

NACMA



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Digital Brand Strategy in the NIL Era

In my almost 15 years working in college athletics, changes in technology have constantly forced us to evolve our strategic planning and how we execute our core responsibilities as marketers. I have seen digital and social media channels take over and become arguably the most important touch point for college athletics brands. Part of the current evolution is the need for added focus on how we support digital and social media brand development for our student-athletes, individually, in the NIL era.

The “there’s no ‘I’ in team” folks may ask, “Why do we need to help them build their brands on social media?” The first answer is easy, because their personal brands are an extension of the school’s brand. Each of our institutions has hundreds of student-athletes on campus, who through digital and social media channels, have

an opportunity to tell their stories in their own authentic and engaging way. Obviously, a major attribute of their personal brands is that they are student-athletes at our schools, making them the most visible ambassadors for our athletics departments and in most cases, for our entire universities. Equipping them with the tools to successfully build their brand and have an engaged audience can be a major boost for our department’s social media marketing strategies.

The second answer is specifically related to NIL. If our student-athletes have more NIL deals, that helps our brand awareness efforts, especially as it relates to recruiting. Having an engaged social media audience is a key to success in maximizing opportunities to monetize their NIL. But we as administrators have to be intentional with our education about how to leverage the digital and social platforms to their advantage. Just because this generation of student-athletes was raised on social media, doesn’t mean they know how to utilize the tools of each platform to generate success with their entrepreneurial NIL activities.

Supporting the digital and social media brand development of student-athletes can be more work for departments that are already

short-staffed. Luckily, technology companies like INFLCR and Opendorse have come along in the past few years to help us prepare for the current landscape. Working with INFLCR in my role at Temple and previously at Georgetown has been a game changer for our student-athletes in a few important ways. First, INFLCR offers a content management system that allows the student-athletes to have access to photos and videos easier and faster so they can post on their social accounts. Secondly, by providing educational resources for students to learn more about topics related to NIL, INFLCR helps reduce the burden on administrators to teach student-athletes how to grow their personal NIL businesses. Thirdly, INFLCR has formed partnerships with major companies in a variety of industries who use INFLCR as a marketplace to potentially offer student-athletes NIL opportunities.

Advances in technology have both fixed old problems and caused new ones. But ultimately, our job in college athletics is still to provide an excellent experience for our student-athletes. I think because of NIL, technology has put us marketers in a position to positively impact the student-athlete experience more than ever but in ways that also help reach our brand awareness goals and objectives.

@d3admins

NADIIIAA



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Championship Outcomes as Student Outcomes

Wabash is a liberal arts college of 850 men in Crawfordsville, Ind., located about an hour west of Indianapolis. Similar to many Division III institutions, we’re a small campus with a student body that embraces our sports program; our fighting spirit is buoyed by the roughly 50 percent of our total students who participate in intercollegiate athletics.

As a Division III program, we are tightly bound to the academic, social, financial, and physical fabric of the institution. The space, both literal and metaphorical, between the athletics program and day-to-day operations of the college is infinitesimally smaller than my prior experiences at the Division I level.

Wabash is also deeply rooted in traditions, and as the college approaches its bicentennial in 2032, we are provided an opportunity to reflect on those traditions that might persist for the next century and those which might be modified, or altogether discarded.

Perhaps our greatest tradition focuses on student outcomes and the success of our alumni. We talk about it a lot, and rightfully so, with the No. 2-ranked alumni network in the country and 40 percent of alumni annually donating to the institution.

Such a finely-tuned combination of tradition and holistic education means that athletically, we operate our sports programs in a way that best serves our institutional objectives. Just as our students pursue a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship or entry into medical school, our coaches guide our student-athletes toward championship-level competition. Not surprisingly, the overlap among students experiencing both unique academic and athletics opportunities is common. It is a strength of Division III’s philosophy that enables not competing, but complementary, experiences for students.

For example, last March, our basketball team reached the national semifinals for the first time since 1982, and our wrestling team finished as national runner-up, narrowly missing a national championship by a single point. Both finishes were historic for the programs with incredible individual and team accolades. A wrestler with a 4.0 GPA on a pre-med track won the Elite 90 Award, and two members of the basketball team were named Academic All-Americans. We celebrated these incredible achievements, which was really a celebration of our students’ collective success as young adults ready for the next stage of their lives.

We believe that as long as the athletics and educational nexus at Wabash remains closely aligned, we can position students for future championship outcomes. It’s a part of maintaining the culture of the athletics program, as well as the college’s broader mission.