



Are we measuring the really important points at our Sports Clubs OR are we measuring just what we **can** measure, even if it's not that important?...*the way forward for measuring the culture and behaviour within our community sports providers:*

*Is your club **WICE(E)**?*

Welcoming, Innovative, Community-focused, Engaging and Enterprising

Through Sports Marketing Network's work and contacts with literally hundreds and hundreds of sports providers from across all sports and different types of organisations we have identified five key factors which we believe are key to delivering growing and sustainable sport and leisure activities.

We all provide sport in different ways, for different people and in different places but nevertheless we strongly suggest you focus on how you can be as **WICE** as possible. Please view this through the eyes of the outside world and not how you and your mates within the club perceive it. (I am yet to find any sports organisation which does not regard itself as being 'welcoming' even though it may be full of Victor Meldrew look-a-likes!)

This is designed to help these clubs develop better practices in terms of how they follow the WICE principles and become sustainable hubs for their communities.

It may not be rocket science but SMN is convinced that if our sports providers, over time, become more **Welcoming, Innovative, Community-focused, Engaging and Enterprising** then we can deliver better sport in a sustainable way.

A few words about the five elements of **WICE**:

Welcoming

Remember, you are in the Experience Industry, competing for people's leisure time and spend.

You, your coaches/instructors and the rest of your team must focus on providing the best sporting and customer experiences possible and remember: we are all different, so what you think is a great experience, may not be the same to a 16 year old recreational player or a 62 year old 'returner'.

Help newcomers ease into the place, so the initial 'like-first-day-at-school' nerves disappear and they become advocates. Your best marketing tool is a customer who has just had a great experience at your club/centre.

So why not ask a few people who have never been in contact with your sports club and never been there to give you an objective view of how 'welcoming' they feel your club is. Of course, if you are happy with the status quo and just being for your members and don't want all these new people in your club, I am terribly sorry I bothered you.

Innovative

More than ever before people involved with sport and leisure are being asked to do more with less. It isn't easy.

Many organisations are tackling this challenge with cost cutting initiatives without really making any changes to the way they operate. What's the net gain? Not much in the way of unique added value for your customers. At the same time too, many people are too busy solving the everyday short-term problems that they ignore the important medium and long-term opportunities and therefore they rarely get ahead. With fewer resources available this then becomes a vicious circle. If you only come up with solutions when the problem is 'blocking the road' you will always be panicking and firefighting.

The trick is to spot practical opportunities everywhere in your organisation and to explore them. Some people and organisations/ in the sport and active leisure sector have been very successful in spotting and exploiting opportunities whereas others, often from within top-heavy, centralised organisations have found it very difficult to be innovative. Informal, commercial and self-organised sport and physical activity is growing because they listen to people's lives and speak their language.

Innovative organisations and people make mistakes and have failures. Analyse and learn. This also applies to your successes. Then you will gradually increase your success rate with your innovations.

Remember, the status quo is not an option.

Community-focused

The notion of 'sport for sport's sake' which implies that sport sits in glorious isolation from the rest of the communities it is supposed to serve simply is no longer valid (I doubt it ever was).

Whenever I come across great sports providers they work for and with their communities, and as a consequence, both parties benefit. They are in reality Hubs for their Communities.

So how well are you connected to your community? The Police, the schools, the Women's Institute, the Sea Cadets, the faith groups etc? Do you know them and do they know you?

Draw up a list of your Community Connectors (people in official/unofficial roles within your community). Invite them to your place, show/tell them what you do, ask them about their needs and see if there are overlaps. Can you work together, benefitting both parties?

When you start planning your great income generating programme (see 'Enterprising' later) always try and link up with relevant, local community groups. Share the proceeds in return for their support, know-how and reach. Remember the old edict: the more thou giveth, the more thou shall receive.

Engaging

It has never been easier (and less costly) for sports providers to engage and communicate with their audiences, using texts, emails and social media such as Facebook and YouTube. (You are one of 8,000 people

reading this e-newsletter sent to you using a database and email programme which cost little more than £200.00).

More than 500.000 people have viewed one of the numerous videos with underwater hockey (octopussy) on YouTube – demonstrating the potential for even lesser known sports (sorry, octopussy) to spread the word and show the sport in action at almost no cost) apart from the camera.

Gentofte Volleyball Klub in Copenhagen, Denmark with 250 members quadrupled the number of visitors to their website, when they moved it to Facebook (where many of their younger members/supporters 'live their lives').

If you are of a disposition or a generation which is a bit baffled by all this, get some of your younger digitally savvy people to do all this for you. This is also a brilliant way of keeping people in their late teens/early twenties engaged with your club (the age with the highest dropout rate).

So you can cut the print budget and create that 'online tribe' where people feel they are part of your club, even when they are not there.

Enterprising

At SMN we encounter many great, enterprising people in community sport on a very regular basis. Many of them succeed outside the established 'sporting landscape' and do not wait for a policy or edict coming down from on high. They go out there and develop some great community and sporting events and raise money (often very impressive amounts) in the process.

Just look at Tony Carlisle whose Doggie Walk in South Shields has raised £3.2m over 15 years; the guys at Blaydon Rugby Club who generate £90,000 every year from their weekly car boot sale; Mandy Young and her incredibly successful indoor skate board and BMX centre, Adrenaline Alley in Corby; Simon Plumb and his great panto which raises £20,000+ every year at Lymm Rugby Club; the great people at St Michael's Hospice in Harrogate who generate £150,000 every year from their Midnight Walk or Dennis Robbins and his remarkable transformation of Hunslet Club in Leeds.

These people just went out there and 'seized the day', and did not come up with plenty of reasons 'why it would not work here'. You could and should do the same, wherever you are.

The days of the 'grant addicts' are well and truly over. The future belongs to Community Sports Entrepreneurs who provide great sport and community experiences in a welcoming and sustainable way.

Conclusion

So here you have it: five simple questions you must ask yourself at least every quarter. Or, even better, ask your customers, members, guests and stakeholders. Please remember, that miracles don't happen overnight and major improvements require hard work and dedication, day in, day out. But trust me, it works.

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