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## [A Lesson in Social Media and Transparency from an Unlikely Source: the UFC](#)

Posted on June 23, 2011 by [Laura Gutierrez](#)

In a few short years, the [Ultimate Fighting Championship](#), or the UFC, has become a sports powerhouse. The league seems to have it all—a booming business, a solid philosophy and a great presence on social media that engages their fans. Why does this matter to you? Because your business can learn a few things from them.

If you're wondering how I know this, it's because I'm a fan. That is not a statement to take lightly, either. Five years ago, you wouldn't get me to watch it, but through the coaxing of my significant other and his interest to perhaps become involved in the sport, I realized how different it is from other professional leagues. As much as it's a business, and there are "star" professional athletes, the league has their priorities straight.

If you are unaware, the UFC organizes and promotes fights between mixed martial artists (MMA). Originally formed in 1993 as a tournament, pitting specialized martial artists against each other (ex., a Jiu-Jitsu black-belt versus a karate master), the league got little buy-in due to its violence. Fast-forward 10 years later, after [Zuffa](#) took over, the UFC created [The Ultimate Fighter](#), a reality show that still airs on Spike TV. It was the start of prominence for the UFC, and here's why.

### **Solid Decisions**

- *Have a solid philosophy and stick to it.*

Headed by [Dana White](#), the league appeased its audience by updating the rules to better protect fighters from injury. White *does not* in any way promote the type of behavior we normally see with professional athletes (I'm making a generalization here)—if you watch the reality show, White frequently kicks off renegades who break his rules or act like an idiot on or off camera. He doesn't tolerate the kind of behavior that might undermine what the league has worked so hard for—credibility—and he rewards those who have worked hard.



## Transparency & the Use of Social Media

- *Transparency is key ([see my last post](#)).*
- *Engagement on social media is a must ("[being human](#)," as Heather Morse writes).*
- *Give the proper tools for use (read: education).*

White is not a shy man, which makes him a good candidate to participate in social media. In an article on *The Washington Examiner*, White says he uses social media ([Twitter](#), mainly) to not only create awareness for his business but to solve problems on the spot:

If the cable goes out in Iowa during a pay-per-view event, White will become aware of it through Facebook and call a contact to investigate.

Should a problem arise with tickets, he will know through Twitter and instantly address it.

What other company president is willing to do that? His level of engagement on Twitter is amazing. Being transparent requires a lot of trust on the company's part. It's tough dealing with fans who don't agree, but he meets them head-on. Want to slap Dana White? Sure, he might fly you to Nevada to do just that. His crew sits down before a big pay-per-view (PPV) fight to set up alerts for his staff to monitor the conversation on multiple social media channels, ensuring issues are being responded to and making connections with fans priority #1.

### **Twitter**

White is an avid Twitterer, so he encourages his fighters to do the same. He hired Amy Martin of Digital Royalty to train the fighters to use Twitter (Mashable). He even offers fighters "\$240,000 annually in bonuses for meeting benchmarks such as highest growth percentage" (*Washington Examiner*). As a fan, how great is it to interact with professional athletes? Fans end up being more invested, more interested. It's something most professional sports organizations don't encourage, let alone reward.

Even the [main UFC Twitter](#) account is managed by different guest fighters, who take turns tweeting live during events.

### **Facebook**

- *Cross-sell!*



Here's the genius: not only do they air the main-card fights on PPV, but the UFC airs preliminary fights on Spike TV and [Facebook](#). What a way to drive people to engage via their page. Most companies refuse to "give away" their product that they're trying to make money off of, but as the old adage goes—you give to get. Chances are good that a fan watching a fight on Facebook will end up purchasing the PPV. And once fans land on the Facebook page, they're encouraged to take photos with their favorite fighters, send in pets that look like fighters, and weigh in on potential fight match-ups.

Now, almost 20 years after its first fight, the UFC has become *the* MMA league. Zuffa recently purchased other MMA leagues like the WEC and Bellatore, and more recently, their almost-competitor Strikeforce. The UFC puts on about one major PPV fight a month, compared to once a year, formerly. Their Facebook page has 5.6 million friends, second to the NBA (*Washington Examiner*). Their major fighters (guys like Anderson Silva, Georges St. Pierre) have joined Twitter to connect with fans. What's next?

### **What organizations have you learned from?**

#### **Sources:**

Graham, Pat. "[UFC's use of social media expands fan base.](#)" *The Washington Examiner*.

Ferenstein, Greg. "[How Dana White Built a UFC Empire with Social Media.](#)" *Mashable*.

