

***Lights Out and Away We Go:***

An analysis of the upcoming “F1” movie’s social media strategy

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MDST 3410: Social Media Strategies

Nov. 8, 2024

Formula 1 has been known for testing the limits of speed and captivating audiences since the 1950s. With a large influx of fan interest and each team competing for race wins and popularity amongst spectators and sponsors, it was no surprise when marketing became social media-driven.

Enter the upcoming 2025 film, *F1*. Announced in July after news broke out that on-track scenes would occur during the British Grand Prix, *F1* stars Brad Pitt as Sonny Hayes in what is to be the “most authentic racing film” to date (Motorsport.com, 2024).

Like authentic Formula 1 teams, *F1* has turned to social media to raise awareness for the upcoming film. Creating social media accounts for the movie’s fictional racing team, *Expensify APX GP*, and drivers Sonny Hayes and Joshua Pearce, the marketing reflects the current Formula 1 season by posting race results and updates for each Grand Prix.

While the movie is yet to be released until next year, the social media strategy has already created buzz and anticipation for the film. The team’s X account, a popular platform for Formula 1 content, has already gained almost 20 thousand followers and receives a range of engagement, anywhere from 10 thousand to 200 thousand impressions (@expensifyapxgp, 2023). Other platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, are also used. However, aside from Sonny Hayes’s Instagram page, which has just over 15 thousand followers, there has not been as much engagement on the other accounts linked to the film (Hayes, 2024).

The lack of interaction may result from mistrust, as most of APX’s accounts are unverified. Furthermore, the lack of context on their social media has led to confusion amongst fans, considering the accounts often post about race results that did not happen. While some users play into the narrative, others find it distasteful, especially when the win of a driver they support gets discredited for a fictional one.

The overall connection to the Formula 1 grid serves as a strength for this campaign. The APX team has direct access to the track, drivers, and other Grand Prix weekend accommodations, allowing them to produce authentic content that replicates that of real teams. Since filming occurred during the 2024 season, fans got a behind-the-scenes look at the film and anticipated cameos from their favourite drivers (Formula 1, 2024).

In hindsight, basing content on the 2024 Formula 1 season is smart to keep the film relevant, but APX’s marketing did not capitalize on the storytelling aspect that real teams play into. The story behind each team drives viewers to watch, and without those stories, engagement would be lower. It is why teams post silly content on TikTok or use popular culture references in tweets; it tells a story.

APX has done none of this, sticking to generic and often reposted static images. If they had revitalized their strategy by including more personalized content, they could have developed the storyline and showcased different aspects of the character beyond their races. Plus, they could have played more into trends and popular culture to generate more awareness from further audiences.

Overall, the current *F1* marketing has been quite compelling. As a fan of the sport, using social media was a smart way to build anticipation and relevance for the film. However, I would have executed it differently.

First, the campaign started too early, and following the 2024 season, it increased the confusion amongst audiences and prevented APX from building its storyline. Instead, I would have begun the campaign in January of 2025, as it marks the year the film will be released and the start of pre-season tests for the Formula 1. Gradually releasing content that reflects a Formula 1 team before the season starts would help fans acclimate to the fictional story and make it easier for people to follow along. Additionally, it allows *F1* to tie in with Netflix's new season of *Drive to Survive*, which typically releases at the same time and generates a lot of fan attention.

For the 2024 season, the social media team could use it to film content, such as the characters competing in silly challenges, behind-the-scenes clips of race days, and fan interactions to post for the 2025 launch. The team can also remain relevant by posting on the fictional drivers' accounts to showcase more about the characters' lives outside racing. More storytelling-based content can make fans more attached to the characters, enticing them to want to see the movie.

Following the launch, the APX team could collaborate with Formula 1 content creators to further cement the narrative. Like any sport, Formula 1 has a lot of discourse that many individuals use as their platform's focus. A collaboration, such as sending Formula 1 creators PR packages surrounding APX for them to discuss on their channels, can showcase *F1* in a fun and interactive way.

Outside of content strategy, the overarching change must occur with the name. The film's title, *F1*, overlaps too much with the sport's actual name, Formula 1, which is usually shortened to "F1". At the same time, the aim is to make the film as authentic as possible, titling it with the same name as the sport, which has increased confusion amongst audiences. Having a different title that reflects the sport would also help with the campaign's overall marketing.

Based on this updated strategy, *F1* would have a fresher, more authentic, and more interactive outlook, while aligning with the campaign's goals of building awareness and maintaining relevance. Yet, unlike the current campaign, there are elements of creative content that keep fans engaged in the movie's storyline. In conclusion, this strategy keeps fans in anticipation and

excitement for the film's release and to see their favourite drivers on screen, whether real or fictional.

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