



Kevin Campbell

Georgetown University
Assistant AD for
Business Operations

Branding and Fundraising – The True Backbone of an Athletics Department

The driving force motivation behind any successful athletics department is the goal of providing the best possible support for its student-athletes. The type of support that helps the student-athlete to give their all in the classroom, weight room, film room and on the respective fields of play. Watching these student-athletes compete at the highest level, graduate and become an exemplary member of our society is the ultimate prize of any college athletics administrator or coach. However, no athletics department has been sustained solely by the mere “support of student-athletes.” This goal requires support for the athletics department that seeks to support its student-athletes.

Financial support always finds itself atop any list of priorities for any organization, simply because it grants the freedom and autonomy to provide

necessary resources to those skilled in using them. There is no exception for athletics departments.

As we all know, most Division I athletics departments receive financial support or revenue through the following sources: ticket sales, athletics fees, sponsorship, NCAA or conference distributions, university support and contributions or fundraising.

Other sources of revenue like the NCAA and conference distributions and ticket sales each have a ceiling. In contrast, since there is no limit on how much revenue an athletics program can receive through contributions, more athletics departments have committed their efforts to prioritize fundraising as a 1A or 1B focus for revenue generation. As operating budgets increase, reflective of the coinciding inflation in supplies, services and travel costs, the need to offset these expenses also grows concurrently.

Here at Georgetown, about 40 percent of our total revenue is made up of contributions, but fundraising alone is not nearly sufficient. Most donors, especially alum, are willing to give financially to support their beloved athletics programs, but the number of donors or companies who will give to a program that effectively brands itself increases exponentially.

Branding, or the promotion of a particular product or company by means of advertising and distinctive design (according to Oxford Languages), must accompany fundraising. Branding, in many ways, is the foundation of revenue generation for athletics departments. The history, success and present-day narratives behind the brands of some of our most prolific college sports programs are all a result of good branding and fundraising. Ticket sales, sponsorship and even enrollment numbers are impacted by the branding efforts of the athletics department. Excellent branding will ensure that fundraisers in the development office have an easier task when engaging prospective donors.

Fundraising and branding, with the right amount of effort and investment, can bolster an athletics department's revenue. The stronger the branding, the easier it is to fundraise, which further supports the athletics department, stewarding its resources wisely, ultimately to support its student-athletes.



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Emily Burton
eburton@slamcoll.com
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