

D2 ADACORNER



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Using technology to empower your student-athletes and positively influence their experience

Today's student-athletes were born during the most accelerated period of technological advancement in human history. Most had early access to a smart device. They have grown up with nearly unlimited access to the internet. Research tells us access to working WiFi is more important than access to a working restroom for this generation.

No matter your age, technology is fundamentally re-shaping your behavior. Your expectations of technology have likely changed in a way you never thought possible. If you are like me, you find yourself adapting and changing with each new innovative technology. Our student-athletes have not had to adjust or change. Our hyper connected digital world is all they know.

Now consider how all this has impacted your day-to-day operations and how you, your administration and your coaching staff supports and communicates with your student-athletes.

At Cal State Monterey Bay, we are defining our success by how our student-athletes experience us (as opposed to how we experience them). To commit to that approach we have invested in web-based software and mobile app technology to connect with our student-athletes in a way they are most likely to receive, respond and engage. This improved connection has empowered our student-athletes to share their experience with us so we can continually build and improve on how we can best serve them.

Three years ago, we replaced our paper/pencil student evaluations and rigid university online survey with an athletics-centric software platform that helps us deliver experience surveys and messages directly to our student-athletes' email and cell phone in a user friendly, intuitive way.

Streamlining this feedback process has dramatically increased our participation and strengthened our ability to get a response and objective pulse of the culture within our sport programs and department. It has also served to inform and protect our student-athletes,

department and university when urgent issues arise.

This year, we invested in a mobile app designed as a team communication platform and "one-stop-shop" for messaging, scheduling, file sharing and more." The most fundamental (and important) day-to-day operations of each of our sport programs have moved to this platform. Class and practice schedules, team travel itineraries and messages between the entire team, position groups or individuals take place within the app. We can also monitor class attendance by requiring students to "check in" to their class locations on the app.

Our administrators, including myself, can use the app to quickly find a team travel itinerary or organize a meeting with a specific student-athlete or team because we now have access to their daily schedules in seconds on our smartphones, tablets and desktop computers.

Investing in technology with the intent to improve our student-athlete experience has been positive across the board for our department. Coaches and staff making changes to "the way we've always done it" has been noticed and appreciated by student-athletes. They report feeling more ownership in their experience and engaged with making the best of their day-to-day life at Cal State Monterey Bay.

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Kris Dunbar

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The advancement of technology has vastly improved the athletics industry, but it has also led to unintended consequences in the workplace. The desire for instantaneous results and decision-making has produced a never-ending workday. Our cell phones are constantly within reach, which makes us accessible to emails, calls and texts at all hours of the day and night. Forgetting a cell phone in this day and age is like losing the ability to take a mobile office anywhere.

There was a time when people weren't tethered to their phones. If you needed someone, a message on a land line was sufficient. Now if a text isn't returned immediately, a phone call not answered or an email left unopened, it's cause to believe you may not be doing your job no matter what time of day it is. I am grateful that I can be accessible to my staff and membership when needed, but technology has created a workplace with few boundaries for communication expectations.

Technology allows us to make decisions more accurately and in an expedited manner. Expectations are high to get the answers quickly and correctly. A play or penalty on the field can be dissected from multiple angles, and the findings disseminated within minutes. With expedited results come expedited expectations to deliver that information. But do multiple camera angles really replace human observation? Does the speed of a text replace the value of dialogue? Is technology inhibiting our ability to build trust and relationships in our business?

Technology has led to a new industry called social media, which gives teams, athletics departments and conferences a platform to showcase themselves. There are so many ways to distribute information that social media is requiring new, full-time positions.

Expectations are high to produce information in a short period of time, respond to requests immediately and keep up with content distribution as it happens. The goal to be the first to announce news sometimes leads to hasty fact-checking, unprofessionalism or lack of proper context. Young staffers are often tasked with social media assignments and aren't always experienced enough to properly manage the technology that is at their fingertips. It is up to us

as managers to help our staff and members avoid social media pitfalls.

Technology is a burden with benefits and a curse camouflaged with great potential. It's important to keep a realistic balance and not get too overwhelmed.