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Atlanta Falcons

www.atlantafalcons.com**Introduction:**

My first impression of the Atlanta Falcons’ Web site was that it was very difficult to understand and it began to frustrate me because I could not find what I was looking for in the beginning. However, spending more time navigating around the site I began to realize how easy it was to understand. Naturally, my opinion of the Web site changed.

The Atlanta Falcons’ Web site is well thought out and easy to navigate; it had headings and drop-down menus that help to assist in finding more information. The headings included: news, team, schedule, video and photos, cheerleaders, on the air, tickets, fan experience, community, and store. These headings then had drop-down menus that went more in depth and had more options. Then, right above the main video highlight was choices that included: features, news, videos, and promotions. The Falcons’ Web site had plenty of videos and highlight clips of the team and various aspects involving the team. The biggest or most interesting thing happening to the team took up the most space in the center of the Web site and below that there were usually highlights of the team working with kids or the coaches speaking. Then, on the right side of the page there was a video and photo streaming area that allowed the viewer to watch a play highlight or pictures from a previous game. The homepage changed rather frequently, sometimes twice a day, but whatever the big story was, the one that was in the middle of the site, usually got brought down to a smaller video you could click on; it was a rotating cycle I became to realize. In my opinion, the Falcons’ Web site was amazing, it updated frequently, there was contact information and literally everything was a click away.

**Presence of PR:**

The biggest area on the Falcons’ Web site that dealt with community, media or public relations was basically the heading that said, “Community”. This involved community news and community programs. Under “Community News” there were news releases that were updated just as often as the game news releases were; PR definitely played a part in this. Also, the Falcon store could be considered customer relations along with buying tickets and how to purchase them. But I really felt that PR had its biggest involvement just by updating the site as much as they did.

**PR Staff/ Management:**

Finding the list of employees was a little more difficult and it was not as easy as I wanted it to be. Although, once I figured it out it made sense; the staff list was under “Front Office” down at the bottom of the page. Not very practical, but once you got to the staff list it was very easy to understand. The employees were broken down into sections based on what they did. There were three sections dedicated to media these included: Football Communications, Community Relations, and Digital Media.

**Football Communications:**

Frank Kleha Senior Director of Media Relations

Brian Cearns Football Communications Coordinator

Matt Haley Football Communications Coordinator

Jimmy Cribb Team Photographer

**Community Relations:**

Kendyl Moss Director of Community Relations

Chris Millman Community Relations and Youth Programs Manager

Liz Serpico Community Relations Coordinator

Chato Waters Cheerleader Coordinator

Jakene Ashford Junior Cheerleader Coordinator

Lea Bond Administrative Assistant - Youth Foundation\

**Digital Media:**

Dan Levak Director of New Media

James Hicks Digital Media Designer

Matthew Moore Video Services Coordinator

Robert Gilkes Video Production Coordinator

Sometimes the person would have a personal page and if they did, it just gave a biography, but no list of duties they performed.

**Interview:**

However, I did interview the Football Communications Coordinator, Brian Cearns. Getting the interview was surprisingly easy; the first time I called I reached his voicemail, but the second time I was connected to his personal line. I told him I was with Oklahoma State University’s Athletic Department and wanted to ask him a few basic questions regarding his position and what a normal day for him was like.

Brian Cearns is a graduate of Kennesaw State University, which is located outside of Atlanta, Georgia. Cearns graduated with a degree in Sports Management and did his practicum two days a week with the athletic department, which put him working about 40 hours a week. He landed his job with the Falcons through the local arena football program; he started with an internship and worked his way up the success latter. Cearns said that a typical day for him is anywhere between 12 to 16 hours, but he must be available whenever. He also mentioned that there are interns working with him and other team members that assist with the daily responsibilities. He said that when he first arrives at work he updates the news articles and communicates with the head coach and general manager any big issues or news that they might need to know. Then, they prepare interview points for the head coach and player so they will not be blindsided by reporters, in essence they tell them what to say. Next, they talk to the players to ensure that they understand issues they might be involved with and how to answer the questions responsibly and with the best interest of the team. The interview concluded with him saying that if I had more questions to contact him and he would be happy to answer them. Overall, the interview was fairly short and went very well; I did not think I would be able to get through or that he would be interested in answering questions. It was a pleasant surprise. I spoke with Brian Cearns he did not have an e-mail address or even a personal page. I contacted him through the number listed on the Web site 770-965-3115 and asked to speak to someone with Public Relations or Media Relations.

**Strategic Goal of the Web site:**

In my opinion, the strategic goal of the Web site is inform fans about what is happening within the organization. I feel this way because there are numerous amounts of news articles and video highlights that are updated frequently; usually within the hour it will be updated if something newsworthy happens. The publics of the team are definitely the Atlanta community and the fans.

The Atlanta community is prominent because the Falcons have various philanthropies in which they are involved; most of which are for the youth. The Falcons are involved in: First Down for Fitness, Read with a Falcon, Atlanta FalCan Food Drive, Toys for Tots, Community Quarterback Award, Youth Weekend at Training Camp, Falcons Football Academy, Atlanta Falcons Junior Cheerleaders, Heroes in the Classroom, Hometown Huddle, Falcons Fitness Flag Crew, Atlanta Falcons Women’s Associations, Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration, and Breast Cancer Awareness. The community is definitely addressed in their Web site because there is a heading on the main page that leads to a more in depth view; in the community, youth and prep football, and youth foundation. The community is definitely at the heart of the Falcons’ organization; in my opinion.

Then, of course the fans; the fans also drive the organization, but in a different way. The Web site is set up to offer information for the fans and allows fans to watch videos, read blogs, and feel as connected to their team as possible. Also, just like the community, there is a heading that is dedicated to “Fan Experience”. This allows fans to get texts and other social media, connect to the mobile Web site, and get information about game day and the Georgia Dome.

There was not a mission statement of the Atlanta Falcons, but there was one for the National Football League. Mission Statement: To challenge National Football League players to be lifelong learners while pursuing continuous improvement in family relations, social interactions, personal growth and career development during and beyond their careers as NFL players. There also was not a vision statement for the team.

**Communication of the Web site:**

The Web site was updated frequently; sometimes even hourly. You could tell this because the smaller stories showed when they were last updated. The Falcons communication department did a great job, in my opinion, staying on top of stories and really making sure their fans had all the information possible. The topics of the news releases, which were on the main page, usually were pertaining to the team or the NFL, but occasionally there would be a story regarding an organization they were helping. The stories involved player appearances, previous or upcoming games, injuries and anything big with the team. I cannot say enough that it updated frequently; it was great. However, community news was found in the under the community section and that was updated just as frequently. Many articles were would say, “last updated 4 hours ago” or even “last updated 1 hour ago” it really allowed the fans, and even myself, to feel like they were getting up to the hour news.

Then, another section I thought was nice was the “Official Injury List” this listed the updated injury list for the Falcons and the team they were playing that week. Along with this there was a video and photo section that gave updated news stories and postgame interviews.

**Team News in October:**

The Atlanta Falcons had a pretty busy month of October. Their news stories did not just pertain to football. They announced the winner of the FalCan school challenge, Owens was named the October Community All-Star, they honored breast cancer survivors, Matt Ryan was a finalist for the FedEx Award, Cornerback Deion Sanders was inducted into the team’s prestigious Ring of Honor, Gearing Up for the FalCan Food Drive, they participated in the Hometown huddle event, and they honored the CEO and Owner Arthur Blank as Atlanta’s Council for Quality for Growth 2010. These are just a few of the non game related news stories that happened in October because the rest of the stories dealt with games and transcripts with the coach or players. The news stories were focused on what happened during the game or what could be expected in an upcoming game. All the news stories were featured on the homepage and usually had some sort of video or photos that accompanied them to fully set the scene.

**Multi-Media:**

The Falcons had a great social media network. They had all the outlets available to the fans. Fans could receive information via text message or the other social media norms such as: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and message boards. Also, on the Web site you could see Tweets from the Falcons and how long ago they were updated. The multi-media aspect of the Falcons Web site really gave the fans a variety of ways to be involved because if you did not follow them on Twitter or Facebook you could receive texts or vice versa.

**Conclusion:**

Compared to how some of the other team’s Web sites were set up, I feel that the Atlanta Falcons did a wonderful job of keeping the fans informed and being available. The PR department really does update the news articles as often and Mr. Cearns said and that was prominent in the experience. Also, just being able to get through to someone in the Communications Department I feel really says a lot about how connected to their fan base this organization is. The only thing that I would change would just be to put the “Front Office” information at the top of the site instead of the bottom. Their Web site was extremely well thought-out and broken down into sections that help to navigate.