

Brands need to find a strong and authentic voice

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CMO interview: Fox Sports head of marketing on driving your social brand

The sports and entertainment media industry is highly competitive in Australia, but **Fox Sports** head of **marketing, brand** and **social**, Chris Gross, shows a focused and targeted **social** and content strategy can boost audience engagement and build a solid **brand**.

Gross began showing interest in **social** media and mobile **marketing** early on in his career, long before the concept had become widely adopted within business' **marketing** strategies. After completing a Bachelor of Arts in 2006, he pursued an interest in **advertising**, and joined an AFA Grad program, which placed him in One **Digital**, where he managed clients such as Valvoline, ChildFund Australia and Warner Music Australia.

"It was the big **digital** agency at the time, and I worked there for a few years," he said. "There I became interested in working with the emerging side of **digital**, which at the time was mobile and **social**."



Following his time at One **Digital**, Gross moved onto Vodafone to take on the role as business development manager for mobile **advertising**, where he monetised the **brand's** touch points

with the consumer through third-party **advertising**.

"I spent a year doing mobile **advertising** which was a nice segway between the **brand** side and aspects of the **advertising**," he said.

With his growing interest in **social**, he then took on a position as Vodafone's emerging media producer, where he was responsible for establishing a scalable model for **social** media to maximise the **brand**'s footprint beyond traditional portals web and mobile portals.

"I was the first person to be within a full-time **social** role at Vodafone in a time where it was the ascendancy of **brands** using **social** media," he said. "We began to use **social** media in a wide way, as **marketing**, customer care and communications functions, and then later as a sales function."

Gross then grew the team from a single resource to a team of 35, and while they did have to go through a 'Voda-fail' period of dilemmas, he said the learning curve meant the team could grow its capabilities.

"By the time I left Vodafone in 2012, we had a full team of working on both **social** and video and managed to produce some great work there," he said.

Tackling large-scale marketing collaborations

In 2012, Gross was brought over by his ex-general manager at Vodafone to **Fox** Sports as head of **social** media and **digital marketing**, and in 2014 he was promoted to the network's head of **marketing**, **brand** and **social**. He's now responsible for all **marketing** activities for the **Fox** Sports **brand**, as well as the full **social** media remit.

A recent successful project Gross was involved with at **Fox** Sports was the **Fox** Sporting Nation launch earlier this year in conjunction with **Foxtel**.

The major radio and TV **marketing** and promotional campaign was **designed** to kick off the 2016 sports season and took a fun look at Australia's most iconic sport moments, along with **digital** display and video to promote the line-up of live Australian sport for the year.

"It was the biggest we've done to date," he claimed. "And it saw us work the most closely with our counterparts at **Foxtel** to drive mutually beneficial outcomes. That certainly had a very positive impact in terms of our **brand** awareness scores, NPS and subscriptions as well. So we are having our most successful year to date."

Why it's all about quality content marketing

In order to remain competitive and drive a **digital marketing** strategy forward, Gross said marketers must move away from creating a beautifully sculpted ad and leaving it in market for 6-12 months. Rather, he stressed it's important to focus on a quality content **marketing** strategy.

"I'd say the old model is obsolete," he said. "Of course it can still be an aspect of your **marketing** mix if done tactically, however sport is a living and breathing concept, and if your creative isn't living and breathing or reactive to what is happening at the time, then you're really missing out on a great opportunity. So you really need to harness the **brand** within content **marketing** and understand how to do that well. You're not only competing with all the other **brands** in the space, but you're also competing with millions of consumers who are excited about sport as well.

"So you need a unique voice that is true to your **brand** and is authentic to your customers. That way you can cut through and make the most out of what you set out to achieve."

But Gross admitted these things are an exerted, long-term effort. "We don't treat these pieces as 'campaigns' but more as programs of work that we have been working on for years and are constantly adapting, shifting and changing," he said.

Common social media fails to avoid

On **social** media, Gross stressed that whatever you decide to do, make sure it reflects your **brand** purpose and what your **brand** values are.

"It's very easy to fall into a trap where you will see something that will give you engagement, however it may not be related in any way to your **brand** or help build your **brand** up," he explained. "Always connect your strategy to your **brand** and what it stands for. And the right value exchange for the consumer means they will in turn pass that on to their **social** connections. Now if you can get that part of it right, you can really unlock the power of what **social** is."

Another common mistake Gross said **brands** make on **social** media is running big competitions to try and get fan acquisition, but it doesn't generate the right, targeted engagement.

"You just end up collecting a bunch of consumers who are only interested in winning things and not interested in your **brand**," he said. "The number we care about is the active audience per week or per month."

At **Fox Sports**, Gross said there is a very big team working on **social** media, but it's not a '**social** media specific' team.

"There are about 50 people across the business who do a lot of other things and are incredibly good at it, but we've taught them how to use **social**, so they can go out and create engaging and interesting content that's right for that channel and that audience," he added. "And we've seen fantastic results, which is why we continue to grow and grow in the space."

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