Industry Insider: Curtis Danburg

Title: Senior Director of Communications, Cleveland Indians
Education: Bachelor's in sport management and marketing, Bowling Green State University
Career: Public relations intern, Buffalo Bills, 1996

Interview conducted by Jim Kadlecak, associate professor and chair of the Department of Human Performance and Sport Business at the University of Mount Union and Vice President for Industry Relations of the Sport Marketing Association.

Curtis Danburg is in his 16th season with the Cleveland Indians. In his current role as Senior Director of Communications, he oversees Corporate Communications, Baseball Information, Broadcasting, Digital Media, and Digital Assets (historical archiving, photography, digital signage). He initiated his career as an intern with the Indians' Media Relations Department for three years before becoming a full-time member of the department in 1998. He was promoted in 2005 to lead Corporate Communications and Digital Media, areas still under his direction. Danburg also spent seven seasons (2005-2011) providing oversight for the Indians' Creative Services operation before being promoted to a leadership role as the Senior Director for the entire Communications division in 2011.

Q: What is your definition of social media?
Danburg: Utilizing technology as a tool for real-time, direct and interactive communication.

Q: Why do sport organizations need to be a part of this digital media conversation?
Danburg: It's a grassroots marketing tool unlike anything our industry has ever seen. We're able to instantly interact with our fans to not only create a deeper connection but also to solicit fan reaction.

Q: Social media has evolved so quickly. What are some current social media trends? Where do you see it going in the immediate future?
Danburg: I think a lot of it relies on giving access and empowering fans to create their own experiences, both with the information they seek and how they interact with your brand. The use of mobile technology is going to be critical to this success, and it's going to be very important for our industry to stay ahead of the curve on this trend.

Q: How do you balance the issue of quality vs. quantity? Is there such a thing as too much social media?
Danburg: There is a delicate balance. Our approach continues to evolve, but it clearly depends on the medium. For instance, it is clear that with Facebook less is more. You have to be strategic on what you post and when posts are made. You are even judged on the quality of your posts based on fan reaction and engagement. So you have to be careful. Whereas on Twitter it's fast-moving, so consumers can handle multiple messages over the course of the day. Overall, we have become more strategic and methodical on how and when we use social media. We're also trying to streamline our use of social media so internal users don't overlap and inundate our fans with the same information.

Q: What are some of the different ways the Cleveland Indians are using social media?
Danburg: One of our most popular social media initiatives was the introduction of the Tribe Social Deck. It opened to fans on opening day of the 2010 season. It made us the first pro sports team to have a social media only zone, free and open to all social media users. We wanted to be aggressive in social media. This idea was developed to engage our fan base and create a social media community that was tied to the Indians' experience. It has allowed us to increase conversation and create deeper connections with our fans. It also allows for free, trusted peer-to-peer marketing, which is the highest level of trust with regard to our brand. It's hard to quantify, but there is no question that this initiative has increased brand perception, which was and always will be one of our goals. We took this initiative to the next level in 2011 by moving this space from the bleachers to a suite. This move took weather out of the equation and increased the exclusivity level of the experience.