

Creative Marketing Strategies and Action Plans To Increase Competitive Advantage

Within the Space of Collegiate NIL

- High-level view:
 - Generally, three different deal flow streams to look at
 - **Agency to Athlete:** Looks at how to effectively market an agency to an athlete using creative marketing strategies and finding competitive advantages
 - **Athlete to Brand/Company:** Looks at how an athlete can leverage their brand(themselves) to companies to get signed to deals. My thoughts for this are in my paper on NIL market outlook, so I won't dive into it here.
 - **Agency to Brand/Company:** Concerned with how an agency can approach a brand or company, in order to become "partners".
 - All of these are very interconnected, i.e. better Agency to Brand connection leads to better Athlete to Agency pull.
 - Looking at mostly siloed or isolated principles that the athlete or agency could use without the functional existence of the remaining entity.
 - To note: essentially all "Athlete to brand" strategies are also "Agency to Athlete" strategies, as having this info will make you more desirable to athletes.

Agency -> Athlete MKTG

- This is essentially asking: "How to make an agency valuable to an athlete?"

1. Find a niche

- a. The world of collegiate athletics is broad and expansive. With athletics being such a broad realm, finding a fit for any given agency is important.
- b. A “one size fits all” model is unlikely to be effective, as each sport has a different fan base and different fans like different things - just like Gucci doesn't compete in the same space as Nike, find what kind and size of athletes your agency best serves.
 - i. Will likely become more prevalent as NIL gets bigger and more athletes start joining, creating more defined categories

How to do:

- Look at the athletes agencies currently have signed now, **especially at the most successful ones**
- Look at why and how these athletes are accomplishing these benchmarks
- When sourcing future athletes try to stay close to this genre whether that’s gender, sport, etc.

2. Show solvency

- a. In traditional rhetoric of speech and argumentation, solvency is showing that a policy or plan you propose to implement, has already worked somewhere else
- b. Once a niche is occupied, find a “proof of concept” and use this POC as a selling point to other athletes
 - i. On the back end of this one needs to be compiling data, not only of deal flow with the athlete but also what the athlete did to get where they are, how you helped them, etc.

How to do:

- Simple: partner with a good athlete -> aggregate data -> visualize effectively

3. Accumulate Data

- a. With this last point - accumulate and keep track of as much data as possible for multiple reasons
 - i. In the NIL industry(and life) your experience makes up almost 0 percent of what has happened, but about 90 percent of how you see the industry.
 - ii. There is a lot you don't know and this can hurt you - compiling data to reference what works, what doesn't, how to operate in certain situations, etc. can help mitigate some of this uncertainty
 - iii. Also knowing what you know and the extent of it can help to find areas of NIL of which you are less familiar and where risk lies.
- b. Additional uses for data -
 - i. If an agency ever plans to make an exit - having data about athletes, and what exactly the competitive advantage provided and how that advantage can be provided in the future would be valuable
 - ii. At its core decisions rely on data, so the more data you have, the more likely you are to make the right decision.

How to do

- Find a software(notion, excel, etc.) maybe multiple for different kinds of data that you enjoy using
- Track data chronologically in a way that's easy to read and Sourceable(if looking for something, can easily look it up)

- Be open to new ideas and don't be adverse to change - you don't know as much as you think, don't let anyone tell you what to do, but allow the ability for perspective shifts

4. Create a culture and community

- a. Athletes are people, and people like to be around other cool people
- b. Building an agency as not only a professional biz but also a social one in which athletes interact or foster a space of belonging will create a culture.

How to do:

- In-person interaction: Flying out to places to see your athlete, or other face-to-face interaction is **CRUCIAL** in building something intangible like culture
- Start small and let it grow naturally, just like any friendship

5. All Around Development

- a. When a family their high school son to a recruitment dinner, they are not just asking the coach about his on-the-field play
- b. The family asks about development as a person, academically, socially, etc.
- c. Look to develop athletes not only as Athletes but also as people, create a culture(#4) that fosters something bigger than just playing the game
- d. Likely many of these athletes are very close with their parental or guardian figures(because of the effort put in of the front end when athletes were kids), so not only appealing to the athletes inclinations, but also to the parents.
 - i. At the end of the day the athlete will be making the decision, but the parents will likely have huge amounts of influence.

How to do

- Find what it is that you think is valuable outside of athletics.
- Create a culture around one, or a couple of these things and use this to show development on and off the field.

6. Future-Oriented

- a. Within the niche that most agencies are likely to fit into to, it is unlikely that many athletes will play post-college sports full-time
- b. Agencies should look to prepare athletes for the next steps in their lives

How to do

- Very general theme that I will dive deeper into, but showing solvency here(although NIL is still young) and being an all-around org that can assist in professional as well as athletic development

7. Money is your future, not your present(FO)

- a. Emphasize that money should be used in a “piggy bank” sense where NIL money is mostly saved, invested, or reinvested into personal brand.

How to do

- This could materialize as partnering with a financial advisor from a credible banking institution or another credible form of financial advice
- Less official - Have SIPs for kids to put money into and just invest in simple things, mutual funds, ETFs, etc.

8. Build a network

- a. Look both internally and externally within the sports industry, fostering genuine relationships that can also be leveraged to assist athletes

How to do

- Go to events, outreach, etc. just be yourself and build connections
- Also do this with brands

9. Build a Personal Brand

- a. Just like an athlete builds a brand to sell to a company, you should also have a personal brand that brings your athlete on board, on the same vein of the culture point.

10. Come up with a Simple Value Proposition + Mission Statement, Then Go

In-Depth

- a. Use a Value prop as a foundation for construction for an in-depth analysis of the competitive advantage you can provide
- b. This might seem almost too simple to think about allocating time to, but any agency should have a value proposition. Just as if you are interviewing for a top job, you detail your skill set, what they bring to the table, and how you can be effective. It is the same idea here.
- c. You should practice saying and thinking about exactly how to structure the verbiage around the VP. An abstract or “in your head” concept of what it is is not enough.
- d. Very similar for Mission Statement. The MS can be as broad or narrow as you’d like, just have it defined.
- e. Important things to remember here are that although NIL is a business centered around people and relationships, **it is still a business.**

- i. Generally(especially in VC-backed startups) businesses that leverage a technically based competitive adv. will have a more specific VP than service or people-based biz, because of the non-intuitive nature of the service(i.e. Little is assumed). However, developing a VP is not only relevant for potential clients but also internally. A VP can serve as an extension of the MS, guiding goals, policies, and procedures of a company toward a consistent place.

How to Do

- The implementation of this may seem easier than it actually is. An in-depth VP takes time and effort to develop. It should be in line with company values, founder's character, goals, etc. Allocating time to creating a VP/MS,(which it seems you already have), is crucial.

11. Being Proactive with Athletes

- a. This won't necessarily help to garner athletes in the first place, however, it will help to retain and keep athletes in good standing
- b. Athletes are extremely new to NIL and especially with large sums of money, will be very naive.
- c. Just as above with the Financial advisor, being proactive about having athletes make the right choices is huge.
- d. This could be anything from teaching athletes how to handle cyber-hate, unruly parents at hosted clinics or other events, remaining professional with brands, etc.
- e. There is so much in the world of NIL that will be new to Athletes and change is great, but can also come with risk.

- f. It is important to remember that Athletes are a reflection of the agency they sign with. Think about the value aspect of what you want that reflection to look like and work from there.

* An Agency is only as good as two things - its founder/directors and its athletes. Similar to a consulting firm in which people are the most valuable asset. Unlikely any “real” product will be sold, which is not better or worse, but just different. In a people-centric biz, the importance of reputation can’t be overstated.

Agency -> Brand Marketing

1. Everything starts with theme and culture

- a. Lots of common themes here. An agency marketing to a brand is not much different than athlete-to-brand
- b. Look to develop relationships with certain brands based on the culture of who you are and what you stand for.
 - i. **These brands don’t like wasting time.**
 - ii. By developing a culture of themes within an org, brands know they can reliably trust the vetting of an athlete.
 - iii. Brands won’t have to research as much, saving time and money
 - iv. Brands/companies HATE wasting time

How to do:

- Starts with the founder - think about who it is you are and how that materializes in the form of something physical.

- Don't think about what would be best, then try and cater to it. This method would be inherently ingenuine.
- Allowing your natural personality to shine through will also give more purpose and meaning to your work

2. Offer value outside of just athletes

- a. Brands will be most concerned with the athlete flow from any given agency, but this doesn't mean that we have to limit our offer to brands to just athletes
- b. This could look like many things - for example - connecting these brands with your "network" as referenced above to foster a relationship with these brands
- c. An agency is only as valuable as it athletes, but creating non-tangible value, such as culture or network can differentiate an agency as a whole from other talent orgs

3. Develop a following yourself

- a. If an agency develops a following/base within social media this will help in a multitude of ways
- b. One of these is the ability to represent the brand yourself
- c. By making a direct partnership with a brand, it is likely athletes will be more attracted to an agency
- d. This following also helps to showcase culture and the ability to display it.

4. Do not burn bridges

- a. This heavily applies to agencies and athletes.
- b. NIL is business, reputation is huge, and remaining professional in the face of conflict is paramount.

- c. From both agencies -> Brands, and Athletes -> brands, it should be emphasized that, publicly, the utmost level of professionalism remains.
- d. Very similar to the point in the previous section. I think it should be emphasized that remaining professional and courteous to partners(and everyone else) is very important for preserving reputation and brand-building.