

# A NEW KIND OF FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

*The Guide to High School  
Sports Marketing for Brands  
and Businesses*



**VNN**

*Nearly 8 million student athletes will play sports each year, and after adding in parents, families, and fans, yearly attendance figures at high school sports is nearly 510M according to the NFHS, making high school the largest market in all of sports.*

*What's more, a recent New York Times article estimated that sports families spend up to 10.5% of their gross household income on their athletes.*

*With all this data, it's clear that high school sports is a great investment for your marketing dollars.*

*So how do you reach this audience? What are they looking for?*

**WE'RE GLAD YOU ASKED.**

*VNN knows high school sports.*

*Our team connects 19M passionate parents, athletes, fans, software providers, and athletic professionals at 2,500 high school across the country around their teams with our communication platform.*



# STEP ONE THE BASICS





A photograph of a basketball game in progress. In the foreground, several spectators are seen from behind, looking towards the court. One person is wearing a blue jersey with the number 35 and the name "DURAN" on the back. Another person is wearing a black jersey with the number 11. To the right, a person is wearing a blue jersey with the number 32. The basketball court is visible in the middle ground, with players in red and white uniforms. The background shows the gymnasium's structure with yellow and green beams.

## THE LAY OF THE LAND

*High school sports has always been very fragmented. Until recently, there hasn't been a lot of connection between one high school and another when it comes to marketing efforts. So, depending on your goals, the first step is understanding if you're targeting one community, or many.*

*While each school may differ in how connected they are with others, there are similarities in how they are set up. There are four key players you need to know:*

- Athletic Director*
- Athletic Administrator*
- Team Coaches*
- Booster Clubs*



*If you want to work with the entire school, and all of the sports programs, these are the two people you'll want to know – they have a '10,000 foot view' of athletics.*

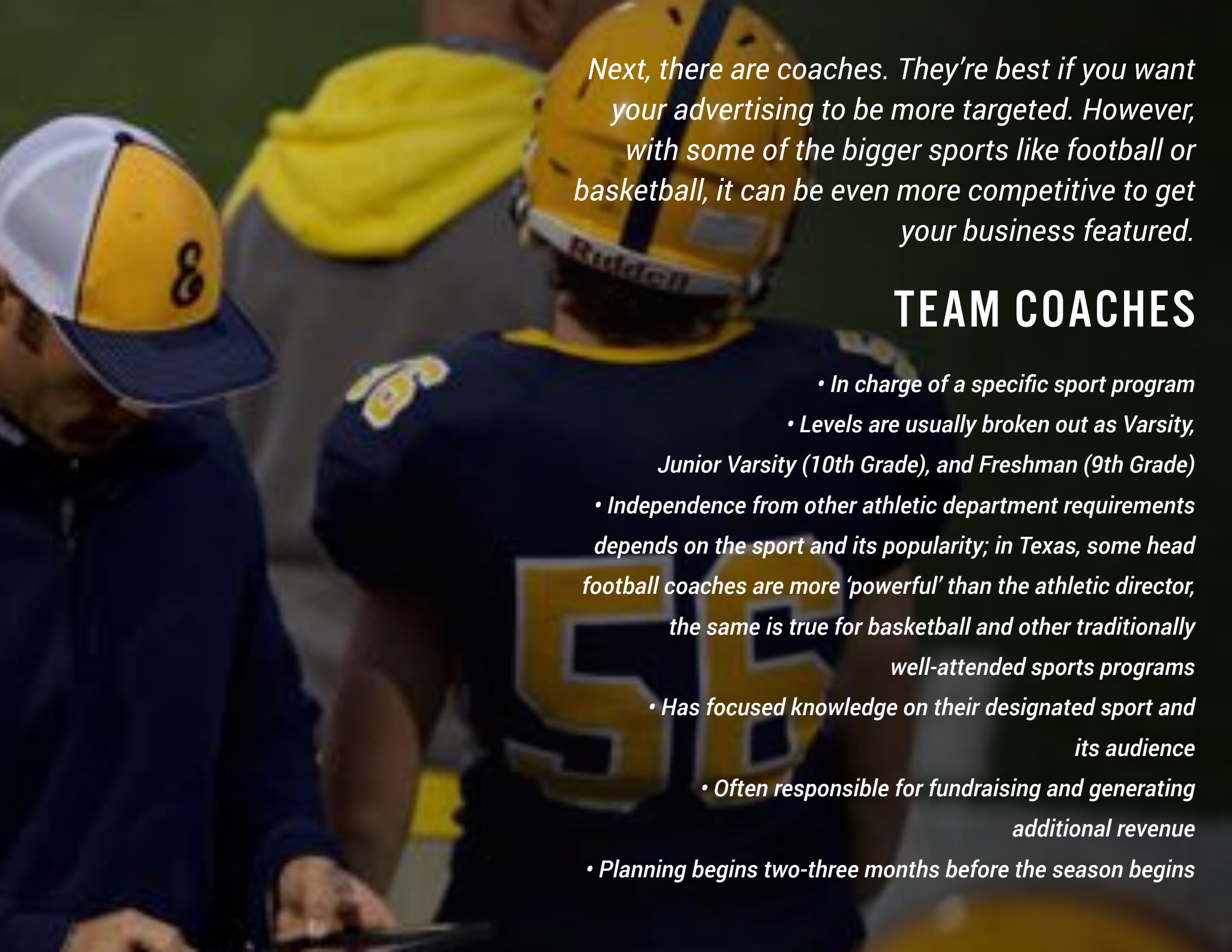
## THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

- *Often the decision maker*
- *The role can vary in responsibilities from community to community*
- *May have an assistant AD*
- *Busy, but also in charge of budgets and finances; the 'manager'*
- *Open to new opportunities, but likes to stick with 'what works' - taking risks is bad for their role.*

## THE ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATOR

- *Controls the calendar*
- *Right-hand person of the athletic director*
- *Usually the first person to speak to*
- *Knows all the systems; often the one doing the work and coordinating*





*Next, there are coaches. They're best if you want your advertising to be more targeted. However, with some of the bigger sports like football or basketball, it can be even more competitive to get your business featured.*

## **TEAM COACHES**

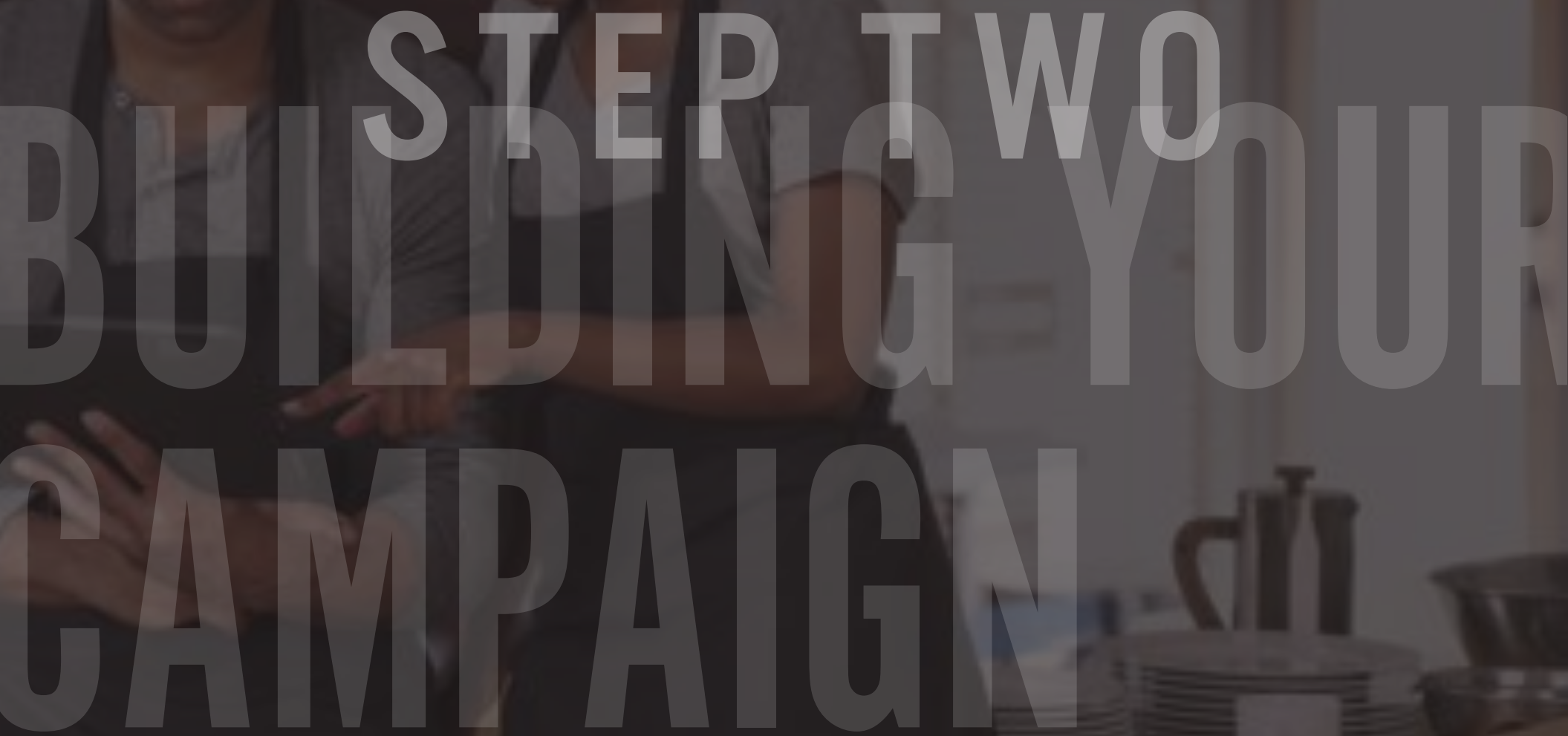
- *In charge of a specific sport program*
- *Levels are usually broken out as Varsity, Junior Varsity (10th Grade), and Freshman (9th Grade)*
- *Independence from other athletic department requirements depends on the sport and its popularity; in Texas, some head football coaches are more 'powerful' than the athletic director, the same is true for basketball and other traditionally well-attended sports programs*
- *Has focused knowledge on their designated sport and its audience*
- *Often responsible for fundraising and generating additional revenue*
- *Planning begins two-three months before the season begins*



# BOOSTER CLUBS

- *A group of parents who can support either a specific team or the entire school's sports programs*
- *Generally solely run and organized by parents of students at the school*
- *Created to raise funds and generate support*
- *Takes the pressure off of athletic administrators and coaches*
- *Know the community well*
- *Are familiar with brands and businesses, but sometimes can default to self-directed 'raffles' and 'sales' to raise the money they need*

*The entire purpose of a booster club is to generate revenue for teams, which makes them a great resource. However, not every school has a booster club, and there are varying levels of sophistication when they do. Working with a booster club is best when your marketing campaign requires a lot of 'on-the-ground' work and logistics to pull off.*

A man and a woman are in a kitchen, looking at a tablet together. The man is on the left, wearing a grey shirt and a dark apron. The woman is on the right, wearing a grey shirt and a dark apron. They are both looking down at the tablet. The background shows a kitchen with a brick wall, a window, and some kitchen items on the counter.

# STEP TWO

# BUILDING YOUR

# CAMPAIGN

*Beyond understating how high school athletic departments are set up, understanding your own business is arguably more important. With our partners who are getting into the space for the first time, we often ask them four questions to understand the best opportunities for their brand:*



# WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

*Understanding what your goals are is essential to ensuring your foray into high school sports is a successful one. You might want to:*

- 1. Get more foot traffic into your store*
- 2. Drive more people to your website*
- 3. Get your logo seen by the community*
- 4. Be known as a supporter of the community*
- 5. Create more purchases or sales inquiries*

*Ultimately, your goal will help you decide which advertising campaign makes the most sense for you to invest in and which key players to approach.*

# WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

*The product you are selling and category it fits into is also very important to creating a campaign, as it allows you to find the right fit:*

- 1. A realtor might want a banner hanging in the gymnasium with their photo, name, and phone number*
- 2. Water bottle companies may want to have their bottles on the sideline at all games*
- 3. A pizza restaurant may want their logo on team schedule pages online*
- 4. A cross-fit gym may want to give away t-shirts at an event*
- 5. An insurance firm may want to sponsor an athlete of the month competition*

*We'll talk more about the specific opportunities we see most often in our next section.*

# WHERE DO YOU DO BUSINESS?

*The location (and size) of your business helps define our recommendations for the number of communities you'll want to target. A smaller business who sells product is most-likely a good candidate for a campaign with one school community, while someone a little larger may be best with multiple communities or an entire metro area, and large brands might want to run a multi-state campaign.*





# WHO DO YOU WANT TO REACH?

*Are you looking to simply reach one community and audience? If so, it is easy enough to get started:*

- 1. Figure out who the key player is that you need to reach out to, whether online or by calling the school*
- 2. Reach out and discuss potential advertising campaigns*
  - A. Do you want to simply have your brand's logo in the gym, speak in front of a group of coaches, or something else?*
  - B. Don't be dissuaded if you have to leave a message and follow-up later! We've learned that most times, athletic administrators are busy people and can often be hard to reach.*
- 3. Decide which campaign will work best for your brand.*
- 4. Set goals.*
- 5. Kick off the campaign!*

# WHO DO YOU WANT TO REACH? (CONT.)

*Looking to reach several communities at once?*

*This can prove to be more difficult, given what we discussed earlier, but it's certainly not impossible.*

*If you have a very good, very organized marketing manager, you can take the steps we outlined for one community, and do it several times across the different schools in each community you want to target.*

*Another option is to connect with a company that represents multiple communities all at once, which will save you time, and headache. There are several of these across the country, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Here's a quick list of those we see as the leaders:*

**-VNN**

**-Home Team Marketing**

**-RankOne**

**-MaxPreps**

# UNDERSTANDING POTENTIAL TACTICS

*By now, you've got the basics of how high school sports marketing works, and understand how to best build your campaign. The next step is often the most fun - brainstorming possible tactics!*

*In high school sports, we've organized the most popular advertising tactics into three main categories:*

*-The Classics*

*-The Digitals*

*-The Future*





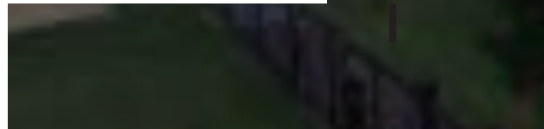
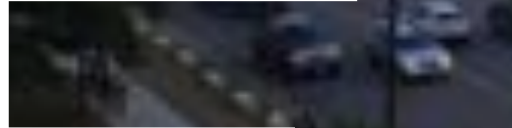
# THE CLASSICS



# ADVERTISING WITH THE CLASSICS

*When it comes to spreading the word about your brand in high school sports, the most common method is with classic, physical advertisements and hard-working in-game activations. These include:*

- Announcements at games*
- Advertising placements on scoreboards*
- Vinyl banners on fence and/or bleachers*
- Side of Stadiums*
- Sponsored by Ads*
- Tickets and Program Ads*



*With these tactics, there are some pros and cons*

## PROS

- *Tried and true*
- *Affordable*
- *Expected*
- *Builds awareness*

## CONS

- *Requires a long time-frame of advertising to build awareness*
- *Can't change after printing or need to pay more*
- *Easily ignorable*
- *Often no metrics to understand how well your ad is doing*
- *'Pay and hope'*



# THE DIGITALS

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's hands interacting with technology. The left hand is on a laptop keyboard, and the right hand is holding a smartphone, which displays a colorful data visualization or chart. The background is out of focus, showing more of the laptop screen and some papers. The overall lighting is warm and soft, creating a professional yet approachable atmosphere. The text 'THE DIGITALS' is superimposed over the top half of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# THE DIGITALS

*As the world has begun using the internet for connecting with friends, learning, and purchasing product, high school athletic departments have adopted technology to promote their teams, from leveraging already existing services like Facebook and Twitter to creating their own home online.*

*As a business owner, these channels give you lots of opportunities reach a local community's audience online.*

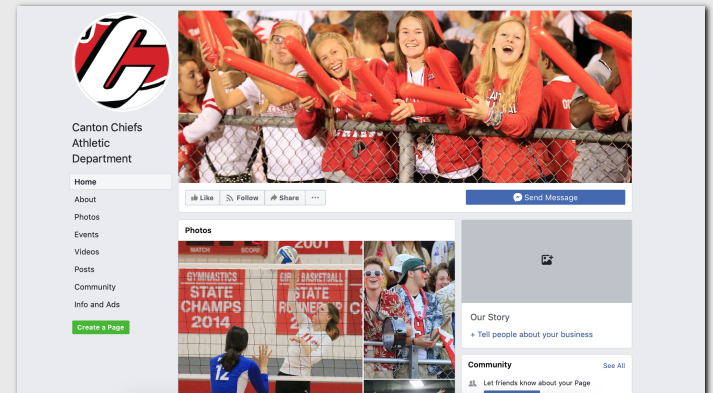


# SOCIAL MEDIA

*With so many people using the most popular social media services, most schools use at least one service to keep their communities up-to-date. Depending on the service, you can also bypass the school completely and target the community directly. It's really up to you!*

## • Facebook

- *Almost every school has a Facebook page, but often seen as a better channel for reaching parents and grandparents.*
- *Create your own campaign with the best targeting tools of all social media platforms, or collaborate with a school on a partner post.*



## • Twitter

- *Great for real-time, quick information; sports programs will often use this channel for reporting scores from the game.*
- *Teams often have their own Twitter accounts*
- *Skews slightly younger - a good way to reach athletes and young fans*
- *Direct advertising tools are OK; not as powerful as Facebook, we suggest collaborating with a school or team*



# SOCIAL MEDIA

- *Instagram*

- *Great for sharing photos and visual content*
- *Not often used by athletics programs, except in some instances*
- *A very insular network; If your business has a small following, it is difficult to get people off of Instagram and on to a third-party site unless you create paid campaigns with Instagram/Facebook directly*
- *Owned by Facebook; advertising campaigns on Facebook can be set-up to advertise on Instagram too*

- *Snapchat*

- *Originally a very popular channel for reaching younger audiences*
- *Hard to market on; messages and stories disappear*
- *Schools don't often use Snapchat to promote their sports, but it is a good direct line to athletes*

# OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITES

*Over the past few years, there's been a trend of school athletic departments creating their own collegiate-style websites to promote their athletic programs. Often, these sites have a few opportunities in common that you can take advantage of.*

- ***Display Banners***

- *One of the most common ways to advertise online, display banners can be likened to online billboards that promote your business, allow viewers to click on them and be taken to another website that you specify*



- ***Native Content***

- *Articles and sections that promote your business in a way that is 'natural' to the site and live alongside the content that a reader is used to seeing*
  - Featured Business Articles
  - Custom Sections
    - *Sports Health, College Prep, Healthy Living, Recruiting*



# OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITES

- *Custom Content Campaigns*

- *Some schools will have different promotions that they create during specific times of the year and create an opportunity for you to sponsor them.*

- Voting Campaigns

- *Athlete of the month*

- *Coach of the Year*

- *Best athletic performance*

- Weekly Editorials

- *'Words from the Athletic Director' Column*



# VIDEO

*One of the biggest trends online for high school athletic departments is to use video to showcase their sports programs. As a business owner, this opens up new opportunity for you to advertise in the two different ways we've seen schools use video.*

- *Pre-Taped*

- *For many of our schools, showcasing game highlights after games and loop them throughout the season is an easy way for them to use video. This allows for businesses to utilize traditional looping video advertising techniques like you may be familiar with from YouTube, Hulu, or other services*

- Pre-roll advertising - 'At the beginning'   - Mid-roll advertising - 'In the middle'
    - Post-roll advertising - 'At the end'   - Logo banners within the video feed



*There are a few companies in the space that specialize in pre-taped video, including:*

- **Rapid Replay**
- **HUDL**

# VIDEO

- **Live**

- *Live-streaming high school sports is also becoming more popular and easily accessible every year. With new technology like BoxCast, SportsCastr, and KeeMotion, high school athletic departments are able to easily broadcast events to their communities like any pro team.*

- *Similar to pre-taped footage, live-streaming also allows your business to access traditional video advertising techniques with the added benefit that the event is live*

- Pre-roll advertising - 'At the beginning'
    - Mid-roll advertising - 'In the middle'
    - Post-roll advertising - 'At the end'
    - Logo banners within the video feed

- *The major player in this field for high school is NFHS, whose NFHS Network gives schools 'channels' to broadcast their games, which they pay to view.*

# ADVERTISER RETARGETING

*When considering a larger digital strategy, it can be wise to consider retargeting to continue showing your message to your audience across the internet to drive purchases.*

- A retargeting campaign follows a person from the original place they were and shows the same (or similar) advertisement to them on another site*
- Have you ever thought of buying something, then decided against it, then saw an advertisement for that product while you were checking the news? That is retargeting.*
- A few companies that offer retargeting services include AdRoll and Criteo, but you can also ask the company you are working with on the campaign if they have these services, which often are an easy add-on.*

*Like the classic tactics, digital advertising in high school sports also has pros and cons:*

## **PROS**

- *Lots of metrics - know how well your advertisement is doing as it runs*
- *Flexible; Ability to change as you go*
- *Builds awareness*
- *Shorter campaigns*
- *More engaging*
- *Plug-and-play; less logistics needed to pull off your campaign*

## **CONS**

- *Nothing physical - it all happens on the internet*
- *Metrics overload; you can often measure too much*
- *Can be more expensive; pay for time, to reach a certain number of people, or a certain number of posts*





# THE FUTURES

# FROM THE PROS TO HIGH SCHOOL

## Looking to the Future

*As in most of the trends in sports, professional leagues set the tone, which then trickle down to college and high school. The same is true for advertising your business - what you see on TV will sooner or later end up in high school.*

*We've been tracking a few major developments in pro sports marketing that we're betting will become available sooner rather than later*



# LOGO PLACEMENT

*One of the most popular advertising tactics being passed from professional sports to high school sports is logo placement. Whether it be on the uniforms, field, or sidelines, advertisers are putting business logos in plain sight - often when the advertiser reflects their team's values.*

*· The LA Clippers recently added the “Bumble” logo to their jerseys.*



# VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED REALITY

*In 2016 both the Oculus Rift and Pokemon Go were released, making virtual reality and augmented reality experiences accessible to everyday audiences. Since then, pro sports teams have been experimenting with both technologies - whether giving you courtside seats from the comfort of your couch (NextVR), or debuting new jerseys in 3D with a new app (Sacramento Kings).*



***Coming soon, your advertisement inside the stadium without a physical advertisement at all!***



# CONTEXTUAL ADVERTISING

*Getting your message in front of the right audience at the right time is one of the biggest challenges in advertising. As statistics, analysis and technology continue to improve together, we're going to see this get easier (for the right price).*

*Taco Bell's 'Steal a Base, Get a Taco' promotion at this year's World Series is a simple use of this concept, where something happens, and customers receive an offer. In the future, out-of-town restaurants will be able to serve up offers to visiting fans when a team has an away game, and athletes will be able to unlock premium, exclusive apparel for their performances.*





A photograph of two men in a stadium setting. The man on the left is smiling and looking towards the man on the right. The man on the right is gesturing with his hands while speaking. The background shows stadium seating and a basketball hoop.

**SO WHAT NOW?**

# HERE'S WHAT WE WOULD DO.

*1. For starters, run an ad campaign on the high school athletics website. Here your goal will be to build brand association between the local business and the high school (parents LOVE brands that support their kids). By having an ad on the athletic website, you can expect the following:*

- Community members seeing the local business as proud supporters of the school*
- Opportunity to grow traffic to your website from community members*

*2. Add in retargeting by keyword - follow the community members who see your ad on the athletic websites when they are searching keywords related to your business (ie. when someone searches 'pizza,' or 'chrysler dealership'). This gives you:*

- An opportunity to catch the person when they are considering a purchase*
- More awareness of your business, and and opportunity to look like you have a large marketing budget*

*3) Make sure you have an account manager - you have a business to run, so it's important that you have an expert watching your advertising campaign, interpreting the results for you, and communicating those results to you to ensure you hit your goals.*

*In the meantime, we're here if you need us.*

*Our network of over 2,000 local athletic departments may be the perfect thing you need to promote your college across the country (or in your backyard), whether that's display advertising, retargeting, native content, sponsorships, and even custom content sections.*





*[vnnsports.net](http://vnnsports.net)*