

# The Washington Times

## SportsBiz: Social media, soccer off the mark

Soccer fans are active on Facebook, Twitter and other social media, but they generally are ignorant of efforts by their favorite teams to reach them through those platforms, according to a new report. A survey of 1,000 soccer fans revealed a disconnect between the online activity of fans and the impact of teams' own social media efforts. At the least, it's unclear whether social media campaigns have any effect on sales of team jerseys, scarves or other products. "Social networking platforms appear to play a role in the fan experience, but it remains to be seen whether they are proving effective at increasing club-to-fan engagement or merchandise sales of team/player paraphernalia," said the report, which was published by Football Partnerships and the European Football Group.

The survey included fans in the United States and around the world, as well as soccer industry professionals. Seventy percent of the respondents were male, ranging in age from 12 to 59. Football Partnerships is a business-to-business network for soccer industry professionals. The European Football Group is a New York-based sports marketing agency that emphasizes soccer. For more than three-quarters of the fans interviewed, Facebook was listed as the top social networking site, and nearly 80 percent of respondents said they checked their favorite social networking site at least once a day.

However, when asked whether their favorite soccer team's Web site had a social networking feature, 42 percent said they didn't know, and 56 percent said they didn't know whether their favorite team had a Twitter account. Only 27 percent of fans said they made a soccer-related purchase because of an advertisement on a social media network, suggesting that companies partnering with soccer leagues aren't getting much bang for the buck. Club officials, however, were unaware of this disconnect - 72 percent of them described their social media campaigns as effective. "Particularly from the perspective of commercial entities invested in soccer... the data suggests... these brands are not getting a sufficient return on investment," the report said.

The survey also revealed new information about how Major League Soccer is perceived. While the report's authors suggested the popularity of the league is growing, the study also noted that 39 percent of U.S. soccer fans don't follow the league at all. The report showed just 34 percent of U.S. respondents believe MLS is "slowly but surely becoming a major league" and only 14 percent considered the league to be "competitive." Furthermore, 68 percent of U.S. respondents named the English Premier League as their favorite league, compared to just 12 percent for MLS.

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