

Chapter 5.5

Winning story

USA Swimming

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USA Swimming

“We make swimming a sport that is in the public’s mind every week, month and year...”

USA Swimming is the National Governing Body for swimming in the United States. It is made up of nearly 300,000 athletes from all 50 states. The organisation also has 12,000 coaches, 2,800 clubs and some 30,000 volunteers. Each year there are approximately 5,000 competitions sanctioned within USA Swimming.



Over the years your federation has developed a strong and solid base of members, what initiatives have contributed to that continued growth?

The strong base of swimming in the U.S. can be directly attributed to a few key reasons:

- There are thousands of coaches in the country who are well-trained professionals. These coaches are devoted to training athletes and helping them reach their potential.
- Grassroots swimming at young developmental ages focuses on teaching skills and making swimming fun.
- The U.S. has a great history of Olympic and World Championship success, and the athletes that reach this level serve as heroes and role models for tens of thousands of young athletes in our sport.

How has your federation been able to maximise its value in order to establish a secure stream of revenues and sponsorship?

USA Swimming has had the benefit over the last years to have some marquis athletes, such as Michael Phelps, who have increased the exposure of the sport of swimming to non-swimming fans in America. This has greatly helped USA Swimming's goal to make swimming a sport that is in the public's mind every week, month and year, versus just a sport that appears in the public once every four years. Television exposure has also greatly enhanced our ability to attract national sponsors. We have a secure relationship with NBC Sports, the U.S. Olympic network, along with a cable partner, Universal Sports. Approximately 7-8 events are on television in the U.S. each year.

What sponsorship trends are becoming more relevant and useful?

In the U.S., sponsors have become incredibly discriminating when it comes to sponsorships. One of our long-time sponsors at USA Swimming, an insurance company, said that when it comes time for renewing the sponsorship, the high-ranking executives will not be the ones making the decision to renew or discontinue the sponsorship. The ones making the decision will be the 4,500 insurance agents around the country. If these individual agents are able to improve their business and make more sales due to the sponsorship of USA Swimming, then the sponsorship will continue. Essentially, when it comes to sponsors, you need to make sure to ask the question, "How can we (the National Federation) help you improve your business?"

What advice would you give to federations, big or small, as they develop financial structures and attempt to increase their revenues?

USA Swimming's leading source of revenue, over 55% of its \$28 million USD annual budget, comes from membership dues from athletes, coaches, volunteers and clubs. This fee is about \$45 (U.S.) per person. All federations should evaluate the benefits they offer to their members and ensure that the benefits have the right "price tag" – what is a reasonable amount to charge athletes, coaches, volunteers, etc. for being a member of your organisation? Membership dues are an acceptable way to raise revenue for your federation provided you appropriate benefits.

How have you found working with the public sector? How has your federation benefited from this relationship?

USA Swimming does not receive any funds from the public sector (government) at any level. The USA Swimming Foundation has received a small amount of funding to help with our learn-to-swim initiative, Make A Splash, but that amount is quite small, and is being used to fund swimming lessons for children that have not had the opportunity to learn to swim.

From your personal experience, what challenges did you meet when exploring different areas of funding? And how did you overcome them?

About seven years ago, USA Swimming instituted a dues increase to its membership fees from \$25 annually to \$40 annually, with a \$1 increase for the next 10 years after that, until the amount reached \$50 per year. This dues increase needed approval from the USA Swimming House of Delegates (about 500 people), and getting this approved by the House of Delegates took much time and effort politically. Fortunately, we were successful in getting this approved, and it has helped raise millions of dollars in added revenue for USA Swimming.

Note: USA Swimming receives about 57% of its revenue from membership dues, about 16% from corporate sponsorship, and about 13% from the U.S. Olympic Committee (the remaining 14% comes from about 7-8 various sources such as fundraising, event registrations, investments, etc.).