

Standing out as the only professional basketball franchise currently based in the Pacific Northwest and the only major professional sports franchises in the state of Oregon, the Portland Trail Blazers have been a member of the National Basketball Association since 1970. Since then they have built a strong and passionate fanbase. Like many professional sports teams, the Portland Trail Blazers have widely embraced digital and social media as a method of public relations and fan engagement. The NBA as a whole and all the individual teams have embraced social media as an incredibly effective public relations tool and have seen both their fanbase and brand recognition flourish.

The Trail Blazers are active on many social and digital media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. To have effective public relations for almost any organization in 2018, they must be active on all three of these major platforms. The Trail Blazer's Facebook page has 2.5 million Likes, their Twitter account has 1.15 million followers and their Instagram account has 1.1 million followers.

Across all three platforms the Trail Blazers keep their branding consistent. They stick to the team's colors of red, black and white and they use the same current version of their "pinwheel" logo as their profile picture for all three accounts. On their Facebook and Twitter account home pages, they use the same cover photo. The design for the cover photo was also distributed through social media to fans to be used as a smartphone wallpaper.

Just as many professional sports teams do, the Trail Blazers post on their accounts every day, multiple times a day. Their social media team sends about 7-15 tweets a day, posts to

Facebook 3-5 times a day and posts to Instagram 2-4 times a day. On game days the activity increases, particularly while the games are actually being played. On game days they can tweet upwards of 25 times a day, post to Facebook over 10 times a day and post to Instagram six or more times a day.

Almost all social media posts sent out by the Trail Blazers contain some form of multimedia, not just text. Twitter is the only platform where text-only posts even appear, with all Facebook posts containing some form of multimedia and all Instagram posts obviously containing a video or an image. Even on Twitter most posts contain multimedia, with just about one of every five tweets being text-only. The digital content that is sometimes posted includes photos, highlights, player interviews, broadcast clips, GIFs, hyperlinks and sponsored content. Posts are promotional, positive in tone and often informative. Their posts promote and “hype up” players, broadcasts and digital content and inform their followers with scores, stats and highlights.

The Trail Blazers have a very engaged fanbase, and thus a very engaged social media following. An average tweet by the Trail Blazers usually about 10-25 retweets, 150-300 likes and 2-5 replies. Facebook posts can receive anywhere from 200-900 likes, but usually garner just 10-30 comments. Their most successful platform on a per-post performance basis is Instagram, where they can get 9,000-15,000 likes on a single post and 15-30 comments. With it having the smallest following, this means their Instagram account also has the highest engagement percentage of followers on the three major platforms. Instagram video posts usually get somewhere in between 15,000-30,000 views, but some can go much higher, especially if it is of a flashy highlight.

In fact, all posts that have highlights embedded in them have the highest engagement of any posts across all three social media platforms. If it is major highlight, like an high-flying dunk or a game-winning three-pointer, the post can even go viral as more and more fans share it to their personal feeds and the rest of the NBA fans on the internet become exposed to it.

As the fans engage with the Trail Blazers, the Trail Blazers social media team does a solid job of interacting back with fans on social media through the team accounts. This is most commonly seen of Twitter. The Trail Blazers will often respond to or “quote-tweet” to fans who tweet at them or reply to one of their tweets, particularly if it is clever or a show of dedication of that person’s fandom. These actions make Trail Blazers fans feel appreciated and recognized by the franchise for being loyal fans and they feel as though their voice is being heard by the organization. However, the social media team for the Trail Blazers do a good job of not over-doing it on the replies, often only responding to a few a day, and usually if that user engages with a post shortly after it is posted. This is smart because it does not set a precedent that leads to followers expecting engagement every time. This would also lower their quality of content as followers’ feeds would become filled with replies to other users, which is not as strong content as original posts. The overall score for the Portland Trail Blazers social media engagement is a 7 out of 10.

The main purposes of the Trail Blazer’s social media presence are to promote all and anything Trail Blazers related and to engage with Blazers fans, the Portland community and the greater NBA community. These are the purposes of social media for pretty much any professional sports franchise. If you look at the accounts of the Trail Blazers or any other pro sports team, their activity clearly meets with those purposes.

The first suggestion I would make to the Portland Trail Blazers social media team would be to engage more with their followers on the non-Twitter platforms. This has started to change a little bit with the growing popularity of the Instagram comments section. My second suggestion would be to capitalize on opportunities for sponsored content. The Trail Blazers do not post a ton of sponsored content, but it would allow them more chances to showcase their corporate partners. Granted, there is a fine line here because followers do not want a bevy of sponsored content, but there is still room for some on the Trail Blazer's social media accounts. Finally, I would suggest interacting more with other professional sports franchises from around the NBA and other regional teams. Sometimes accounts from different teams will interact with each other, and fans often find this entertaining. It usually gets shared across the internet, in turn growing the following, presence and brand recognition across social media.