Introduction

For the athletics information professional who has been around 25 years or more, a simple smile may appear when reminiscing about the past “Stone Age” realities of the trade – the teletypewriter; sending raw copy to a printer for a publication’s design and layout; and hours on the phone calling in contest results.

A reality is that the evolution of new communication platforms is measured now in months rather than years. Today, for example, videos can be produced on a phone. Athletics communication directors accustomed to traditional methods or recently fluent in the latest media or technology platforms may be startled by the amount of emerging new platforms and the expectation to learn and use them quickly and efficiently.

While there is no denying the technology explosion impacts every aspect of the athletics department, the publicity arms of those departments, in particular athletics communication directors, are asked to flex their muscles more than any person. Social media especially has revolutionized information dissemination, and new products and services are ever-changing and expanding. For starters, athletics venues routinely serve as broadcast studios producing live streaming video and/or audio. Messages of 140 characters, delivered by computer or phone, are the lifeblood of the fan who wants up-to-the-minute sports coverage whether the user is across campus or across the country.

NCAA Division III institutions are particularly stretched by fast-paced technology growth because the sports publicity operation is typically one full-time professional, who is challenged with everyday responsibilities while keeping up with the latest technological demands. It’s highly unusual for a Division III athletics communication director to have a full-
time assistant. The number of student workers, interns and graduate assistants varies widely, and those individuals are in constant need of training.

These inherent limitations do not reduce demands upon institutions, or expectations by a public that wants need-to-know information now. The pressures are, at the very least, two-fold. The first, and most obvious, is the time involved as one exploits the technology to its fullest. The second is the inevitable comparison with those seen as the institution’s peers; when, based on staffing and other resources, they might not be peers at all.

The national College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) organization is keenly aware of the profession’s evolving complexity, acknowledging that its own name might not do the organization justice anymore.

The traditional title of sports information director with roles of historian, record-keeper, statistician and media contact are still very much present, but evolving responsibilities such as media producer, strategic communicator and multi-platform content manager are as equally important in today’s more aptly titled athletics communication director’s daily work. One might argue the new roles are more important in an increasingly competitive college admissions climate in which many Division III athletics departments are seen as an integral component of the institution’s enrollment management effort.

Most everyone in higher education recognizes that athletics provides an institution the best and most visible way of connecting the campus to its alumni, to prospects, to parents, to the “Town-Gown” relationship, and even to the more casual observer on a local and regional basis. Compelling sports feature stories and contest results get “air time.”
Throughout this document, there are several key repeating themes in each section. The themes encapsulate the changing landscape of this profession and the current challenges facing Division III.

**Resources** – Demands on time, technology knowledge and breadth of experience have increased, but the resources have remained status quo. The data highlight staffing needs, technology demands and the lack of professional development opportunities for athletics communication directors, even though the expectations and demands within the profession have changed and grown beyond the original scope.

**Strategic Integration** – The importance of the athletics communication director at both the departmental and institutional level has become a key piece in promoting institutions.

**Technology** – The challenge of the ever-changing, fast-paced and instantaneous demands of students, prospects, spectators, parents, alumni, etc., and its impact on the expectations of athletics departments.

**Workload** – With recent changes and expectations, the workload and time demands have increased dramatically.

Athletics communication directors must be mindful of Division III’s unique student-athlete experience and supportive of its philosophy, which calls upon its member institutions to provide and promote a mix of rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and the opportunity to pursue the multitude of other co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
In Division III, the student-athlete is inherently committed to academic achievements, community outreach initiatives, and athletic success – three values that are fundamental to Division III institutions. Student-athletes have the opportunity to share their stories with the help of athletics communication directors, as the institution and its athletics program seek to align with the Division III philosophy in its entirety. Fellow student-athletes, parents, the general public/media, and other Division III constituents are able to understand and appreciate the value of the Division III student-athlete experience through the highlighted words and talents of athletics communication directors.

The relationship formed between directors and student-athletes not only supports the Division III strategic platform of portraying the division’s mission, it also allows student-athletes to form a professional connection – a connection that may lead to increased internship opportunities and/or a future career path.

As individuals who are dedicated to community service and outreach, student-athletes and institutional and conference Student-Athlete Advisory Committees (SAAC) can collaborate with athletics communication directors to brainstorm ideas for campuses and conferences and to increase awareness of Division III initiatives such as the partnership with Special Olympics. Additionally, directors can narrate what events and opportunities are offered on campus or within a conference, while applauding a different kind of dedication and achievement from a student-athlete. The collaboration ultimately benefits the student-athletes, SAAC, and the directors, enables institutions to exemplify Division III tenets, and builds the foundation of an affirmative and comprehensive communications strategy for a Division III institution and the communities it serves.
GUIDE TO STRATEGIC ATHLETICS COMMUNICATIONS ON CAMPUS
Surveys by the Division III Sports Information Directors of America (D3SIDA) involving 64 percent (279 responses) of 433 Division III institutions in 2005 and 67 percent (300 of 446 responses) in 2012 confirmed that Division III athletics communication directors have assumed a greater responsibility for institutional and conference outreach through the years, beyond the traditional tasks of writing news releases and keeping statistics. The data indicates the following:

- Division III athletics communication directors are chief communications and information officers at institutions sponsoring an average of 17 varsity sports (compared to an average of 19 sports sponsored by Division I institutions and 15 sports sponsored by Division II institutions).

- Approximately 60 percent of respondents to the 2012 D3SIDA survey reported that their schools sponsor 17 to 23 sports, up from 53 percent in 2005.

- Almost 52 percent of respondents perform non-communications duties (down from 56 percent in 2005).
Nearly 20 percent serve as a head or assistant coach for a sport (down from nearly one-third of directors in 2005).

Slightly more than 20 percent of athletics communication directors are assigned non-athletics duties as employees of a university or college public relations office.

Nearly 60 percent of Division III athletics communication directors hold the traditional title of director of sports information, but a significant number (approaching 20 percent) perform communications duties as associate or assistant directors of athletics; a smaller number (approximately 5 percent) hold the title of director of athletics communication. Regardless of title, the majority of Division III institutions (60 percent) operate with one professional athletics communication staff member. Data also indicates the following regarding staffing:

- Approximately 80 percent of directors are employed full-time for 12 months.
- A recent review of the Division III institutions’ directory of athletics communication directors indicates that more than 85 percent are men.
- Forty percent of directors report having a communications professional as an assistant, but approximately one-third of those assistants are not full time. In comparison, a 2010 Division II survey revealed that all of the respondents’ institutions employ a full-time communications director, and approximately half of those institutions employ two or more full-time staff as part of the communications team.

### Professional staff assistants

- Directors with no professional assistants
- Directors with professional assistants
In Division III, according to the 2012 D3SIDA survey, approximately 15 percent of athletics communication offices have a graduate assistant. About one-fourth have one student assistant working in the office, while about 30 percent have no student assistants. (The Division II survey indicated nearly 70 percent of respondents drew additional staffing from a pool that included part-time staff, graduate assistants and paid or volunteer internships.)

Survey responses indicate that workload is a significant issue, with 90 percent of Division III athletics communication directors reporting that they work an average of 50 or more hours per week. At institutions sponsoring 17 or more sports, approximately 50 percent of directors work an average of 60-plus hours per week, and 17 percent work 70 or more hours weekly. Most directors continue to perform traditional duties including designing media guides, producing game programs and creating promotional materials (such as posters, brochures and recruiting materials).
Between 10 and 30 percent of directors also perform duties such as selling advertising or venue sponsorships, serving as radio or television broadcasters for games, overseeing taping of games for coaches, and hiring game officials.

Nearly three-quarters of directors are responsible for performing or hiring individuals to perform game-management duties.

With the emergence of new technologies, most directors manage athletics website content, and more than half devote 16 or more hours weekly to this duty.

Nearly all communications offices use social media – primarily Facebook, Twitter and YouTube – to promote athletics. About 42 percent of athletics communication staffs devote six or more hours to social media functions weekly (although about 55 percent of offices staffed by one professional athletics communicator devote fewer than five hours to social media).
• Approximately three-quarters of Division III athletics communicators report producing athletics video content for online use, and live web-based streaming of competition.

There is also evidence in the 2012 D3SIDA survey that athletics communication directors are heavily involved in strategic decision-making at Division III institutions. More than 80 percent of respondents to the 2012 D3SIDA survey believe their opinion is valued by the top administration within athletics departments, and 69 percent believe they are involved in administrative decision-making.

About 40 percent of athletics communication directors have worked in the profession for six or fewer years, according to the 2012 D3SIDA survey.

A high percentage of respondents have not participated in the primary professional-development opportunities available to Division III athletics communicators. [Currently, the primary opportunity for development is offered by CoSIDA during its annual summer workshop, which for at least the next three years will be held in conjunction with the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Convention in Orlando, Florida. CoSIDA programming traditionally has a multi-divisional focus with less emphasis on Division III. The regionally conducted Eastern College Athletic Conference Sports Information Directors Association (ECAC-SIDA) is an important professional-development alternative.] The D3SIDA survey reveals:

• About one-third of respondents have attended the summer ECAC-SIDA meeting and a similar percentage report involvement in opportunities not directly affiliated with CoSIDA or ECAC-SIDA, including attending an NCAA Regional Rules Seminar (14 percent).
• However, 45 percent of directors have not attended a CoSIDA Workshop (a slight improvement from 2005’s 47 percent).

• Institutions paid the full cost of attending the CoSIDA Workshop for about 45 percent of respondents and a portion of the cost for another 12 percent, while conference support is nearly nonexistent.

Data from these surveys of athletics communication directors and from other sources points to the following conclusions:

• Most directors have workloads of 50 or more hours weekly, and due to the large number of sports sponsored at Division III institutions (in comparison to Divisions I and II institutions), about half work 60 or more hours weekly.

• About 60 percent of Division III institutions employ only one athletics communication professional, who has a wide array of responsibilities – ranging from management of athletics websites, social media and video, to non-communications duties including game management (measurable numbers hold coaching positions or work in institutional public relations offices).

• Despite devoting many hours weekly to communications duties, more than two-thirds of athletics communication directors believe they are also involved in strategic decision-making within the institution’s athletics department.

• More than one-third of directors who have worked in the profession for six or fewer years, combined with time spent in learning and using new technologies and on strategic planning and supervision, point to the importance of professional-development opportunities for directors seeking to be more proficient in their duties.

• Lack of funding for professional-development activities appears to be a significant reason why only slightly more than half of athletics communication directors participate in the CoSIDA Workshop and even fewer seek out other professional development programming.
Based on feedback and data collection, the NCAA Division III/CoSIDA Strategic Communications Working Group provides the following best practices that will positively impact athletics communication directors (ACD) while simultaneously having a significant positive impact on athletics departments.

1. **Be a part of the athletics department senior staff.** As the keeper of the front porch (i.e., the athletics website; statistics; social media; marketing; and communication), it is important for the ACD to be involved in athletics department meetings and strategic planning. [Sixty-nine percent of the 2012 survey respondents believe they are involved in administrative decision making and strategic planning].

2. **Encourage ACD collaboration with campus, local community and conference counterparts.**

   - Initiate cross-departmental communication and collaboration with a variety of campus constituents, including:
     
     Academic Departments (Journalism, Marketing Communications, Public Relations, etc.)
     
     Alumnae/i Relations
     
     Communications Office
     
     Development Office
     
     Information Technology Office
     
     Marketing Department
     
     Multi-Media Services
     
     Student Affairs
     
     University Relations
• Build and maintain relationships with local media – television, newspaper and radio – and social media outlets. Cultivating relationships with media professionals is a key component.

• Develop a professional resource with other ACDs within the respective conference, including the conference communication director. Recommend an annual meeting with all conference ACDs and the conference communication director.

3. Ensure that ACDs are members of the campus communications cadre that discusses strategic campus public relations and media issues; ensures consistent institutional branding; garners insights and input on athletics initiatives; and shares communication best practices. This group could include representatives from University Relations, Development, Alumnae/i Relations, Student Affairs, Faculty, Administration, etc.

4. Engage with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) on a regular basis, with a minimum interaction of twice each semester. The student-athletes are the story. ACDs can provide a communication resource to SAAC and benefit from frequent interaction with the student-athletes to learn about possible feature stories and special events. These stories will also foster connections with other campus constituents.

5. Partner with campus-wide and academic departments to enlist graduate assistants, interns and student workers. Athletics communication offices provide a wide array of intern opportunities ranging from feature story and press release writing and editing; compilation of statistics; game announcing; social media maintenance; and marketing. If partnered with academic departments, interns could receive academic credit; exposure to the entire student body; resume building; and real world experiences. Graduate assistants can be solicited internally or from neighboring institutions. [Data from the 2012 survey indicates that less than 25 percent of Division III ACDs have a graduate assistant or student intern and nearly three-quarters of athletics communication directors are responsible for overseeing game-management and management of athletics website content].
6. **Build relationships with local community groups** (e.g., Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) to elevate the institution’s athletics events, to engage with a potential fan base, build a better understanding of opportunities for collaboration among community members and create community service opportunities for student-athletes.

7. **Attend one regional professional development seminar annually and at least one national professional development convention every three years.** Conference offices, with the assistance of the NCAA Conference Grant program, have funding to support professional development opportunities for ACDs.

8. **Staffing.** Based on the 2012 Division III survey, institutions currently have the following staffing based on the number of sports offered:

- Fewer than 17 varsity teams – 75 percent of institutions employ one full-time athletics communication director with all responsibilities within sports information who averages 60 hours per week.

- More than 17 varsity teams – 50 percent of institutions employ two full-time athletics communication personnel.

9. **Athletics directors and ACD need to conduct an annual review of the ever-changing landscape in athletics communication and reassess best practices.**
Resources

Technology
- Personal computer(s) – laptop(s), tablet(s)
- Smartphone(s)
- Remote Internet access - wireless air card(s)/hot spot
- Professional camera/video camera
- Flip camera(s)
- Video editing software
- Design software (InDesign, Adobe Illustrator)
- Statistics software
- Web-streaming equipment for indoor/outdoor events
- Web hosting company (rather than an in-house website)

CoSIDA Resources
- CoSIDA.com
  www.cosida.com
- CoSIDA Twitter (@CoSIDAnews)
  twitter.com/cosidanews
- CoSIDA listserv
- D3SIDA Facebook
  facebook.com/pages/D3SIDA
NCAA Division III Resources

- Division III Strategic Positioning Platform
- NCAA.org (public)
  www.NCAA.org (@InsidetheNCAA)
- NCAAconnect (membership side of NCAA.org)
  www.NCAA.org/wps/myportal
- NCAA.org/D3SpecialOlympics
  www.NCAA.org/D3SpecialOlympics
- NCAA.com
  www.NCAA.com
- NCAA Division III FTP site
  ncaadiv3.smartfile.com/ftp/login
  Username: ncaadiv3
  Password: ncaaftp1
  Download customizable Division III Week resources
  (communications kit, logos, videos, splash page, etc.)
  Download Identity Initiative videos
- NCAA Division III Facebook
  www.facebook.com/NCAADivisionIII
- NCAA Division III Twitter
  twitter.com/NCAADIII (@NCAADIII) #whyd3
- NCAA Division III YouTube
  www.youtube.com/ncaadivisioniii
- Division III membership peers
- NCAA News archives
- NCAA Division III mobile website
  blog.NCAA.org/d3mobile

Professional Development Resources

Memberships/Affiliations

- Membership in CoSIDA
- Membership in NACDA
- Membership in ECAC-SIDA
- Membership in public relations/communications/marketing organizations
Workshops

- Attendance at annual CoSIDA Convention
- Attendance at ECAC-SIDA workshops and professional development activities
- Attendance at communications-related seminars, workshops and webinars

Online

- Public Relations Society of America
  www.prsa.org (@PRSAatactics)
- Ragan Communications
  www.ragan.com (@MarkRaganCEO)
- Institute for Public Relations
  www.instituteforpr.org
- International Association of Business Communicators
  www.iabc.com
- International Public Relations Association
  www.ipra.org
- Mashable
  mashable.com (@mashable)
- LinkedIn Groups (CoSIDA, PRSA, PR and Communications professionals and Sports Information and Statistics)

Other

- ECAC-SIDA
  www.ecac-sida.org
- NCAA Division III Sports Information Directors
  Email Address Listing
  moraviansports.com/information/links/D3emails
- NCAA Division III College Athletics Website Addresses
  (Alphabetical) moraviansports.com/information/links/AlphaWebsites
- NCAA Division III College Athletics Website Addresses
  (By Conference) moraviansports.com/information/links/D3websites
- AP Style Guide
  www.apstylebook.com (@APStylebook)
On-Campus

- Communications/Journalism departments (professors, class projects, internships, etc.)
- Campus-wide communication group/team
- Student-athletes. Their stories are the greatest resource.

Budget

- Independent budget operations for communications
- Work-study budget and/or stipends to hire graduate assistants and student interns

New Professional Development Funding starting in 2013-14
Division III ACD meeting before the beginning of CoSIDA Workshop

- Will conduct a one-day Division III-specific workshop before the beginning of the annual CoSIDA Workshop.
- Request an increase to Tier I funding and include athletics communication directors as part of the mandatory constituency. Conference offices would dictate distribution/allocation on a conference-by-conference basis. Approximately $1,000 per conference ($43,000).
- Request that CoSIDA front end the Division III programming on the first day of its Workshop.
- Partner with CoSIDA to provide a registration discount for Division III participants.

To provide feedback on this guide or for more information on the NCAA Division III/CoSIDA Strategic Communications Working Group, please contact d3identity@NCAA.org.