

How to grow your professional network in Sports

"It's sometimes about who you know..."

The Sports Business industry is much like a fraternity/sorority with different chapters all over the country. Everyone is doing very similar work in a slightly different way. No two teams are exactly alike, but the similarities are everywhere and because of that, everyone knows what each other is going through and can relate to one another. That's why it's common that teams conduct conference calls with other teams in other markets to see what's working and how they can learn from each other. Although they all compete on the field, court, or diamond, teams in different states aren't competing with each other in business, so they develop strong relationships through that common thread.

Also, because of the nature of our business, and because our teams and jobs are so similar, it's common that someone will do well in business with one team, and then take a promotion with another team that offers them more career growth. This may happen multiple times over the course of a career. So as people start working together, begin to network, then go on to new teams, their networks keep expanding.

What makes the Sports Business industry so unique, and frankly so much fun, are these relationships you develop with your counterparts and colleagues with all teams and leagues all over the country.

Any time there is an open position, a hiring manager will always go internal first to see if they have anyone ready to step into that role, but if not, then they'll go to "The network" next. They'll see if their friends around the industry can recommend anyone, or if they have someone at their team who is ready for more responsibility. I'd say the majority of jobs are filled that way, and if those two options aren't available then lastly they will post on a job site, and see what they get externally.

To make a long story short, if you can get access to "The network", and get referred or endorsed by a member of the industry, you can elevate yourself to the top of the list for potential jobs. So how do you do it?

- Be proactive – If you really want to build a network and get plugged in, you have to go for it. Getting up the courage to start making new connections and getting out of your comfort zone is half the battle. It won't happen by waiting in your apartment or waiting for someone to reply to your job application.
- Cast a wide net – When starting out, in most cases, you probably don't know many people in sports business (maybe none). So you can't be selective by team or job type, go wide and try and connect with anyone you can.
- Work your own network and find a warm way in – Did your family ever buy tickets to sports games, or have season tickets, do they know their sales/service person? Ask if they can make a connection for you. Do you know anyone that ever played sports in college, minors, or pro? If so, they may have made a connection, see if they can make an intro for you. Get involved in college, are there any sports business clubs or organizations you can find, some bring in speakers. Go to your college alumni office, are there any alumni of your school that are in the business? Alumni of your fraternity/sorority? Go to a local sporting event and look around for people with a credential on, introduce yourself and ask them about their job, see if they can point you in the right direction?
- Be genuine – Once you get a conversation going, you have to be genuine, ask a lot of questions, write them all down, bring a lot of excitement and energy to the call, be respectful of their time but make sure you take all of the time allotted. Ask their advice, ask how they've been so successful, people love talking about themselves and their success, but you have to genuinely want to hear it all.

- Provide value – These business professionals are very busy, ask them what they're working on and if you can volunteer to help with anything? Offer to work and be involved for free. If they say they're working on social media strategy, ask for their contact information and send them relevant articles on social media strategies, find ways to be relevant.
- Try not to go in cold – Don't just blindly start emailing or linkedIN connecting with everyone you can unless you have a relationship or in with them. It will turn them off and could hurt your ability to connect with them again in the future.

If you don't have a warm connection or you want to talk through the best ways to reach out to members of the industry, just let us know, and we can even help make the introductions for you. Remember, this industry is all about relationships and if you make this a focus, and grow your network, it'll separate you from your peers. Good luck!