



COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Developments in communication in the Digital Age have changed the landscape in every walk of life over the past 30 years. For the International Federations (IFs), it is no exaggeration to say that these advances have revolutionised sport.

The key stakeholders of the International Ski Federation (FIS) are its National Association (NA) members and their athletes, as well as the fans and spectators. Our ability to communicate with these groups is a fundamental responsibility of our organisations, and the Digital Revolution is providing a variety of tools for doing this, in line with the ways different target groups choose to follow sport, whether on television, via the internet or mobile devices.

On the organisational side, technology provides competition officials with the tools to time, measure and aid the judging of performances in the various competition environments – on ski-slopes, courses, tracks, pitches, courts, fields and ice-rinks – and thus improve the accuracy of the sports' outcomes.

And, of course, the Digital Revolution has also been the driving factor in commercialising sport and creating income streams to fund its development. The FIS budget for the two-year financial period 1963-64 amounted to CHF 155,000. Thirty years later, it was more than 40 million. (Perhaps I should also mention that the profit at the end of the period was not significantly different!)

The benefits of communication in the Digital Age that apply to society at large also play a major role in the operations of international sports:

- Communication all over the world now takes place in real time.
- Information can be published instantaneously.
- Access to knowledge has been massively simplified.
- Communicating with any part of the world is much less expensive than in the past, using the far-reaching possibilities offered by the internet.

But there are drawbacks and challenges too:

Mistakes are immediately and glaringly exposed, bad news headlines are sought after, and even unfounded rumours are broadcast to the world at the touch of a button.

Expectations whereby only the very best broadcast quality is acceptable, and the newest gadgets and gizmos must be used, has driven production and operational costs increasingly higher. The result is that, for some sports, many technological advances are now unaffordable. But, similarly, there can be a misconception that new technological tools will solve issues with the product, i.e. the sport event itself. Technology cannot repair the fundamentals of the sport; it is the role of the IF to ensure that the product is sound and the format attractive.

And, of course, if the system is down, even for a few minutes, well, life stops. Our work is more or less paralysed.

While the past decade or so has seen most of us in the IFs trying to discover appropriate uses for the technology, many are now looking ahead to opportunities for using it to improve the coverage of their sports.

One of the key aspects of the Digital Revolution is that it provides a way of reconnecting with young people. For today's generation, following sport is about multi-technology and the ability it gives them to interact and connect with their heroes. Our goal is to attract young people to participate in sport themselves, and there may be opportunities to reach out to them by portraying it in their style and language.

Eminent television experts, Manolo Romero and Alex Gilady, have already given us an insight into the television-specific aspects, so I will take this opportunity to refer to the effects of technology on the field of play.

Official results from all levels of competition can now be transmitted instantaneously, following completion of a competition and sign-off by the technical delegate, and published on various websites. Such technology is no longer the exclusive preserve of top-level championships; now even the results of the local golf club weekly medal contest are made available almost immediately. The countless mistakes that used to arise from phoning in results to the national wire service, then in the next generation from retyping them onto telex machines, then from reading the fading print of faxes, are becoming a distant memory.

Communication of live data, such as times and scores, not only via the television feed, but also via the internet and mobile phones, is an important way of enabling fans to follow the sport live or in a post-competition round up. Additional text reporting brings the story of the competition even more to life as an alternative to streamed images or photos of the action, if these are not available, or if the user is not equipped to take advantage of bandwidth-consuming coverage.

Such forms of reporting are not designed to compete with or replace television, which remains the single most important means of transmitting sports events live, not to mention the main source of revenue, but data and text feeds add to the range of opportunities for fans and viewers to obtain information.

Many sports have implemented technological solutions to support competition officials, given the difficult task they have of making split-second decisions and judgements. This digital technology is so far



advanced that there is barely a pause in proceedings when a referral is made to video control in order to check a crucial incident.

Some sports create animation and suspense before the communication of the official's decision, leading to great anticipation in the stadium and interaction with the spectators.

Far from undermining a referee, umpire or judge's decision, sports that are using the technology have stated that their officials appreciate the assistance. With the knowledge that any borderline decision can be accurately assessed using the technology, they can focus on the smooth running of the competition, maintaining control and discipline on the field of play or, in the case of our sport of skiing, assessing the conditions attentively and implementing any necessary measures, such as preparing an area of the course.

There is no doubt that the Digital Revolution has provided IFs with outstanding tools to better manage, officiate, communicate and promote their sports. The challenge is to find ways of using them effectively, from an end-user stakeholder and cost perspective.