

Game Plan *Marketing*

*Why there's never been a better time to
grow your sports organisation and what
to do to make it happen.*

Ned Coten



For my mother, Meg Coten

You have given me everything and loved me unconditionally. I will be forever thankful.

For John Stone

My first basketball coach, who pushed and inspired me to be the best I could.

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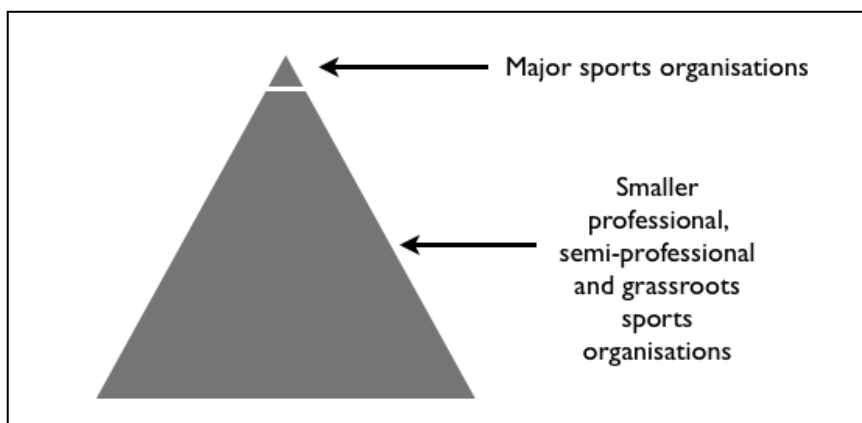
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Introduction

Don't miss this bit – the rest of the book won't make sense without it!

When most people think of sports marketing the image of big sports organisations comes to mind: the AFL, Tennis Australia or Super Rugby in Australia, the NBA, NFL and Major League Baseball in the US, and major football (soccer) competitions such as the English Premier League and Serie A in Italy. But this market represents only a fraction of sports participation and organisations around the world.



For every major sports brand there are thousands of other sports organisations fighting for their own piece of turf. These sports businesses

cater to literally millions of men, women and children, able-bodied and disabled, from many countries, who play sport at every stage from beginners through to elite level.

Despite the fact that they cater for the majority of sportspeople, both amateur and professional, these smaller organisations face the biggest hurdles in attracting members and participants, finding commercial partners and generating revenue. They may have significant capital assets and many stakeholders, but often rely on volunteers and struggle with the day-to-day challenges of marketing and promoting their sport. This book has valuable lessons for anyone involved in the administration and marketing of sport or a sports-related business. It provides a 'game plan' for growing an organisation into a thriving community, where your participants or members become your greatest advocates.

While every sports organisation is a business, the rules of the game are sometimes different for sport. The budgets are often smaller, the profiles are lower and there are invariably fewer people to make sure that an ever-growing list of tasks actually happen. If your work or passion is sport you'll be familiar with these issues and many more specific to this environment, including the need for more members or participants, more sponsors and more revenue. Often communication within the organisation is not great and a lot of strain is placed on too few people, typically volunteers, who are overworked and lack resources.

Sound familiar? Well this book will show you, clearly and simply, how to overcome these hurdles. You will learn how to develop the expertise and resources to brand and market your sports organisation, without selling your soul. As a result, you will have more time, energy and resources to deliver a better product and build a thriving sports community that leaves a legacy for the future.

Who is this book for?

This book has been written to help people who are involved in the management and marketing of sports organisations and sports-related businesses. This includes clubs, associations, leagues, franchises, sports suppliers, teams and governing bodies at both state and national level. In general I use the term 'sports organisation' to include all of these, but

from time to time I also use the individual references above, or refer to them as 'sports businesses' or simply 'businesses' (which they are, even if we don't always think about them as such). It's important to understand that regardless of the term used you can apply the principles to your own situation. Don't make the 'rookie mistake' of assuming that just because I don't refer directly to your type of sports organisation that an idea does not apply to you. Use your imagination!

The information in this book is relevant for:

- local, community-based sports clubs and individual teams
- leagues, such as junior football leagues, at the local, regional or state level
- sports clubs catering to a number of different sports
- community clubs, such as golf and tennis clubs
- country clubs
- school-based sports organisations
- state-based governing bodies for sport
- state and federal government organisations that focus on sport
- national sports organisations and governing bodies for sports
- businesses supplying products and services to sports organisations
- professional sports teams and leagues
- school or holiday camp organisations and businesses
- businesses that deliver sports products or experiences
- local government offices responsible for delivery of sport services
- state government departments involved in sport and recreation
- federal government departments responsible for sport, health and wellbeing
- events on a local, state or national basis
- in general, any organisation where sport is the central theme.

Within these organisations the people who will get the most value from this book are those in an operational position, whether paid

or volunteer, and the committees and boards of management. This includes marketing managers, CEOs, general managers, administrators, officials and event directors.

Who am I to tell you anything anyway?

One of the most important things you should learn from this book is the value of trust. Without trust you will always find it harder to be successful than it needs to be. So, why trust me? What gives me the right to write a book like this?

I grew up in a small country town called Narrogin in Western Australia. Like most country kids at the time, I played a lot of sport. Tennis, Aussie rules football, basketball, a bit of cricket and soccer, along with riding my bike everywhere. But two things were different about me:

- ➔ I was very tall (6'8", or 203 cms)
- ➔ I worked very hard to be good at sport and school.

My father died when I was five years old and as a result I felt compelled to do well, be a leader for my mum and younger brother and to make the most of everything. When I left school, the hard work paid off and I was offered a scholarship with the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra, Australia's capital city. In a matter of weeks I went from playing on outdoor bitumen basketball courts with my mates to Australia's most elite sporting facility, with Australia's Olympic basketball coach as my mentor!

At the AIS everyone was tall, but I worked hard and was able to represent Australia at a junior level. I travelled to the US and Europe playing basketball, and realised what a great opportunity sport had given me. I returned to Perth and joined the Perth Wildcats in their second season in Australia's National Basketball League competition.

It was around this time I realised that, despite my height and work ethic, I was probably never going to make a living playing sport. I was good but not that good, usually spending plenty of time 'riding the pine' on the bench, waiting for my turn to play, which was rare. From that moment forward I undertook to use sport as a means to an end

– to continue to play, but to focus on a career and use my contacts in sport to help me.

A tennis player friend from the AIS, Charlie Fancutt, came to Perth to start the Hopman Cup tournament with Australian tennis legends Paul McNamee and Pat Cash. Charlie asked me to be involved. I worked on putting together the event magazine, spoke to the media, helped with whatever needed doing and, while working very long hours, gained a great first-hand insight into how to make a sporting event really successful. For the next 10 years I took a holiday every Christmas to work on the tournament.

Charlie was keen to get into basketball and negotiated to buy the licence for a new Western Australian state league basketball team. It was (and still is) based in Kalgoorlie, perhaps Australia's best-known gold mining town and a six-hour drive from most of the other teams in the competition. I was the General Manager, Coach, Sponsorship Salesman and of course a player. We struggled in that first year, but the team is still there, over 20 years later, and now has a couple of state championships under its belt.

From there, I worked in sponsorship development for the Quit Campaign before re-joining the Wildcats, this time as Marketing Manager. I worked to develop this role for myself over a year prior by doing small marketing odd jobs for the team to prove my worth. Eventually I became CEO of the Wildcats, then held the same role for a soccer team in Adelaide and then for another NBL team, Victoria Titans, in Melbourne.

One of the Titans' sponsors, Mark Cowan, invited me to meet regarding working in his packaging design and branding business. Despite no specific experience in this industry, I managed to make it work and have contributed to the success of many of Australia's best-known brands, including Heinz, Wrigley, Ryobi, Novartis and many others.

During this time I remained involved in sport, coaching my kids' teams in basketball and Australian Rules and presenting on branding and marketing to numerous sports organisations. I also joined the Board of Basketball Victoria and became Vice President four years later.

Over my years in sports marketing and branding I was involved in a lot. I sold (at the time) the largest ever sponsorship package for an NBL team, numerous other sponsorship and marketing packages, and was responsible for the entire operations of the teams I ran. I was also a volunteer at the Sydney Olympics, worked on many committees and served as the Team Manager for the Australian men's basketball team.

This experience has given me a unique set of skills. I know sport intimately, from the most basic of grassroots environments to the international level. I've done just about every job in sport, from 'running the show' to 'cleaning up after the show'! I have also had exposure to the way in which brands of all sizes market themselves, observing the things that work and the things that don't. I've developed and implemented numerous marketing and branding projects with major consumer brands, individual sportspeople, small clubs, state associations and national peak sports bodies.

As a result, I'm qualified – not because I have a formal education and an MBA (which I do have and are useful) but because I've been in the trenches, doing the hard yards, experiencing both success and failure to see what actually works. I'm passionate about marketing for sports organisations, and I want to share my experience with you!

Why I wrote this book

I started my career in sport, where resources and money are often tight. I've also spent a reasonable amount of my career working with the kinds of businesses where resources and money are plentiful, or at least available. Those big and well-known brands do some cool things, but so they should – they have lots of people running around providing ideas, resources and tricks of the trade so they can sell more stuff. I'm not complaining – I've been paid for it!

But I've found that the real satisfaction comes not from throwing money around but from developing a strong strategic plan, executing it well using the methods I'll outline here and seeing the results come through. You cannot and should not try to do the same things in grassroots sport as large companies do. They have millions to spend on getting their brand into the hearts and minds of consumers. I have no doubt that

any sports organisation can be successful by implementing simple but effective marketing that attracts the right kind of participants and supporters. My aim is for you to learn from my experiences, mistakes and successes, so you can take your organisation to greater heights, no matter where you are starting from and what resources you have available.

The two key themes of this book

There are two key themes running through this book. The first is logical: the use of a defined, tested, workable and simple system for the development of a thriving sporting community. By following what is laid out here you will be able to transform the way your sports organisation is performing off the field of play in around six to twelve months. You will have more time and resources to ensure that your participants are engaged and have facilities they love. If you do this well, there will be also a flow-on effect to what happens on the field of play.

The second theme is not so obvious but is equally important – in fact I'd argue even more important. It's about the **way** you do things: the effort you put in, the planning you undertake, the attitude you have, the will and conviction with which you back yourself. These things are the mental factors. Being involved in sport, I'm sure you know just how critical being mentally on top of your game is!

I've read literally hundreds of books on business, marketing and self-development over the past 30 years. (My wife Hilary says I'm the reason many authors have made a profit!) Most of these books start out with a chapter on self-development, attitude and belief – the mental side of business. After a while, I started to skip over these chapters because I wanted to get to the 'meat' of the book. I just wanted to implement stuff – I thought that was the most important part. But what I've learned is this: you cannot and will not be successful in anything unless you believe you can do it and back up this belief with actions, by actually doing something. The system outlined here works – it's been proven by many people before you. The question is: can you make it work for you? Of course the answer is yes, but you must have the right approach. Attitude and belief are vital. Don't dismiss this critical aspect of your work.

There's never been a better time to brand and market your sports organisation!

It's no secret: the world is changing fast, sometimes so quickly that we don't have time to comprehend what's happening.

When I was a kid and we drove to the coast to camp for a holiday, my mum gave me a map and told me to make sure I read it properly so that I could give her the directions. Today, I ask my kids to put the destination into Google Maps on their iPhones and tell them to make sure they take me around the heaviest traffic zones as we drive along. Then they tell me about the place where we are going, what's happening there at the moment, and what people who are already there have to say about it (all while communicating with their friends in the background)!

Never in history has there been more power available to every one of us as individuals! Because of this, I don't think there's ever been a better time to grow your sports organisation and leave a legacy for those that come after you. A number of things are stacked in your favour:

People love sport and it's getting more exposure

There's no point in having a product if no-one wants to buy it! We have a natural advantage in sport – it's a product that a large percentage of the population wants! Because of the abundance of sport and physical pursuits on television and other media, the world's population has exposure to more and more sport. We can see and hear about sport on free-to-air television, pay television, the internet, our phones, tablets, newspapers, magazines, radio, newsletters and numerous other outlets – we are swamped by it. As a result, there is more demand for people to participate.

We have more time to do it

We all complain that there is never enough time in a day, however most of the mundane tasks that used to take up our time are now done by machines or professionally by other people; for example, automatic dishwashers and lawn care services, to name just two. So our free time is not taken up with mundane tasks. There's more time for people to engage in sport.

The population is growing

There's a lot of people in the world, and by the time you get to read this there will be even more. As the population grows, there is going to be more demand for every service, including sport. If you are an established sports organisation, this presents a huge opportunity!

People are more aware of health issues

Shows like *The Biggest Loser*TM have helped to make people think about their health and fitness. There are magazines dedicated to these issues and to every type of sport you can imagine. Medical research that was a tightly held secret for years is now freely available on the internet and we are exposed to much more information than ever before.

Because of this, people know that health and fitness are important and that organised sport is a great way to achieve their goals in this area.

The government wants people to play sport!

The rise of obesity and ill-health from preventable causes is a massive issue for governments all over the world. It is getting increasingly difficult for public health systems to handle the demand that has been created. As a result, governments are setting up programs and providing funding for people to be involved in sport and exercise. They are also spending money publicising the value of playing sport and being active. This is a massive 'free kick' for sport!

Technology is making your job easier!

Technology improvement now allows even the smallest organisation to market like a 400-kilogram gorilla! Fifteen years ago the only way to get massive publicity was via expensive television or radio campaigns. Now people are using free social media and other technology to gain global publicity almost overnight. With a well-designed website, strong branding and compelling communication, you can now position yourself perfectly to your target market and compete with anyone, regardless of your size and resources.

Help, information and advice is abundantly available

In medieval times tricksters and shysters easily fooled people because they didn't know any better. As little as 10 years ago it was sometimes

difficult to get really good information and advice on how to grow your sports organisation. Now there are people offering services and information in any niche you can think of and you have no excuse for not knowing how to improve your organisation.

So, despite the day-to-day challenges you face in promoting and building your sports organisation, and what you may hear in the media, the environment for growth and success has never been better. The remainder of this book will show you how!

Do things in your own unique way

There is a wonderful quote from the late, great Steve Jobs that I love:

‘People can copy what we do – they can’t copy who we are.’

I often give away some of my very best material. Why? People will copy it anyway, so you may as well save them the hassle of tracking you down and getting your information! You then look like a good guy and also position yourself as an expert in your area. Nine out of 10 people who receive the information won’t do anything with it anyway!

I have also copied parts of what others have done in the past. But importantly, I repurpose this to my own unique way of delivering information that brings out my best traits, knowledge and experience. You need to do the same thing. As you go about implementing what you learn here, it’s important to add your own unique touch. Bring your own individual style and personality to the table, put in a great effort and focus on what needs to be done. When you truly commit to implementing a strong marketing system you will see your thriving sports community grow in front of you. People can copy what you do but they can’t copy who you are!

How to use each of the five steps

I have developed the 5-Step Game Plan system based on my extensive experience in sport, brand development and marketing. I know it works because I’ve implemented it personally and I’ve observed and

helped others do the same. So the question is not whether the process works but if you are willing to make it work for you.

To get the most out of this book and the system outlined here, consider the following:

- ➔ Before you get started on your plan, read the whole book to get an understanding of the entire process and how it all fits together. I've found that it's always helpful to see the complete picture. Visit the website and use the free information that is available to you there.
- ➔ It's possible you are already doing a number of the things you will read about here, but are they being done effectively, in the right way, with acceptable results? As with many things in life, the devil is in the detail. If you are an athlete in any sport, turning up to training is not enough – to be successful you need to train in the right way, matching game conditions as closely as possible, with intensity and desire to improve. It's the same for marketing: don't just 'turn up' – do it right!
- ➔ Start at the start and work your way from Step 1 to Step 5. Even if you are not intending to visually re-brand your sports organisation, do the exercises on branding to ensure you have a written description of your brand so everyone is clear about what you stand for and where you are going as an organisation.
- ➔ Make marketing a priority in your sports organisation – don't neglect the other things that you must do, but be clear about what is important and what is not. As a rule of thumb, I would encourage you to *do fewer things better*. There's no point in doing lots of things quickly just to say they're done. Take the time to do it right and the results will serve you for a long time. But make it a priority!
- ➔ Use other people's skills and knowledge. Think of yourself as the champion of marketing and branding in your organisation, but don't be afraid to call on experts to help you out. You can do this through books, searching the internet, attending relevant seminars and training, or of course hiring people to help. Build your skills and knowledge and don't be afraid to ask questions.

- ➔ Have fun! If you are reading this book you are probably the kind of person who wants and likes to improve the way things are done – just don't forget why you are doing it, and enjoy the journey.

Make it happen!

What you are about to embark on is simple, but not easy. Nothing worthwhile comes easily. There will be challenges along the way. You can overcome them but it takes determination. Don't let things get in your way.

Good luck! I look forward to hearing about your journey, the challenges along the way and, importantly, the successes that you have.


**Ned Coten,
June, 2013**

If you have feedback, comments or questions, I'd love to hear them. Please contact me as follows:

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Part I

What IS marketing and why do I need it?

My definition of marketing

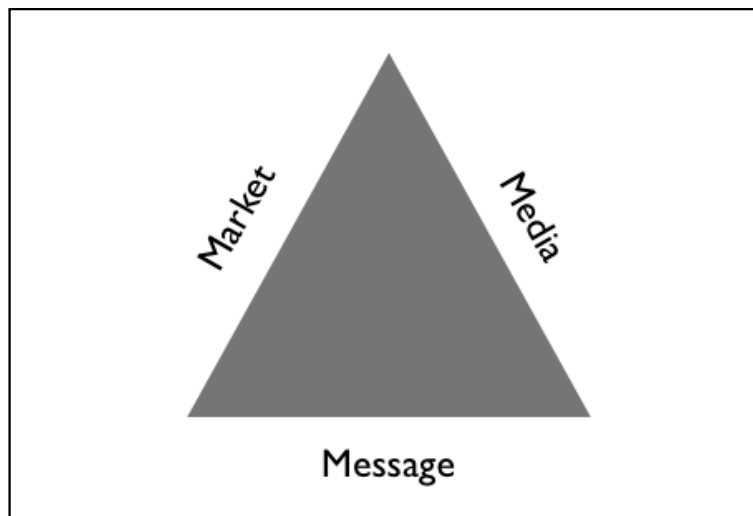
At the outset I want to give you my definition of marketing, so that we are all on the 'same page' from the start. The 5-Step Game Plan system that I have outlined here is built around this definition, designed to bring it to life and make it valuable.

My definition of marketing might not be found in a university textbook. I've been inspired by some great marketing, and it's based on what actually works in the real world – not academic theory. (I'm not dismissing education here by the way – I studied hard for many years, and have a Bachelor of Education and an MBA. But most of what I use today has come from what I've learned in the trenches.)

So my definition of marketing is this:

Getting the right message to the right people using the right media and methods in an effective, efficient and profitable manner.

A visual representation looks like this:



(You should know that I've 'stolen' this definition from a great marketer who I've respected for many years – Dan Kennedy. You can find out more about Dan at www.dankennedy.com.)

There's a perception among some people that branding and marketing can only be done by creative people. They believe that there is some

‘secret sauce’ that successful marketers have that others don’t know about. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Branding and marketing are done in exactly the same way that a tennis tournament is run. To run a tennis tournament you need to plan the event, book the date, ensure all the relevant services are available, ensure there are umpires, tennis balls, towels and refreshments. You communicate with the players beforehand, tell them what’s going on, provide what they need and ensure that the winner gets a trophy. It’s a system, a series of events, done in the right order, using skills that are learned, according to a predetermined plan.

Strong branding and marketing is done in the same way. A system is implemented and followed. Are there some specific skills required? Yes – but these can be learned because they are practical, tangible skills. They are not mysterious happenings known only to a few!

‘Why should I choose you?’

Before anyone buys anything, they ask themselves two questions:

1. Is this the product (or service) I want?
2. If so, is this the place to buy it from?

Both of these questions are important, but nearly everyone in sport thinks only about the answer to the first one. They spend time, money and effort making their product better. They focus on the facilities and the quality of the equipment being used, and on making sure everything runs to plan. I’m not suggesting you shouldn’t pay attention to this, but don’t make it your primary focus at the expense of building your brand and implementing great marketing. Why not? **Because everyone else is doing the same thing.** They are all making their products just a little better, tweaking things to get them just right. However, they would have better results if they focused on finding a great answer to the second question. And so would you! You need to get a great answer to the question: ‘Why should I choose you?’

Think about McDonald’s. I use them here as an example because everyone knows the brand *and* because they have an everyday product.

Let's face it – no-one goes to McDonald's to get a 5-star dining experience! We know what the food is before we go in (and because they are so consistent we are never surprised by this). Be honest: would slightly improving the quality of the food at McDonald's lead to a significant improvement in sales? I doubt it! The food is not the primary reason we go.

We go there because our kids want a Happy Meal, or because we want a rest while they play outside, or because we want a quick and easy McCafé coffee, or sometimes because we just want a quick feed and don't really care too much what it tastes like. We know we will always get the same thing, it will cost the same, and it will be served in an environment we know and trust. McDonald's has answered the second question by creating an experience and marketing themselves accordingly.

So don't just focus on providing a product – make sure that your potential customers see your sports organisation as ***the place to buy that product from!***

Develop a marketing-led business

Most sports organisations, particularly at the grassroots level, are *operationally*-led. They are fantastic at putting on competitions and events, running carnivals and tournaments, and implementing coaching clinics. In general, the *operations* of the organisation work very well. But their marketing is often ineffective, or even non-existent. They don't tell the world what a great job they are doing in their sport. There may be the beginnings of a marketing strategy, or there may be some things that happen sporadically, but overwhelmingly few organisations take the time to implement a marketing culture.

Most really successful sports organisations are marketing-led. They don't neglect the important operational side of their business, but they focus on engaging their members, participants and supporters, often using the same simple but effective methods I discuss here.

The City to Surf Fun Run in Sydney is a great example of a marketing-led event. People don't participate just to run (they could do that on

their own); they want to enjoy the camaraderie and emotion of being part of a community event. They want entertainment and they want to brag over a beer after the race or over coffee on Monday morning. The **activity** is running, but the event, the **brand**, is about participation and excitement.

Shift your thinking to focus on the marketing of your sports organisation. Think of yourself as the champion of marketing – the one who will lead the way when it comes to implementing simple but effective strategies to turn your participants into raving fans. As a result they will tell others, so you can reach your potential and leave a legacy for those that follow.

You need to build a branding and marketing system

The more closely you look at high-performing teams or players in any sport, the more apparent it will become that they have a system – a set of structured routines that are performed in order to get a better result. This includes positions on the field of play, the way that you work with other team members and the way practice sessions are structured.

What you will find, if you look closely enough, is that there are systems just about everywhere in sport, business and life. They may not be immediately apparent, but if you look hard enough they are there. This is more obvious with higher performing teams in any environment. If you went into an Olympic training centre tomorrow, would you expect to see people moping around, wondering what to do next? No! It's likely that there will be a system for *everything*, with plans and training routines written on wall charts, meetings and training sessions starting on time, and everyone *very* clear about what is going on.

And so it is with branding and marketing for you and your sport. Whether you know it or not, you have a brand and a marketing system already. Chances are it is not as good as it could be, and in fact it may need a total overhaul. But there are solutions – simple, logical solutions that people in business all over the world are using every day to help them stand out from the pack and be successful. Over the past 10 years, I've adapted these solutions to work in sports organisations.

The 5-Step system outlined here enables any sports manager, administrator or volunteer to develop a brand that stands out and marketing that attracts and engages the right customers.

Effective branding and marketing is about having a structured plan and executing it well. While you should certainly ensure you have a budget for branding and marketing, it's the execution of a good plan that will make the difference – not only *having* a plan, but *executing* the plan ... taking action!

Where are you now?

A vital first step in building and improving your sports organisation is to take stock of where you are now. Have a think about your organisation, and answer the following questions:

- ➔ ***Is your marketing built around the most compelling, intriguing and engaging message possible?*** Or are you just doing what everyone else does, being boring, dull, mundane, with no point of difference and just giving the basic facts? Are you positioning yourself as a commodity, with nothing to make you stand out? Worst of all, are you just about being cheap, available at the lowest price?
- ➔ ***Have you determined exactly who your message is for and how to get to them, and equally importantly decided who you are NOT for?*** Or are you vague, all things to all people and therefore nothing to anyone? Are you spreading your limited resources too thinly rather than focusing like a laser on a defined and specific target market?
- ➔ ***Are you thinking about the most appropriate media you use to get directly to the prospects in your specific target market?*** Or are you just following the crowd to the latest media craze, taking the advice of a well-intentioned friend or just doing anything available to 'get the word out'? (The right media depends on the target market, the message and the timing.)
- ➔ ***Are you being effective and efficient?*** Or are you taking the easy path, hoping everything will work out, or worse, just not making the time to plan and implement correctly? (*Most people use their*

time poorly, or at least not as well as they could. I provide more thoughts on this and provide appropriate resources later in this chapter.)

- ➔ **Are you accurately measuring the true net return on investment for each marketing activity?** Or are you just guessing, hoping that more people will come in the door, but still not exactly sure how they found you?

If this is a bit confronting, let me set your mind at ease. Once you understand what to do and how to do it, these principles will become like second nature to you. Importantly, you will start to see some results from the changes that you are making. And think about this: if it were easy, everyone would be doing a great job of it now! Things worth doing take effort!

You already have some significant advantages ...

If you've never read the book *Acres of Diamonds* by Russell Conwell, you should get a copy. The story is about an ambitious young man wanting to make his mark in the world. In order to do this he sells his family farm to search and mine for diamonds, and thus become wealthy. He travels the world for many years, trying to find his fortune, but never succeeds. On his return home many years later, he finds that a very successful diamond discovery had been made and a mine set up – on the exact property he sold all those years before!

The moral of the story: *we often don't know the mountain of value that we are sitting on.* I can just about guarantee that you don't realise the true potential your sports organisation already has. You just need to 'unpack the value' and let others discover it.

In my role working with some of the world's best-known brands I often dealt with outstanding marketers, usually with lots of resources behind them. We made ordinary products seem great and good products seem outstanding. These great marketers were able to achieve excellent results for brands with products that were ordinary, with a minimal point of difference to the competition. You have a great advantage because sport is the opposite. The product is amazing! The millions of people that participate in sport and watch others do it is testament to that. Sport is healthy, fun, mentally and physically stimulating – it really is a great product.

Here are some of the inherent advantages of sport that you can build on:

- ➔ Sport makes people feel good.
- ➔ Sport helps people to feel healthy and live to the full.
- ➔ Sports organisations have many committed people who care about their organisation.
- ➔ It's a great way for people of all ages, particularly children, to meet new friends and become more social.
- ➔ Sport teaches you a lot of 'life lessons'.
- ➔ People want to feel like they are part of a community – sport delivers this really well, with very high levels of consumer engagement.
- ➔ Large organisations are falling over themselves to get to your market (sport participants and families). I know this from extensive personal experience.
- ➔ Sport is a great leveller – there's an opportunity for virtually anyone to be involved.
- ➔ Sport evokes passion, and great brands are all about passion.
- ➔ People often want to volunteer or help their sports organisation – your customers are sometimes your best workers and salespeople!

But MY sports organisation is different!

When I talk about the marketing principles in this book, some people have said to me, 'Oh, I couldn't do that because my situation is different!' Sure, the tactics and nuances of each sports organisation are different (though only slightly), but the **principles** are the same! Every sports organisation or business has a product, operations to undertake, finances to look after and a sports product or service to market and sell.

I believe that every sports organisation is a **marketing business** that just happens to promote a different product. The scale and size of the organisation may vary, but something still needs to be sold. If you can grasp this concept, your view of the world will change and you will become far more productive and successful in your marketing.

You must make the connection that your sports organisation is a business and should be run like one. You may have different reasons for being in business: growth of your sport, enjoyment of participants or perhaps to give back to your community (as opposed to pure profitability). That's fine, but nothing will occur unless you take a professional approach and realise that you have a marketing business with sport as the product or service!

It's not about money

How many times have you heard this statement (or perhaps even said it yourself?): 'It's okay for the bigger sports, they've got lots of money – it's easy for them!'

It's true: there are definite advantages to having money to spend. But it's **not** the most important thing! Whether you have money or not, you must have a strategy – a plan of attack that considers the playing field in front of you and determines what you will do with the resources you have. Then you must act.

This famous quote from Sun Tzu, the legendary Chinese military strategist, says it all:

***'Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.'***

In Australia, the Australian Football League (AFL) is seen as one of the most successful major sports organisations. Their television rights earn hundreds of millions of dollars and as a result there is money to invest in a number of areas of the business. But it wasn't always this way. When I was growing up, the then Victorian Football League was a state-based league, albeit a very good one, with a few people working in their head office.

The leaders of the sport developed a strategy to become a truly national competition, with a vision to develop into one of the world's major leagues. There is no question the AFL has achieved this. It's easy to look back now and say that anyone could have done it. The truth is that every step was a struggle, and at the time the path ahead would have seemed just about insurmountable. But they had a strategy, took

action and **made** it happen. You need to do the same thing. Using the principles and steps in this book you can develop your own strategy to turn your sports organisation from being operationally-led to being marketing-led.

And a word of encouragement . . . you would be amazed who will help if you take the time to ask. Because we see sport as an emotional outlet and of benefit to the community, most people of influence and knowledge will be happy to help if you give them the chance to do so.

This stuff is simple, but not easy!

The 5-Step Game Plan system I have laid out for you in this book and the supporting material on the Game Plan website (at www.game-plan-marketing.com) is simple. Any high school student of reasonable intelligence could implement it with the material I have made available. The challenge for you is that it actually takes (hard) work and you will need to make decisions, sometimes ones that are difficult and may meet with resistance. You will need to use your skills and you will need to think about how the principles here can be adapted for your own use. It **is** simple, it is **not necessarily** easy!

It is my belief that the number one priority for any business (including sports organisations) is marketing. It's the single activity that will make the biggest difference in the shortest amount of time. Therefore, it is very worthwhile going through some pain to make it a reality. Most sports organisations have a great product and people want that product. The trick is to get a compelling message to as many people as possible in the most cost- and time-effective manner so you can build a thriving community.

If you have never done this it may seem confronting at first, so here are two tips:

1. Go on gut instinct – it's usually correct. If you are unsure about how to proceed at any stage, go with what feels right. Branding is half emotion, half logic, so this is really a viable way to proceed. You can always adjust your thinking as you go, but often what you *feel* is right, is right.

2. Use people around you, who are in your target market, as a sounding board. The people who pay you money are your target market. Find out what they think about your activities. You will be surprised about how effective this is in shaping your thinking in the right way.

Jeez Ned, I'm busy – I just don't have the TIME to do all this marketing stuff ...

I'm going to get up on my pedestal here ...

The truth is, implementing what I'm going to talk about and teach you in this book is hard work. There is a lot to do and it involves thinking, planning, and getting your ideas out of your head and written down in a cohesive manner. Then you need to re-work them, implementing and refining as you go. And that's just the start!

You have exactly the same amount of time as me or any of the other 6 billion-plus people on this planet of ours. How come some get amazing things done while some seem to go around in circles and get nothing done? It's my view that most people waste most of their time. Think about your typical day – for a lot of people it goes something like this:

Get up, get yourself (and your kids, family perhaps) up and out the door, check your mobile for messages and give a Facebook update.

Arrive at the office, talk to a few people on the way in, make a coffee, and check your email.

Start on a project before you have a staff meeting, which gets delayed because a couple of people roll in late.

Urgent issue from the staff meeting takes 45 minutes to resolve.

Back to the desk, check email, return a phone call, a couple of random questions from some of your co-workers.

Check email, another meeting.

Lunch at your desk, coffee to keep you going, scan the internet while you're doing it and read the sports pages.

Check email, check text messages, and update Facebook.

A bit more time on the project.

Planning meeting for an upcoming project. Agree that you all need a bit more information and will meet again next week.

Check email, return phone calls.

Run out the door, talking on the phone, concerned that you're not ready for the presentation in the morning...

Okay, so this may be a slight exaggeration – or is it? I hope you get the point.

Productive people remove the rubbish from their day, set specific blocks of time to do things, don't allow unnecessary interruptions and check email once or twice at specific times. They allocate finishing times for meetings as well as start times (and often do these meetings standing up so no-one gets too comfortable).

Be honest with yourself: how much focused, productive time do you *ensure you get* every day? How many systems do you have in place to avoid repetition and poor use of time? Do you proactively manage your time, planning by the year, the month, the week, the day, even the hour? Or do you just roll up and see what happens, hoping your vague plans will somehow come to fruition and that people around you won't find out in the meantime?

When I hear someone say they don't have the time to do the critical things that will lead to specific goals being achieved, I see someone who doesn't have their priorities straight and hasn't made the difficult decisions about what's important, what's not and then acted accordingly.

Don't get me wrong – I'm a social guy. I love talking to everyone, meeting new people and engaging in life. There's nothing wrong with enjoying the environment that you are around – after all, sport is one of the best emotive environments you can find yourself in. But separate your social time, or your 'bozo' time as I call it, from your work time. Allocate tasks, allocate time frames and make it happen – you do have the time, you just choose to use it poorly!

As you can tell, this subject is close to my heart, but further discussion is outside the scope of this book. Two resources for you:

- ➔ The 80/20 Rule presentation at www.game-plan-marketing.com. Otherwise known as Pareto's Principle, after its founder Wilfredo Pareto, this presentation talks about the universal truth of how the world works – the majority of results come from the minority of inputs. Like it or not, this principle is true in every situation you find yourself in, so understand and use it.
- ➔ *The No BS Guide to Time Management*, by Dan Kennedy. This book is one of the best I own and I recommend you adopt its principles. Dan likes to be known as 'The Professor of Harsh Reality'. It took me a long time to realise that I should just follow the advice he gives, rather than worrying about what others would think or how I could implement it without a little pain.

Your competitors are repositioning you right now!

Just because you are waiting around for 'the right time' to get started doesn't mean everyone else is too. Right now, in the market in which you are competing, people are implementing strategies that are going to help them and hurt you.

Here are some signs that you are leaving the door open for your competitors to come right in and take your members and participants away from under your nose:

People can't tell you apart from the crowd.

Do your members and other stakeholders know exactly what it is that you offer and why they should buy from you instead of someone else? Your brand – the perception of your business in the marketplace – has never been more important, and if your brand promise isn't clear, you are in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Not keeping in touch with a newsletter or podcast?

What is the single best thing you can do to keep people informed and engaged? Send out a well-written, relevant newsletter that lets people know what's going on in your community, or upload a podcast that they can download and listen to when *they* want to.

Still keep all your records in an Excel spreadsheet?

This is a disaster waiting to happen. You could lose them all when your laptop gets stolen, and only one person can update it. And sending email is a nightmare. This is perhaps the simplest but most important issue to address.

Your participants can't register online?

In all other aspects of their lives, your members and participants do everything online, and they are probably **very** frustrated that they can't do this with you. But that's the good part! The bad part is that when you register them using outdated methods, you are using an untold amount of time and effort on something that could be done automatically by your stakeholders... and they would love you for it!

Being transactional instead of engaging.

What are you doing to ensure that your members, customers, volunteers, sponsors and other participants love being involved with your organisation? If they are just turning up, playing or watching an event or competition, and then leaving, they are temporary residents of your village. When someone else offers a better experience and shows your members how much they care about them, look out!

No new products or services.

The competitions and events you have been running for years are fine, but if that's all you have to offer you're leaving a lot of money on the table. Some sports organisations extend to school camps and clinics, but those are just the tip of the iceberg. This is a significant opportunity that many sports organisations don't explore, or worse, don't even think about!

A ton of other things like ...

- ➔ logos, colours, uniforms, signage and other visual communications that are not congruent and do not prove a similar, professional, compelling message
- ➔ fixtures, results and other information that is not provided online or not up to date and accurate
- ➔ not using every opportunity to engage your participants by providing a unique experience that they want to tell others about
- ➔ not having a PR kit ready to go with relevant articles, images and videos about your people and organisation
- ➔ overall, not doing everything you can, even with your limited resources, to convey a consistent, compelling message to your target market.

If you aren't doing these things, your competitors don't have to do much to stay in front! Now let's make a start ...

Redeem your FREE consultation

Read the book but not sure what to do next?

Don't worry, you're not alone. One of the biggest challenges faced by my past and present clients is knowing how to get started and having the confidence to make it happen. Its one thing to know what needs to be done: it's another entirely to actually do it!

For this reason, Game Plan Marketing offers a **FREE one-hour consultation** to any reader of this book who is not sure exactly what they need to do and how to get started!

This consultation can be done face-to-face or more commonly via an online meeting. In the consultation, we will cover:

- ➔ Your specific situation and circumstances
- ➔ Identification of your top challenges in building a thriving sports community
- ➔ Analysis of your brand structure an implementation
- ➔ Identification of key communication opportunities
- ➔ Consideration of the best automation systems for your organisation
- ➔ Top engagement opportunities for your market
- ➔ The best potential revenue opportunities in your sports organisation
- ➔ What NOT to do in your situation
- ➔ Identification of the key people whose help and support you will need
- ➔ Answering your specific questions on branding and marketing your sports organisation

This consultation is absolutely free of any obligation on your part. We have found that people who are serious about making changes in their sports organisation often need some assistance to get them started. If this is you, please contact us to book a consultation.

To book your session, go to:

www.game-plan-marketing.com/book-consultation

or call us on +61 3 9010 6147