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Media Management – Best Practice

“Best practice” report by Denise Westhäusler

Handball in Australia and its hard work behind the scenes

My name is Denise Westhäusler and currently a member of the Australian Handball Federation. My position within the organisation is Team Manager for the Australian Beach Handball Teams travelling to the 2014 World Beach Handball Championships in Recife, Brazil. Yes you heard me correct, Australia!

I know Australia belongs to the Oceania region and is not necessarily within Europe or to be more specifically the question you may ask is “*what am I doing here in the Club Manager Seminar from the European Handball Federation (EHF)*”? Simple answer, I was born and raised in Germany and played Handball since the age of 8, but when I turned 18, I decided to go to Australia for one year, which ended up being 7 1/2 years. After a Bachelors degree in Sport Management, opening up a University club and the running of the state organisation of Handball in Western Australia, I decided to move back to my roots and try to gain more experience and widen my knowledge. That’s why I am here.

You must understand that Handball Australia is ran by volunteers and limited funds are given to support the sport. Even the Australian Sport Commission is not supporting the Federation. The reason they put forward is that the teams are not participating in any Olympic Games, besides in 2000 when they were in Sydney. This limited support makes it very difficult for the sport to be developed. However we are all very dedicated and believe that Handball can become a major sport in the country and find more and more participants and eventually funding.

In 2008 I started my Bachelor degree and with this my work in the development of Handball in Western Australia begun. Within the year I opened up a Handball University club and got students from all over the world to try the sport out and participate in the Australian University Games. A challenge was to get the students to try a sport, which they have never heard of or seen before.

So with simple ideas, my friends and I promoted Handball on different occasions and tools. We ran around University with flyers, talked to people about the sport and showed them pictures, videos etc. to get them interested. Furthermore we had a stand on the Opening Day were all future and current students went around campus and enjoyed different attractions, food and informative stalls. At this particular day we got Handballs out and a smaller version of a Handball goal to make the people try it out, by throwing at the goal. Posters were hang all over the campus and ads were placed on the sport website of the University. Within time social media was also used to spread the word of the Handball Club, which was the best way to spread the word quickly to friends and their friends.

All in all, the first club training was filled with about 50 students wanting to try out the sport. This was another challenge to add, given limited capacity and the limited amount of people to be able to explain the sport. This number was reached at every start of the semester, however dropped down after 2-3 sessions, as some just want to see what it is about. The highlight of my time here is that my team won in 2010 the Australian University Games, which paid off the hard work.

After running the University club I was elected in 2011 to the school coordinator of Handball West. In this role I visited schools, taught children and teachers the sport of Handball and held seminars.

Back then it started as a pretty basic role, but with time and close work with the Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) and the Active After School Program, Handball has picked up on a lot of interest from schools and children. Especially a higher interest was seen when the sport was covered on TV, which did not happen very often, but from time to time!

We have worked closely with the DSR to promote the sport in every possible way and were included on their website, had flyers for them to hand out and place on various websites and even conducted a training session for their staff, which loved the sport. With this involvement the DSR got more and more teachers interested to learn the sport and held one-day seminars for teachers to participate in a various kind of sports. The Handball seminar was always full and was good as a promotion and material source, to encourage teachers to help us develop the sport in schools and outside school hours.

Over the years we then were able to held two major school carnivals, north and south of Perth. School Sport WA picked up on the growth and is now a major supporter for the development of Handball in schools in WA. This partnership resulted in more marketing and awareness opportunities for Handball. Handball West has now a good database of sport teachers and people wanting to be involved in the sport and supplies supports them with material and equipment if needed. Additionally we send from time to time information out to the teachers about some ideas for the teaching of Handball, upcoming tournaments and news.

However an ongoing challenge here is that Handball West has only limited volunteers available to spend their free time organising Handball events or trainings. Practices to improve these and encourage more young people to be involved were worked on and starting to be implemented, such as Handball seminars, equipment and small reimbursements.

My next step within Handball West was in 2012 when I got elected as President. This enabled me put my learned skills at University to a test and make ideas happening.

The School Sport WA project was one of my initiatives as acting president as well as others. However there is one particular project I would like to put forwarded, which enabled me to test all my skills and nerves, which was the organisation and managing of the Australian Beach Handball Championships.

The Australian Beach Handball Championships were held mid February this year in conjunction with a training camp and a referee, officiating and coaching course before the tournament. The Championships was attended by clubs all around Australia and was played in three divisions, women, men and mixed.

Planning of this tournament started a year ahead with the booking of the venue, which was a prime venue and hard to get its hands on in the prime season, however offers great promotional opportunities for the sport. The next major step was to spread the word about the Championships and get teams as well as people interested to play. This was done to all extent with local, as well as national newspapers, social media, newsletters and so on.

The harder part was to reach out to the wider audience and promote the event in the other states of Australia, where we mainly relied on the state organisations and individuals. However as social media and the internet is now a major part of life, we have reached quite far and had in total 22 teams participating from 6 states out of 8 and a high quality of Beach Handball action.

As the Championships started we have had the local and national newspaper visiting, as well as other magazine asked us for information on the Championships and results.

Another project during the Championships was to create a promotional video for Australia to show and explain Beach Handball in a short and fun way. Therefore footage was taken from games during the Championships. This was shared on YouTube and other channels (See Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i89d9OIBXmY>).

This clip has reached not only Handball fans in Australia, also all over the world and parts of the video were also used in other Beach Handball teams promotional activities. Furthermore Handball Planet covered an article on the Australian Championships and the IHF, which made us proud to see that we have gotten some attention around the globe.

The success of our media tools we were able to use was seen especially locally, as more new people came down to trainings after the Championships and enquired about Beach Handball.

Media management within my current position as a Team Manager is one of the most important to consider, as it displays the National team. Even though we are not a recognised body by the Australian Sports Commission, certain rules and behaviours must be considered and followed.

For the promotion of our Australian Beach Handball Teams we use different kind of channels to make people aware and support the teams during the tours, as well as promote the supporting sponsors.

Social media is one of the main tool we use, such as Facebook and Instagram where we are updating news and pictures ongoing. A website was recently relaunched and close work with the newspapers, local and national, as well as establishing a strategic plan with the Australian Sport Commission for the support of Handball is in process. However as mentioned once before small amounts of funds make it hard to reach out further and use the media to a maximum, but work is in progress to change these.

Media management has grown around the world to a major tool to promote various kinds of products, sports or services and with the right use can influence the behaviours or interests of people. However to make it work in the right way, you need to have a good sense of creativity for the product, money to promote it and the right tools to get the maximum out of the use of media.

All in all this is my small and short story of my experiences and practices I have mainly worked with, given the constraints, such as money and time.

I hope and believe that this seminar will only add to my experience with media management and will learn a lot out of the group experiences and knowledge. It will help me to grow and will add to my future development within the world of Handball.