How Major League Baseball Effectively Uses Social Media to Engage Fans

By Jay Osterholm, Founder & CEO, The ODM Group

MLB Social Media Strategies & Stats

Today, sports fans across the country have the opportunity to connect, engage and interact with their favorite players like never before. Social media has created a new aspect of the game where fans are no longer passive spectators. Social media not only encourages active participation, it provides fans with a communication channel where authentic interactions with players can happen. Those fans are motivators, they are supporters, and in some cases, they are instigators. In any case, there is no doubt that social media has come to play an important role in how the MLB and players connect, and ultimately sustain relationships, with fans.

With spring training and Opening Day in the books, this season’s marathon for best stats in baseball is well underway. You don’t have to be a baseball fanatic to know that this game is all about the stats. From batting and pitching to fielding and baserunning, there is a statistical percentage for literally every aspect of the game. However, we are just as interested, if not more interested, in another kind of statistical game playing out in the MLB—the one taking place online and across social media.

So out of all the MLB teams, can you guess which one is the most social? In a recent study conducted by digital marketing firm Silverpop, researchers looked at the social, email and mobile habits of the 30 Major League Baseball clubs. They reviewed interactions and engagement between fans and teams across the most popular social platforms of today. Here are the standout stats:

- The most social team of the MLB is the Yankees with 7,980,000 fans across Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest and Instagram.
- In the AL East, the Yankees reign in the number of Twitter followers with approximately 850k, while the Phillies reign in the NL East with approximately 747k.
- In NL Central, Cardinals reign in the number of Twitter followers with 890k, while the Giants reign in the NL West with 871k.
• In the AL Central, the Tigers reign in the number of Twitter followers with 694k, while the Rangers reign in the AL West with 628k.

• The top 5 stadiums with the most Foursquare check-ins on Opening Day were for the Rockies at Brewers (1,200), the Red Sox at Yankees (1,105), the Padres at Mets (777), the Tigers at Twins (751) and the Phillies at Braves (741).

• The AL has more social followers (23.7 million) than the NL (19.9 million).

Social Initiatives: How the Fightin’ Phils Have Fun with Fans

The way in which the MLB franchisees communicate with fans is forever changed by the opportunities presented with social media. Social channels like Facebook and Twitter allow for direct connections between players, franchisees and fans. In the two weeks leading up to Opening Day, MLB franchisees tweeted, on average, 175 times per team.

Each team has its unique way of engaging with fans using social media. For example, our own Philadelphia Phillies distributed balloons around town with tickets to opening week games inside, then announced the contest via Twitter with the designated hashtag #PhilliesBalloonPlatoon.

According to NBC10 Philadelphia, Phillies spokesperson Deborah Renaldi said the social media-driven promotion was the first of its kind for the organization. The first fan to arrive popped the balloon and
was greeted by the Phillie Phanatic. That is a good example of how teams are engaging fans with social media.

This promotion may be the first of its kind, but it certainly won’t be the last. The organization will have several promotional opportunities for fans to win giveaways via social media this season, particularly during the games. In fact, the franchise has even posted on its site an **Official Rules for @Phillies Giveaways on Twitter**. One such in-game promotion that the Phils are doing is the Tweet Your Ticket initiative where fans attending the game have the opportunity to win various prizes by tweeting their tickets to the game they are at with the hashtag #TweetYourTicket.

In addition to the various promotions the MLB teams will be running this season, each team also has a “social media clubhouse” on their official site which links to each of their associated social media accounts. Additionally, the teams have an official Twitter roster of the players’ verified accounts so fans can easily follow their favorites.

**Baseball’s Best App for 2013**

With mobile connectivity and smartphone ownership on a steady rise, major organizations like the MLB franchisees must take advantage of this outlet if they want to maximize their market reach to their target audiences.

According to a **Pew Research study** conducted in Dec. 2012, 87% of American adults have a cell phone and 45% have a smartphone. Even more recent, research conducted in January 2013 shows that 31% of American adults own a tablet. If these statistics tell us anything, it is that the U.S. adult
population is more mobile-connected than ever before, and with mobile connection comes application use. Take a look at our pick for best baseball app in 2013:

**MLB At Bat**, which is the MLB’s official iOS and Android app, is great for several reasons. It offers a variety of features including game scores, summaries, MLB news, schedules, rosters and team standings for free. The navigation and functionality of the app’s interface is easy to use and fans can personalize it to designate team favorites. For fanatics that can’t get enough of their favorite teams, the app also features two paid options. For $14.99 for the season or $2.99 per month, fans are given access to even more features like pitch-by-pitch updates and live radio broadcasts. Those with existing subscriptions to MLB.TV, have access to all the premium features too. Even if you don’t want to spend the per month fee for extra features, the free version offers enough great information to keep any fan satisfied. When all is said and done, I give this app a homerun for overall performance.

**References**

