the right activity in the right area at the right time on the right day, and then fill it on day one with no extra marketing budget. That's just part of why the Make Sport Fun approach is so powerful.

6 stages of an effective campaign

I've been running sports marketing campaigns for about 7 years now, and I've tried out a wide range of different approaches. I've found that campaigns that are the most effective have 6 stages. The Department of Health has separately done the same research and they've found almost exactly the same thing. These stages have now been officially recognised as the way that the NHS will promote activity; and GPs and nurses are being trained in using them.

Step 1 – Plan.

First of all you'll need to ask yourself several questions in order to plan your campaign properly.

Step 2 – Set up

Next you'll need to set some project elements up before you start your campaign.

Step 3 – Promote

The recruit stage is our initial marketing to get someone's attention and to get them to register their interest.

Step 4 – Intervene

Now that we have collected people's contact details we are able to stay in touch with anyone who's interested in getting active, and link them with somewhere to do the activity of their choice.

Step 5 - Activity

This is when people try the activity. This first time should be fun, free and friendly.

Step 6 – Follow up.

Lastly we stay in touch to make sure they stay motivated. If they didn't like the activity they first tried then we find them a new activity to try.

Step 1 – Plan your campaign

There are several questions that you need to ask when planning your campaign. Here are a few examples.

- Who is your target audience?
- What activities appeal to your target audience?
- How many people do you need to get active?
- How much should you invest in a marketing programme?

Who is your target audience?

When you're running your initial promotion you can't afford to communicate with each person as an individual, and communicating with everybody as one homogenous group doesn't work. Segmentation is a very useful halfway house, as it groups people together into segments who have similar attitudes and behaviour with regards to sport and activity. This is by no means perfect, but is the best approach in many situations.

Luckily, Sport England have created a fabulous and detailed segmentation model for sport and activity. These segments are the result of more than £6 million of research and are one of the best and most thorough segmentation projects available in the public sector. So make use of them.

On top of that Make Sport Fun have done a 3-year, qualitative research project on behalf of the Department of Health into how to market to each of the segments. This has resulted in a marketing communication plan for each of the segments (link below).

The first step is to decide on your target audience by deciding which of the 19 sporting segments you will focus on.

The tools to use to help with this are:

- Segmentation mapping tool - <http://segments.sportengland.org>
- Marketing communication plans - www.promotingactivity.com
- Index tables – Raw data tab on <http://segments.sportengland.org>

Within all of these is the information you need to decide which segments you should be focussing your campaign on.

How many people do you need to get active?

To be successful in your campaign you need to define a set of clear and cost effective objectives first. Your overall objective might be to increase the number of squash games booked by 30%, or to get 700 more over 50s active once a week. It is very helpful if these objectives are crystal clear before you start work on trying to reach them.

How much should you invest in a marketing programme?

Again you need to be clear on what you want to achieve. You need to set a budget and plan out all your costs in advance. Identify the channels you need to achieve your objectives - what marketing costs are involved? Are these within budget? You can set yourself a tiered system of essential marketing costs and increase spend as you start seeing results.

What activities appeal to your target audience?

After deciding on your target audience visit the promoting activity site <http://www.promotingactivity.com/strategic/>. Identify the activities that your target market are interested in and ensure that you are offering these types of activities.

Hounslow Helps Women Back Into Exercise

A Fusion Lifestyle team working on behalf of Hounslow Borough Council was able to set up a series of programmes aimed at encouraging women within the borough back into exercise.

The team used the market segmentation planning tool to identify the two most prevalent female demographics in the borough – in this case ‘Leannes’ and ‘Chloes’, young women who may not be doing as much exercise as they could or should be. Research has shown that aerobics and netball are preferred sports for both groups so the decision was made to offer a Back to Netball course and some new fitness classes that concentrate on core stability and spinning. They then used the marketing communication plans from www.promotingactivity.com to decide how to market to them.

“Promotingactivity.com really helped us in shaping our bid for the Play Sport London funds,” explains Community Sports Development Manager Jo Valks, “the market segmentation toolkits were really helpful as they helped us identify just where our target market lived, which is particularly useful in such a diverse area as Hounslow. We found that there was a high density of Chloes and Leannes living in the centre and east of the borough, so we concentrated on activities that not only suited our target market but that also matched the facilities we had available in those areas. The information also meant that we could carefully target our marketing materials, ensuring that we were more effective in getting our message out to the right people.”

“The results have been fantastic! All the classes were really well attended and spinning has now been fully incorporated into our leisure programme – we are also hoping to offer netball on a regular basis when we can find a suitable venue. I think the fact that we offered free taster sessions was crucial in developing such a high attendance – a lot of the people who joined the classes wouldn’t have attended if they had to pay, but now they are involved in sport and activity again and are keeping on with it, which is exactly the result we were looking for.”

Step 2 – Set up

Some people will see your promotion and go along and try the activity. However there are many more people who will see it, be interested, but not go along. They might forget about it, they might be uncertain about whether it's the right level for them, they might not be able to do that day or time. We still want to know who those people are, so we can help them to get active either at that group or at a different group.

We therefore need to make it really easy for people to let us know that they want to get active.

Ways for people to register

Different ways you might set up for people to register their interest are:

- Email address
- Phone number
- Freepost address
- Online form

Way to track who's registered

Once people have registered their interest in getting active we need a way of tracking everyone. You can do this in an excel spreadsheet, but I find it easier to use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which allows you to track contact with each person. We use Highrise (www.highrisehq.com) as it's easily adaptable, simple to use and reasonably priced.

Step 3 - Promotion

At the promotion stage nearly all our efforts (in our advert, poster, flyer, etc.) should be put into catching someone's attention and convincing them to register their interest in getting active.

This list of people who are signed up to receive communication from you is hugely important, and is one of the most effective things that you can do in your marketing. Wandsworth council is an example of an organisation which has done this well –

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/keeping-older-people-active-in-wandsworth/>.

The following are the approaches which we have found to be the most effective.

- Direct mail
- Facebook Ads
- Google Ads

Direct mail

Buy databases of people who exactly match your target audience profile and write to them. Tell them you're offering vouchers to allow them to try an activity for free. If done right 8% of people you write to will register.

Facebook Ads

Advertise to your exact target audience on Facebook based on location, age and gender. You only pay for the advert when someone clicks on your ad.

Google Ads

I'll explain this one in more detail to give you a taste of what's possible using modern marketing techniques.

Google Ads are one of the most underused marketing tools out there in sport. You can see from the table below the number of people searching each month for information about badminton:

Search Terms (3)

Keyword	Local Monthly Searches
★ badminton	368,000
★ badminton london	4,400
★ badminton bristol	1,300

These are searches per month in the UK. What this shows you is that there are staggering, mind-blowing numbers of people searching for where to do activity. Even something smaller like badminton has this enormous number of people searching for it.

At the moment, if you put badminton plus a postcode into Google this is the kind of results you get. Not a badminton club, or anything from Badminton England, but badminton school.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "badminton BS1 5TR". The search bar indicates "About 12,700 results (0.19 seconds)". The top result is "Badminton School" with the URL "www.badminton.bristol.sch.uk/". The description states: "Badminton School, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol. BS9 3BA Telephone +44 (0)117 905 5200 | admissions@badminton.bristol.sch.uk". A small image of the school is shown. Below the main result are several other links, including "Bristol City Council - Homepage", "Bristol Women's Forum Equalities Team Council House College Green", "Bristol City Council in Bristol, BS1 5TR | Local Government in Bristol", "B.C.C Translating & Interpreting in Bristol, BS1 5TR | Translation", "Extract Coffee - BS1 5TR - Bristol", "Shared Commissioning Services - Learning Partnership West", and "Woods Estate Agents - Property for Sale and Rent in Westbury On Trym". On the right side, there is a map showing the location of the school in Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, near the B440B road. Below the map, there is an advertisement for "Badminton Mega Sale" from "directbadminton.co.uk".

One of the ways to appear on Google very easily is to use Google Ads. Google Ads work as an auction. So if no-one else is advertising against the term you want to appear for then you don't have to pay very much at all. And almost no-one is advertising against sports terms. Especially location specific sports terms.

So in Greenwich we've been running a campaign, and we've been working on how to reduce the cost per click, and we've got it down to about 10p at best so far. With nearly 100 clicks per day. There's a number of steps to setting up a really good campaign, but the top tip is to add very location specific search terms. For instance Greenwich swimming baths, or Eltham judo club. No-one else is advertising against these terms, so they're dirt cheap.

So if you're spending 10p per click, and your campaign website has a conversion rate of 12%, like the London Swimming campaign had, then you're paying 80p per person you recruit. That's insanely, unbelievably low.

If you can then get 30% of those people to do the activity (we've managed 70% in previous campaigns) then we're looking at a cost of £2.40 per person active.

If you compare that to the current cost per person active then it's incredibly low.

Since Sport England started working through the NGBs they've got 109,000 new people regularly participating in sport against an original target of 1 million by March 2013. That's a return on £450 million spent through sporting National Governing Bodies." That's over £4,000 per person!

Now the costs from Sport England include talent development, and all the administration costs. But however much you play around with the figures, they don't meet up in the middle.

Step 4 – Behaviour change intervention

Now that we have collected people's contact details we are able to call them and help find them somewhere to do the activity of their choice. A key thing here is that we need to find them somewhere that's close to where they live or work, and is on a day and time that suits them. Let me explain why this is so important with a story.

Doctors were asked to consider the medical records of a 67-year old patient who had chronic pain in their hip from arthritis.¹ None of the drugs they'd tried had worked, so they were considering hip-replacement surgery. This involves slicing open the thigh, wrenching the bone out of the socket, sawing off the arthritic end and replacing it with an implant. Recovery from this surgery is long and painful.

Then they found out that there was a drug which they hadn't tried. 47% of doctors suggested they try the medication before considering surgery. In a variation of this question instead of 1 untried drug there were now 2 types. Bizarrely they now found that only 28% of doctors now tried medication before considering surgery. This strange story is due to people's inability to deal with choice.

What we're doing at the behaviour change intervention stage is making it very easy for someone to find the right activity for them. Down to the day, time and type of session. This is possible because of the activity database we set up in Step 2 – Set up.

On the phone call you can personalise the help if you listen to what is going on now. They can ask questions, you can ask questions. They can tell you they have a health complaint and you can instantly identify that the sports activity they wanted to try is perhaps not as suitable as something else, often something they hadn't thought of. You can avoid disappointment by ensuring they are available and know what is involved.

Once you've called them, and helped them find an activity that's right for them it's then a good idea to write to them to confirm the details by email or letter, and also to set up a reminder text message for the day that they're going to try the activity.

¹ Research done by physician Donald Redelmeier and psychologist Edel Shafir

Step 5 - Active participation

The Active participation stage is when someone goes off and tries the activity.

You can't necessarily control the quality of the active participation stage, but if you can, then focus on making the first session fun, free and friendly.

If you encourage local activity providers to provide one free session for anyone who turns up with one of your vouchers then you'll get many more people taking this up.

Entry level products

There's been a spate of excellent entry-level sports products over the past few years. One of the best is Back to Netball. For those of you who haven't heard of it Back to Netball provides a gentle introduction to the sport for female players over sixteen years of age. Sessions are coach led and cover basic skill development and court play. The emphasis of these sessions is on learning new skills and having fun playing Netball with friends.

These kind of entry-level sessions make my job running campaigns much easier. This is the kind of thing that many people I talk to through campaigns are crying out for. They want to do more activity, but they don't want to be intimidated by joining a club of experienced players.

Step 6 – Follow up

It is important to remember that many people find it hard to become and remain sufficiently physically active to benefit their health, so the need for support and encouragement is to be expected.

Phone calls

The approach to use here is to phone people back at 1, 3, 6 and 12 months (or more if necessary). On those calls reassess the person's physical activity levels and check for any changes compared to when they started.

If they're still active then congratulate them on their great work, and help them stay motivated.

If they're not still active then be supportive and help them develop their belief in their ability to become and stay more active. Ask if they'd like to try something else and help them find somewhere to do that activity.

Again, the motivational interviewing approach is the most effective one to use.

Autoresponder emails

A very effective addition is to also send autoresponder emails to everyone promoting the best offers you have available.

Next steps

This guide has given you an introduction and an overview of what's involved in a sport and activity marketing campaign, and what it can achieve. Now there are 3 ways that we can help you implement these ideas and increase participation.

1. The Make Sport Fun book
2. A marketing training workshop
3. A marketing campaign

Make Sport Fun book

The Make Sport Fun book shows you how to use marketing to get people playing more sport and doing more activity. It helps you identify what you need to do and what you can forget about.

This book will take you through every step of the activity marketing process. It's only £9.90, and is available from www.makesportfun.com/book.

Marketing training workshop

Training workshops are a very effective way of helping a group of people to learn about these marketing ideas. We run training workshops for up to 15 people at a time, and use lots of interaction to get people really thinking about these ideas, and how they can make a difference in their day-to-day work.

For more details contact John Ainsworth – contact details below.

Marketing campaign

Getting us to run a marketing campaign on your behalf is the most effective way to get the results you need. We'll meet with you, plan out what results you can get, set up the campaign and run the whole thing for you.

To get in touch call 020 8386 1641, or 07776 103 785 or email john@makesportfun.com.