Kalamazoo FC Social Media Plan

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Introduction

Kalamazoo FC (KZFC) is a semi-professional soccer team and a part of the National Premier Soccer League (NPSL), a reserve league for the men’s professional North American Soccer League (National Premier Soccer League). The team was founded in 2015 with the intention of representing Kalamazoo and serving as the city’s primary soccer club. KZFC is one of ninety-six teams within the NPSL, and the fifth team from Michigan. Michigan has recently seen an increase in NPSL teams, with the addition of three teams after 2014. Kalamazoo FC is the newest Michigan team to join the league and one of two of the newest teams within the Great Lakes conference. This conference is made up of seven teams total: AFC Ann Arbor, Detroit City FC, FC Indiana, Grand Rapids FC, FC Columbus, Milwaukee Torrent, and Kalamazoo FC (Kalamazoo FC, 2017).

Because Kalamazoo FC is such a new team, they are currently working to gain more of a fan following and to improve attendance and engagement. It is becoming increasingly important to establish a committed fan base, as one team in the conference, Michigan Stars FC, decided to not return for the 2018 season due to “the market for top level teams in [the] region [becoming] saturated to the point where it has been hard for the Stars to build and sustain a substantial following” (Michigan Stars, 2018). One powerful tool to complete these goals is through social media. Not only are nearly 2.8 billion people active on at least one social media network worldwide, but social media also offers companies the ability to directly interact with their followers to improve the overall customer experience (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Social media also serves as a tool to target specific market segments through the use of filters, including age group, geographic region, and particular interests. Targeting the correct segments is essential to any company’s success, so utilizing the most effective social media platform is equally as important. As social media progresses, companies must understand what type of people are primarily active within each platform.
SWOT Analysis

Kalamazoo FC currently utilizes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. While they have created all of these accounts, they have yet to establish a strong presence. The following chart is an analysis of KZFC’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the social media realm:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths:</th>
<th>Weaknesses:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Blank slate – able to make their own statement and brand image</td>
<td>• Short on staff – no social media director</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Community based – work with local vendors and want to represent Kalamazoo</td>
<td>• Conflicting brand image – affiliated store shares social media platforms with team</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Give back to local youth – run youth camps, go to schools, host club teams</td>
<td>• Not enough content on platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have a current base of die-hard fans</td>
<td>• Not enough fan engagement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Speed in gaining new fans is slow</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities:</th>
<th>Threats:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Kalamazoo is a rising city</td>
<td>• Other Michigan NPSL teams who can take KZFC’s following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Only semi-professional soccer team in Kalamazoo</td>
<td>• Close proximity with Grand Rapids FC – people could choose to go to those games instead</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Michigan, as a state, loves sports</td>
<td>• Michigan Stars FC will not be returning for the 2018 season due to “the market in the region becoming too saturated.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Soccer is an up-and-coming sport</td>
<td>• College teams within Kalamazoo: WMU, KVCC, K College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social media is now an integral part of people’s lives</td>
<td>• Sports market is very saturated with college and professional teams</td>
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<td>• Social media serves as a hub for sports information</td>
<td>• Too many accounts on social media – competing for share of voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Social media creates a space for fans to communicate and create a community</td>
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Objectives

Raise awareness of team
Increase engagement on posts
Increase likes on posts on team’s social media platforms [Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter]
Increase members in supporters group
Increase attendance at games
Michigan Demographics

As of July of 2017, the state of Michigan houses approximately 9,962,311 habitants (US Census Bureau, 2017). Kalamazoo ranks 13th in terms of population, with a population of 74,262 (Suburban Stats, 2017). Of these 74,262, the largest age group is 20-24 years old, making up 20.1% of the total population. 25-34 years old represent the second largest group, comprising 13.7% of the total city population (Home Facts, 2017). The gender breakdown is 51% females and 49% males. The median household income is $53,138, which is slightly above the average income in Michigan, which comes in at $52,492. 47% of the households make under $50,000 annually (Census Reporter).

Michigan is becoming a soccer state, and the sport is expected to continue to grow rapidly. With 92,022 kids playing soccer, Michigan has the largest youth program of any state without an MLS franchise. Michigan’s youth program is the 10th largest in the country and the largest in the entire Midwest. Kansas, which has an MLS team and one of the best facilities in the country, has only 25,258 youth players (Huffington Post).

Soccer in the United States

Soccer is not just growing in popularity in Michigan, however. Soccer is a rising sport within the United States as a whole. According to U.S. Youth Soccer, 3 million children currently play in their leagues, making it the largest youth sports association in the United States. As shown through the decline in popularity of baseball, the amount of children playing a sport directly correlates to their general interest in the sport. According to the Wall Street Journal in 2015, youth soccer participation is double that of tackle football and has over a million more kids than baseball.

The increase of youth participation, the national teams’ visibility in the Olympics and World Cup, the rise of the popularity of the MLS, and even the increased interest in international soccer have all factored into the rise of interest in the sport of soccer. The Manchester United versus Real Madrid at Michigan Stadium drew over 109,000 fans, making it the largest crowd for a live soccer match in the U.S. David Carter, director of the sports-business program at the University of Southern California, agrees that “that sort of continued visibility helps you gain traction with the public. It’s hard to maintain interest in a sport if it disappears between World Cups.” (WSJ, Soccer).

Adding to the buzz surrounding soccer, social media is playing a large role in keeping the sport relevant, even during non-World Cup years. According to the Adobe Digital Index (ADI) data analysis, U.S. social media buzz for events like Europe’s annual UEFA Champions League is doubling year-over-year (Umbel). ADI data shows that the NBA playoffs and UEFA Champions League generated almost the same level of social media activity. Some experts predict that judging by the significantly higher social media buzz around soccer in the last couple of years, there’s even a chance that World Cup 2024 could be held in the U.S. At the start of the 2015
season, even the 20 Major League Soccer teams saw a 34% increase in social media buzz compared to 2014 (Umbel).

Another factor that could be playing into the popularity of soccer is the relatively inexpensive price compared to other sports. According to SI Live, which is based in Staten Island, the average enrollment fee for travel soccer is around $575, while baseball is closer to $2,000 (SI Live). These are the prices for travel, or more elite, sports teams, so regular leagues are even less expensive. With about half of Kalamazoo’s population making under $50,000 a year, soccer could provide a sports activity for athletes of all ages to engage in.

**Target Market**

Currently, the majority of the audience at Kalamazoo FC’s games are families that have young children that currently play soccer, according to James Tarner, business development manager. This can be attributed to the fact that in the first year of the team, the team owner Mike Garrett went to AYSO clubs around the area to provide free training and to get the word out surrounding the team. The team also provides the service of sending their players to help coach practices for club teams in which they are offered discounted ticket packages for an upcoming game. There are club teams in attendance at most games. With a steady stream of families coming to games, it is time in year three to further expand the team’s target market and audience.

Three groups pose as profitable opportunities for Kalamazoo FC: college students, millennials, and the Latino market.

**College Market**

There are an abundance of colleges in Kalamazoo including Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Kalamazoo College, Everest College Technical School, Davenport University, Spring Arbor University, and Cornerstone University. The three largest universities in the Kalamazoo area are Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, and Kalamazoo Valley Community College. According to the common data sets of WMU and K College, as well as the “Fast Facts” on KVCC’s website, WMU by far has the largest amount of students with 22,894. KVCC is second with 8,797 and K College follows with 1,436 students.
The gender breakout per university is as follows: at WMU, 51.4% of their students are female with 48.6% male. WMU offers both graduate and undergraduate programs, so the gender breakout per graduate level is 39.5% undergraduate male, 38.8% undergraduate female, 9.1% graduate male, and 12.6% graduate female. K College does not offer a graduate program, so they only have undergraduate students. Their student population is made up of 58.6% female and 41.4% male. KVCC classifies their students as full and part-time, with 32% of their students as full-time and 68% as part-time. 52% of their students are female and 48% are male.
As for ethnicity, Caucasian composists the largest group at all three schools, with this group making up 68.7% at WMU, 56.1% at K College, and 72% at KVCC. Black/African American makes up the second largest groups at WMU and KVCC, 11.2% and 13% respectively, while Hispanic/Latino is the second largest group at K College with 12.7% of the students. Hispanic/Latino is the third largest group at WMU and KVCC with 5.6% and 6% respectively, while Black/African American is the third largest group at K College with 7.9%. Something interesting to note is that KVCC grouped together American Indian and Asian when recording this demographic and reported 3% of their students in this group. WMU and K College split these groups up, but to remain consistent, they are reported together in the charts below. WMU reported that 2.6% of their students identified as American Indian or Asian. K College did not
report having any students that fell into the American Indian group, so the full 7.8% of this group of students identifies as Asian.
**Millennial Market**

According to Mintel’s September 2017 study of demographics of Avid sports fans, soccer has one of the youngest Avid fans base, with Avid fans being three times as likely to be aged 18-44 as 45+. This is highlighted by Avid fan demographic study, where a total of 80% of Avid fans are in the 18-44 year old age group, compared to the 18% that are 45+ years.
Millennials have the highest average number of Facebook friends with an average of 250 versus Generation X’s 200

http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/millennials-millennial-generation

In this study by Statistica in May of 2017, 2,267 adults, 18 years of age and older, were asked “Which of the following sports would you pay to watch as part of a streaming service?” The study finds that Millennials (ages 18-34) are more likely than Non-Millennials (ages 35+) to pay for a streaming service to watch soccer, at 25% compared to 14%. Soccer is clearly an up and coming sport for the millennial generation, as it has surpassed hockey into the “Top Four” of sports.
According to Wells Fargo and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2016 Millennials spent roughly 5% of their income on entertainment. This surpasses the proportion spent on health care, education, and apparel/services. Entertainment is important for Millennials’ enjoyment of life and they are willing to spend in order to ensure their satisfaction.
Stryker and Pfizer are companies based around Kalamazoo that hire college graduates every year. This brings a number of millennials, and potential Kalamazoo FC fans, to the area every year.

**Latino Market**

More than 56% of Americans who identify themselves as Hispanic, Latino or African-American said they follow soccer even during the non-World Cup years. What’s more, 25.5% of these people consider professional soccer as their favorite spectator sport. The growth of the Hispanic population across the U.S. means more soccer fans, players and growth in viewership (Umbel). Latinos make up a big part of the soccer community and their dedication to the sport could bring a number of loyal fans. Currently, there is a league separate of the NPSL, called La Liga Latino. This league consists of twenty teams over Southwest Michigan. Kalamazoo FC played a friendly game versus La Liga Kalamazoo this past season, which could be a starting point in converting fans over to the NPSL as well.

According to Mintel, 38% of their 158 internet users, aged 18+, who identify as Avid Fans of professional soccer are Hispanic. This is by far the largest ethnic group that agrees that “I almost never miss my team’s game/event.”
Marketing Mix

Kalamazoo FC utilizes a number of promotional strategies to increase awareness of the team, grow their fan base, and engage their followers. Current promotional efforts for Kalamazoo FC come from signage, a store which stocks team merchandise, social media, and a team website. There are KZFC signs near the entrance of the Portage Soccerzone facility, an indoor soccer facility that oversees youth and adult leagues in the winter months. Hundreds of people enter the facility every week. Soccerzone also houses a soccer gear store that holds Kalamazoo FC merchandise. This merchandise includes jerseys, tee shirts, hats, and even player cards. There is no mention of the online presence of the team within Soccerzone.

As for social media presence, Kalamazoo FC is currently using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Their posts range from merchandise in store to information on past and present players to general sports news spanning outside of the sport of soccer. Generally the posts serve the purpose of informing followers. Videos are posted to YouTube and Instagram, but not on Facebook or Twitter. The same content is typically cross-posted onto Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
Lastly, Kalamazoo FC runs their own website. It includes information on ticket sales, the team’s schedule, standings, team-related news articles, team-related videos, the team’s roster, youth training options, volunteer opportunities, kids and coach’s club information, the online store, and stadium information.

**Key Metrics per Platform:**

Digging deeper into Kalamazoo FC’s social media platforms can provide valuable information regarding what types of posts the followers on each platform respond to, as well as the current fan engagement throughout the platforms.

Each platform currently used by Kalamazoo FC was analyzed from December 1st, 2017 to March 27th, 2018, with the total number of posts varying by platform. Each platform offers their own post analytic software, which can be found within the individual application. For Facebook, likes, reach, comments, reactions, and shares were measured on a per-post basis. For Instagram, likes, reach, comments, and impressions per post were measured. On Twitter, likes, reach, comments, impressions, engagements, and retweets per post were measured. I totaled each metric for the posts in the time frame specified, and then found the mean of that number. The top five posts per reach and likes were also noted for each of the following three platforms.

Reach is defined as the number of people who have had a post from an account enter their screen. Likes are defined as a click of a predetermined button to show approval or favor towards a post. Comments are defined as a response to a post in the form of written text or emoticons. Reactions are unique to Facebook. This is an extension of the like function, where followers can use the following emoticon reactions: love, haha, wow, sad, and angry. Shares are also unique to Facebook. Sharing a post involves posting an account’s post on one’s individual Facebook page. Engagements are unique to Instagram and Twitter. Engagements are defined as the number of times people interact with a post. Retweets and impressions are unique to Twitter. They are similar to shares on Facebook in the sense that the individual posts the tweet on their individual page. Impressions are defined as the total number of times a post has been seen.

For YouTube, the top five videos per watch time and views were noted, according to the information from YouTube’s internal analytic system. Watch time is defined as the number of minutes people spent watching a video. Views are defined as the number of people who looked at the video.

**Facebook: (12/01/2017-03/27/2018; 59 posts total)**

Likes/Followers: 2,124

Top Posts by Reach:

1. Summer Camps 2018: 7,343
2. Holiday Giveaway: 6,154
3. Hasten Biddlecome Signing: 4,597
4. Schedule Release: 3,618
5. Paul Liagre Signing: 2,937
   Lucas Malaguez and Vini Schwindt Signings: 2,937

Top Posts by Likes:
1. Hasten Biddlecome Signing: 66
   Holiday Giveaway: 66
2. Brandon Bye MLS Debut: 64
3. Schedule Release: 54
4. Beau Prey Signing: 52
   Luke Morrell Signing: 52
   Spencer MacDonald Signing: 52
5. Assistant Coach Todd Wells Signing: 50

Average Likes per Post: 25.10
Average Reach per Post: 1,359.93
Average Comments per Post: 9.25
Average Reactions per Post: 55.73
Average Shares per Post: 4.41

**Instagram: (12/01/2017-03/27/2018; 49 posts total)**

Followers: 1,344

Top Posts by Reach
1. Spencer MacDonald Signing: 1,209
2. Brandon Bye 8th Pick in MLS Draft: 988
3. Jake Puente at NPSL Coaches Convention: 876
4. Jonathan Nord Birthday: 835
5. Beau Prey Signing: 822

Top Posts by Likes
1. Brandon Bye 8th Pick in MLS Draft: 177
2. Spencer MacDonald Signing: 142
3. Brandon Bye MLS Debut: 128
4. Jake Puente at NPSL Coaches Convention: 123

Average Likes per Post: 69.12
Average Reach per Post: 724.20
Average Comments per Post: 2.16
Average Impressions per Post: 1,140.90

Twitter: (12/01/2017-03/27/2018; 47 posts total)

Followers: 1,358

Top Posts by Reach:
1. NPSL Annual Owners Meeting Open System Discussion: 15,994
2. NPSL Conference Determined: 9,610
3. Brandon Bye’s Success in MLS Combine: 8,992
4. Cam Sipple Signing: 7,416
5. Schedule Release: 6,528

Top Posts by Like:
1. NPSL Annual Owners Meeting Open System Discussion: 96
2. Brandon Bye’s Success in MLS Combine: 81
3. Cam Sipple Signing: 64
4. NPSL Conference Determined: 44
5. Spencer MacDonald Signing: 42

Average Likes per Post: 21.38
Average Reach per Post: 3,448.28
Average Comments per Post: 0.55
Average Impressions per Post: 3,557.96
Average Engagements per Post: 192
Average Retweets per Post: 6.21

YouTube:

Subscribers: 117

Top Posts by Watch Time:
1. Lucas Malaguez Introduction: 142
2. Vini Schwindt Introduction: 140
3. Mike Garrett Speech at Open House: 115
4. Arthur Prunis Introduction: 103
5. Gio Duran Introduction: 89

Top Posts by Views:
1. Arthur Prunis Introduction: 159
2. Vini Schwindt Introduction: 156
3. Lucas Malaguez Introduction: 146
Social Media Metrics

To best meet social media objectives, it is useful to identify the key performance indicators that must be analyzed to recognize if progress is being made. I took the objectives set out earlier, and looked at the specific metrics that amount to each objective. Awareness involves the amount of people who have heard of the team. Followers is a way to measure those explicitly interested in the team, but indicators such as shares, impressions, and retweets also show viewership outside of an account’s following. Likes and replies were also added for Facebook and Twitter respectively because followers of the individual who liked or replied to the post are made aware of that individual’s actions, further increasing viewership of a post. Engagement can be identified through comments, reactions, and other engagements including detail expands, replies, and hashtag or link clicks. Increasing likes on posts only looks to raise one metric, so the number of likes should watched across all platforms. Lastly, for the team’s Supporter’s Group which plays a large role in soccer culture, increasing members within the group largely has to do with increasing awareness. Therefore the same metrics as those analyzed for raising team awareness will be looked at as well, but for the separate accounts for the Supporter’s Group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platform</th>
<th>Objective 1: Raise awareness of team</th>
<th>Objective 2: Increase engagement on posts</th>
<th>Objective 3: Increase likes on posts</th>
<th>Objective 4: Increase members in supporter's group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>KPI: Followers, Shares, Likes</td>
<td>KPI: Comments, Reactions</td>
<td>KPI: Likes</td>
<td>KPI: Likes, Shares, Followers of Supporters Group page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>KPI: Followers, Impressions</td>
<td>KPI: Comments</td>
<td>KPI: Likes</td>
<td>KPI: Impressions, Followers of Supporters Group page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>KPI: Followers, Retweets, Impressions, Replies</td>
<td>KPI: Replies, Engagements</td>
<td>KPI: Likes</td>
<td>KPI: Replies, Retweets, Followers of Supporters Group page</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

To make recommendations related to social media campaigns, I conducted a comprehensive examination of past posts. I looked at various metrics calculated per post per platform, as well as the general layout of the posts. The listings of the top posts per platforms per reach and likes also helped to highlight the type of content that performs best. Each platform offers their own post analytics, noting data for all posts on that platform. Following are my major findings:

- Paid posts on Facebook receive more reach and impressions than non-boosted posts. The summer camp post was boosted by $100 and targeted to followers of the KZFC page and their friends, aged 18-65 in the Kalamazoo area. This is the top Facebook posts by reach with 7,343 views, so to further increase visibility of the team and its activities, boosting Facebook posts can help to build awareness.

- There is a general interest in players, as the team’s social media followers are fans of the team, so KZFC should continue to play them up and highlight what they’re doing. The Brandon Bye and Luke Morrell posts were big hits, so local players are important to fans as well. Luke’s signing ranked fourth among Facebook posts with 52 likes, while Brandon’s journey into the MLS ranked in the top five by likes for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as well as in the top five by reach for Twitter and Instagram.

- Posts from the Open House performed well, so hosting more events fans can go to outside of games can be a good way to engage them, as well as hook in new fans. Team owner, Mike Garrett’s, interview at the Open House event ranked third on YouTube for watch time with 115 minutes. Also, compared to last year, this year’s Open House attendance increased. There was more social media posting leading up to this event, which could attribute to the increase in attendance.

- Kalamazoo FC-focused posts perform better than store posts, as no top posts in any category are store related. Metrics are consistently lower for store related posts across platforms. People follow what they are most interested in and want to see, so separate accounts should be made to best target groups of people. The same logic applies to the supporter’s group and separate social media accounts should be created for the group.

- Some player signings were released in close proximity to each other, with as little as four days in between posts, so better spacing them would allow for more variety in content. A posting schedule can help to better organize posts to vary content and make sure all important posts are released at the most effective date.
Player news and signings perform well across platforms, so making the players more relatable, such as through fun interviews, will increase fan engagement. Longer YouTube videos can be made, with shorter clips previewed on the other social media platforms. This will not only engage followers, but direct more traffic to the YouTube channel. The team currently offers autographs after each home game, so these more personable posts can further enhance the relationship between players and fans.

Twitter followers seem to like posts regarding the NPSL as a whole the most, so more general soccer posts beyond just the NPSL should be posted frequently on this platform. The post regarding the NPSL Annual Owners Meeting, by far, experienced the highest reach with over 15,000 views. This post also received the most amount of likes, with 96. The second ranked post by reach is also regarding the NPSL, in particular the conference being determined, which reached over 9,600 Twitter users.

**Posting Schedule**

As stated in my findings, having a posting schedule allows for a company to better organize their ideas and target their content by social media platform. This posting schedule does not specifically assign content to different social media platforms, but as the team sees a larger divide in post popularity, they get a better feel for what content each market responds to. One problem facing the current social media execution is the abundance of posting in certain months, with little to no posts in other months. Planning a schedule can help to eliminate this issue by brainstorming content for every month.

The following schedule displays an example of a social media posting plan that Kalamazoo FC could implement. Putting together a schedule betters lays out what should be posted on social media on a per-month basis to ensure all necessary information is released to fans, without overwhelming them by posts too frequently, as share of voice is an issue in regards to the number of accounts on social media.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platform</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
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<th>May</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Platform</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>August</td>
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<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>YouTube</td>
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<tr>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>~Game recap after every game (score and photo from game)</td>
<td>~Post-Season Awards (might move to July)</td>
<td>~Craziest fan photo contest</td>
<td>~Skill Challenge</td>
<td>~Post-Season Awards (might move to July)</td>
<td>~KZFC &quot;What are you thankful for&quot; video</td>
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<td>Facebook</td>
<td>~4th of July</td>
<td>~Best play/goal of the season bracket</td>
<td>~Copy a KZFC skill challenge</td>
<td>~Camp Video</td>
<td>~Thanksgiving</td>
<td>~Christmas</td>
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**Progress Monitoring**

Engagement should steadily increase as Kalamazoo FC becomes more well-known, especially if the three segments discussed earlier are targeted. Each platform Kalamazoo FC uses offers its own analytical tool, however one would have to go into each post to look at the metrics. Investing in an analytical website that creates a dashboard with all metrics may be the most effective move. This will keep track of the rises and falls of many metrics including followers, comments, likes, further engagement, and so forth. The tool I used in this report, Cyfe, will also should the top five posts in terms of different metrics. If newer posts are not making this list, it may be time to rethink social media strategies. Checking an analytical tool regularly will help to ensure that posts are reaching fans and that the fans like the content they are shown. The KZFC team can also hold regular social media meetings to brainstorm unique ideas for new social media initiatives and to evaluate past posts. Getting the discussion going regarding social media can uncover new ideas to further engage KZFC’s audience, as well as continue to get the team’s name out.
References


