

Over the last two years things have changed. We all found twitter. We found Facebook. Not only did we find twitter and fb, but our phones got much, much smarter. Tablets popped on the scene. We were able to get everything sports we wanted in the palm of our hands. No matter where we were.

ESPN responded. They knew that twitter was becoming a HUGE generator of pageviews. The lifeblood of ESPN.com. If you couldn't reach an audience on twitter, those with an audience on twitter could and will take pageviews from ESPN.com. Sending them elsewhere. COuld it be big enough to be a game changer? Maybe.

In the past, sports fans first stop in the search for sports news would be ESPN.com. Twitter changed all that. Twitter means we don't have to go to ESPN.com, we just check our twitter stream. Those people we follow always send us the updates we needed right to us. And we like it. And if we want more information, we just click on the links they send us.

Today, sports news finds millions and millions of sports fans first via twitter. Unfortunately for ESPN.com, they don't control any ad space on your tweet stream. ESPN no longer makes a penny from the first sports news you receive. That's not good for them.

So they responded. Their reporters started tweeting. Tweeting in whatever ways they could come up with to generate pageviews. Because pageviews on ESPN.com still paid their bills and allowed them to keep their jobs.

It hasn't worked.

ESPN.com reporters haven't had a lot of success getting followers on Twitter. Some columnists like Bill Simmons have. The vast majority of their reporters have under 100k followers and many of those, as best I can tell, have under 10k. Which in a nutshell means, the world wide leader in sports doesn't have much in the way of muscle to drive traffic from twitter users to their sites. That is a risk.

Their deficiency in twitter followers is not for lack of trying. Over the past 9 months or so, their reporters are becoming more and more like tweeting columnists and less and less like tweeting reporters. Which makes a ton of sense if you think about it. Their reporters have a far better chance of attracting a following if they are throwing out witty one liners ala Bill Simmons than by throwing out dry facts or quotes. Facts and quotes aren't going to entertain or attract the masses. Wit and controversy and rumors might.

But they haven't. That might turn into a real problem for ESPN. Twitter and Facebook are becoming primary traffic drivers to websites. Other sports sites now have an open window to drive traffic by attacking ESPN on the twitter and facebook front.

Will they put ESPN out of business. Of course not. But it's not inconceivable that by hiring writers with big, loyal twitter followings, a competitor or upstart could take over the first level of access to sports fans. Something that ESPN has owned for years. That would be a twitter problem for ESPN. It may already be a twitter problem for ESPN.