


Club Development Through Athletics For All

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ABSTRACT

The Athletic Club Novi Grad Sarajevo was established in Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, in 2014 with the aim of working differently than other local clubs. The idea was to rebuild athletics' popularity and participation by first adding an 'athletics for all' element to the normal club's focus on performance and competition results and then by taking a more modern approach to marketing and communication. This case study describes initiatives taken by the club, including the offer of fitness training programmes for participants of different ages and motivations using the expertise of athletics coaches, and the results achieved. The authors report that despite challenging circumstances the project has been successful and the club is thriving and financially independent. The experience demonstrates that it is possible for athletics clubs to increase membership and improve their standing in their communities by providing quality services and charging a fair price for them. The project received an Honourable Mention in the 2016 European Athletics Innovation Awards. The authors suggest that it could be copied by other clubs and that European Athletics or the IAAF could lead a larger scale project to help clubs in need.

AUTHORS

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Introduction

Growing athletics in Bosnia Herzegovina is certainly challenging. Resources are scarce and, as everywhere, the competition for attention with other sports and leisure activities is intense. In our country the more popular sports and recreational activities seem to benefit from good promotion and lobbying, which has led to their expansion at

the expense of athletics' popularity. The more traditional athletics clubs have not found an effective response through their offers or communications and it has become increasingly difficult for them to attract members or bring the value of our sport to individuals and society as a whole.

We established the Athletic Club *Novi Grad Sarajevo* in 2014 with a concept for working that would be different from the other clubs in the area. We wanted to rebuild athletics' popularity and the level of participation by first adding an 'athletics for all' element to the normal club's focus on performance and competition results and then by taking a more modern approach to marketing and communication.

As we believe athletics has the capability to benefit people in their everyday lives and that everyone can identify with the idea of being fitter (and thus a better athlete), our idea was to offer multiple athletics-based activities and training methods to groups of people of all ages, interests, ability levels and motivations and thereby increase overall engagement. In addition to providing physical training, we also wanted to educate club members about the true values of athletics, including content, history, and the sport's psychosocial and psychophysical attributes.

The name of our project translates to English as 'Athletics for all generations and variations', and based on this we created the brand *ATHLETA* (Athlete) for our communications.

Our main aims are to:

- Make the local community aware that athletics is the most multifunctional of all sports, and can be a part of each person's fitness regime;
- Popularise athletics by attracting as many individuals of various ages and physical levels (professional, elite, amateur, recreational) and abilities;
- Promote participation and integration through quality activity offers that ensure everyone can identify something suited for them;

- Foster a sense of pride and belonging to the club.

In this article we discuss the main elements of our project and the offers of our club in the hope that our experience can be valuable for other clubs that are facing similar challenges.

Methodology

1. Communication

Aware of the fact that the Internet is the best means for providing information to and interacting with a large number of customers and that the future of entrepreneurship is online, one of our first actions was to create a website (www.atleta.ba). The name of the domain is our brand, *ATHLETA*, so people can easily remember us. The webpage has been developed to have a number of elements including:

- Our contact information;
- The history of athletics;
- Our vision and ideas;
- Our club, its work and offers;
- Short biographies of our professional athletes in which we categorise them using the results from an IAAF table;
- Articles on the technology of athletic training and academic work done on athletics;
- Member registration.

2. Our Offers

In addition to performance-oriented training for track and field athletes, various new programmes are now offered at the club. They allow new members the possibility to choose their form of involvement and progress at their own pace. These offers include:

Athletic School – This programme is intended for children ages of four to 12. The goal is to develop an interest in athletics in both the participants and their parents, since the parents are ultimately responsible for choosing the sport their children join. The activities develop both motor abilities and social attributes using fun-oriented, basic athletic methods. We explain to the parents that this sensitive phase of the child's development is convenient for

acquiring certain capabilities via training and that a child cannot achieve his or her full genetic potential if there is no training at these ages. Our message is that by introducing their children to athletics parents can ensure they have a solid foundation for most sports.

Athletic Training – This programme is aimed at youngsters aged 12 years and older who aspire to compete in track and field. Training is focused on both physical and mental development with the former referring to capabilities such as strength, power, speed, endurance and proprioception. Mental development is geared mostly to fostering self-belief and discipline and developing the toughness needed to overcome fatigue and exhaustion and deal with environmental stress (family life, school, friends). To sell this programme to both the young athletes and their parents we emphasise that this training will prepare them for competition in any discipline, instilling tools and skills that will help them to maximise their true potential and also help them in their daily lives.

Athletic Fitness – This programme is geared to the older, fitness and recreation-oriented participant. Similar to Athletic Training, it develops the participants both physically and mentally, while they are having fun. The programme uses the same training techniques as those of the professional athlete but it focuses on increasing overall health and physical appearance. To sell it we emphasise the need to “try something different”(i.e., train like a professional athlete) and that this type of training can help you “succeed where other programmes have failed”.

Athletic Conditioning for Professional Athletes – This programme is meant for sportsmen or sportswomen from other sports who wish to enhance their physical capabilities. It uses basic track and field training methods and techniques to develop strength, jumping ability, endurance, flexibility, and coordination. It is geared to creating greater movement efficiency, which translates to a gain of hundredth

of a seconds (sprinting) or millimetres (jumping and throwing). Advertising for this programme includes the message “It is impossible to succeed in professional sport without good conditioning. Our techniques will help you become faster, stronger and more durable, in other words, more efficient”

Athletic Conditioning for Children – This programme is meant for children between the ages 6 and 14 who are training for other sports and require improved running speed, posture, strength and other physical abilities. It will increase their ability to excel by developing and enhancing their motor intelligence. They are coached to run properly, which enhances coordination and helps them to run faster without fear of getting injured. They also learn to change direction in a full sprint, which in the case of football players will help them to develop the skill of running with a ball. The main promotional message for this programme is: “If you want your child to enhance his or her talent in any sport, you need to provide them with the basics before the specifics”.

3. The Brand ATLETA

Before new club members start physical training they are educated about what it means to be an athlete (ATLETA).The image is of an individual trained by track and field methods that have existed for many years and are proven to develop the body both aesthetically and functionally. The ATLETA athlete is trained systematically throughout the year, developing physical, mental and emotional toughness. In other words, he or she is a complete sports figure – an athlete.

4. Type and Form of Work

Since there are numerous types of participants, each with specific needs and desires, we thought it was important to tailor our various programmes as much as possible. To this end we have made it so club members can choose to be trained individually, in a group or as a ‘family time’ (i.e. parents and children together):

Group – Training is with other members of the club closely matched for ability and goals who then follow a similar programme. Depending on the size, the group is led by either one or two trainers.

Individual – Training is done one-on-one with a trainer. The goal is to fully maximise the physical capability of the club member. With this package, the trainer can devote the time to correct the trainee during each moment of the training session.

“Family Time”– This unique package is designed to facilitate parent participation. They and their children participate in different programmes that are run at the same time, with parents following in the “Athletic Fitness” programme and the child being trained in the “Athletic School” programme. Advantages of the “Family Time” package are as follows:

- Time saving
- Money saving, because there are no double expenses on commute, or expenses in a café while the child trains
- A discount of 10% for both offers (Athletic Fitness and Athletic School).

5. Promotion Strategy

Aware of the fact that the success of a project depends on public awareness and popularity, we used certain measures to ensure the club and its offers were highly visible within the local community. We targeted groups such as children in primary schools and the visitors at athletics centres as well as the wider population. Promotion was conducted in the following manner:

- Visiting and distributing flyers to all primary school students. The material in the flyers was age-appropriate motivational text focused on attracting and motivating the students to join our club. In addition, during visits to these schools, meetings were arranged with the physical education teachers. This established a cooperation to further motivate the children, especially the talented ones, to join.

- The Centre Safet Zajko where our club’s athletic track is located is visited daily by a large number of people. To inform everyone and to motivate them to join the club, an info-booth and advertising panel were set up at the entrance. All information was developed in a graphically appealing manner.
- Since TV is also an effective promotional tool, we try to ensure that our programme receive regular air time. Local TV stations were invited to our training sessions and several reports focusing on sports or family have been aired during prime time.

Results

Since implementing the project Athletic Club Novi Grad Sarajevo the club has enjoyed significant success and its influence has been growing daily. Although a new club, we are financially independent and able to pay for our activities and development from the revenues of our programmes. We currently employ two professional trainers to deliver our programmes alongside our club volunteers. This has been made possible by the fact that people are willing to pay a fair price for quality services that benefit themselves or their children. On the more traditional performance-oriented side of our work we can say that our membership includes five national team members.

Among the most interesting results and achievements from our project are:

- The recognition of athletic training as a new form of fitness training has increased both the profile of athletics and the club within the region;
- Many children have been enrolled in the Athletic School learning the basics of athletics and developing their skills;
- The development of a database of professional male and female athletes who have trained at the club and have achieved the podium at both national and international competitions;
- Every programme we have offered has attracted a fair number of participants;

- Recently, a scholarship was awarded to one of the club's athletes, a student of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education. This athlete volunteers at the Athletic School and this is helping him develop as an athletic coach.

Conclusion

Athletics is not as popular as some other sports in our country because it has not been effectively promoted. To increase its popularity, the Athletic Club Novi Grad Sarajevo created the project "Athletics for All Generations and Variations". The main aim was to offer the benefits of athletic training regardless of age, gender or physical ability and thereby increase the number of club members and strength of the club. We used a number of communications ideas, new activity offers and promotional efforts developed around a central message that everyone can be an athlete and that athletics training can benefit everyone in their daily lives. The results so far have been very

positive and we have shown it is possible to create a thriving club even in difficult financial circumstances.

We believe similar projects could be implemented in other athletic clubs with the goal to popularize and promote athletics in their communities. We have shown that is possible to achieve success even in a developing country that does not invest in athletics and where athletics clubs have continuous financial problems.

Maybe European Athletics or the IAAF could build on our experience and make a similar project on a larger scale using some of our methodologies and a more sophisticated business plan to help strengthen the grass roots of athletics.

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