



Staying Connected

Maintaining contact with players, once they leave youth rugby, is important for a number of reasons. It will make sure players feel valued and ensure they are aware of opportunities to participate. This should keep them playing regularly, but should they lapse regular communication may encourage them to: return to the game (when their personal circumstances allow), participate in occasional events, or support/donate to the club.

Remember to not just pursue those that are likely to play for the 1st XV, all players have potential to add lots to the club (socially, financially, with time and effort). Three main areas for staying connected will be promoted here: Tracking, Social Media, and Alumni Activities.

Tracking

Tracking the destination of youth players sounds like an easy task but very few clubs know what has happened to all of their players once they move on from youth rugby. Having this information is essential to take any action to 'save' those that drop out. Some lessons learnt from clubs that have tried this are below:

- Start gathering information early
- Online methods (e.g. survey monkey, google forms) can save having to collate details and avoid errors
- Paper versions can be gathered while in a group setting before or after training/game/meeting
- It will take more than one ask to get done
- Email and mobile numbers go with players that move, although parents/home contact details can be useful as a fall back
- Find out their destination, can you support them getting there? (Having a wider goal than keeping players at the club will pay dividends in the long run)
- Check and update contact details periodically (perhaps with annual update)
- Try, try and try again. Be there when they are ready

Social Media

Other forms of communication may be effective in 'staying connected' with players but there is probably most to gain from providing information on social media.

It is important to point out that, while social media is important, people are good at tuning out corporate messages. It is individuals that influence decision making, but social media can help engage individuals. The social media strategy must be supported by other communication and activity on the ground (to feed into and on from posts). Don't lose sight of the ultimate goal.

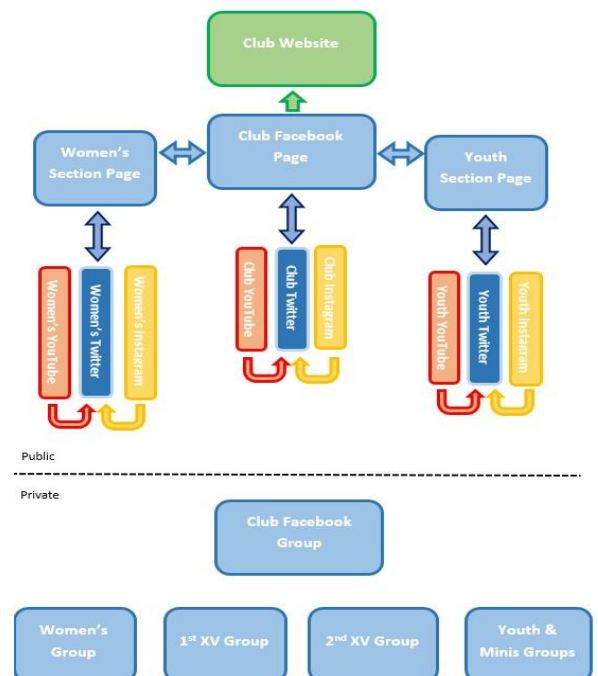
This guidance focusses on Facebook and Twitter as these are two of the most popular platforms (at the moment).

It is likely that someone at the club is already proficient in using social media and can be recruited to help (don't be scared to try things on your own but its better if two or three people are active). This person will probably be young (exactly who you are trying to target) which will help make the message appealing (peer-to-peer communication is best) and has the bonus of creating at least one relationship).

Some general guidelines are:

Plan

- Follow/like similar organisation/people and learn from them
- Know your audience (what do they like/want)
- Who can help? Get help
- How much time can you/they spare, when will you do it
- Structure ('public page' to attract, 'closed group' to organise)
- What are you going to post, what's the key message?
- Prepare batches of posts and schedule release
- Know what you are aiming for and measure it





Post Content

- Make conversations not just announcements; mention and interact with others in their 'own language'
- Be positive, show successes (they're shared more), don't post anything that can cause offence
- Keep public and outward facing (its purpose is to generate interest and support). Use closed group for mundane organisational posts.
- The 'Goldilocks' number of posts (too often-switch off, too few – don't see) just right depends on type

In contrast to many other initiatives (addressing the retention of transitioning players) integration of social media with the adult section is less important. More specific posts are likely to be more appealing and followers will gradually migrate to the adult page, perhaps as they see friends progress and succeed.

There is nothing to fear from jumping in and having a go at social media but doing so in a more planned fashion is likely to lead to better structure and content with more consistent activity. Dipping your toes in the water will not have an effect, it doesn't take much time but it should be regular.

Alumni Activities

Having implemented the previous two initiatives there should be an increasing pool of contacts to call upon. Offering a range of different types of activities will appeal to a greater number of former players and associates encouraging them to feel part of something and engage with the club. These activities could range from:

- Regular newsletter
- Key social events
- Challenges from different groups within the club (touch/non rugby)
- Reunions of teams
- Replay of classic matches
- Activity around big club matches
- Networking opportunities



- Host volunteers
- Name the players in old photos
- Exclusive offers

Care is needed to ensure that the frequency of activity and communication does not become off putting. Varying the method of communication may help achieve this; try to only use direct/invasive communication for the important or very specific events that would be of interest.