

Retroactive cofounder Mike Sharman on personal marketing with MatchKit

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This month's Marketing Mastermind is Mike Sharman, Retroactive cofounder. He discusses MatchKit.



Mike Sharman, cofounder of Retroactive

How did this idea come about?

I travelled to Anfield just before the hard lockdown. I'm a huge Liverpool fan and wanted to watch the team play at home before they won the League, which – fortunately – they did. So I returned home on a high, but then global and local sport came to a grinding halt.

If you play for Liverpool, you earn enough money through your salary and sponsorships to carry you through lockdown. But what about the athletes at national and community level who only make money when they play and don't have sponsorships to rely on?

Statistically, the average athlete is bankrupt within five years of retiring. The big-league athletes get used to a certain lifestyle that they can't sustain when they retire. So, they find it difficult to adapt to life after sport and a more frugal way of living.

We came up with [MatchKit](#) as way to help athletes with their personal marketing and to generate additional income through merchandise sales and crowdfunding. It's like a digital CV and ecosystem for athletes that incorporates the social aspects of Instagram and Facebook.

[Bryan Habana](#), who co-founded Retroactive with me in 2018, was the poster child for MatchKit. He's a savvy businessman and the epitome of personal branding which is why he's sponsored by the likes of Mastercard, Oakley, HSBC, and Land

Rover.

Why was there a need for a solution like MatchKit?

Because none existed and we spotted a gap. We were unique in that we had a fintech aspect within a sports universe.

Probably only 1% of athletes have personal websites – people like Serena Williams, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Lewis Hamilton. But they also have teams and agents to support them with that.

Even Siya Kolisi, who became the most marketable rugby player in the world overnight because of what his captainship meant for our country, our nation, and also for other rugby playing nations around the world, didn't have a website.

MatchKit makes personal branding relevant and accessible and it's easy for athletes to share a link to their profiles through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or any other social platform.

How does it work?

MatchKit is a platform for athletes to manage their brands, earn more, and engage with fans and sponsors. It offers all the features of a full-blown website with the ease of a social media account, plus e-commerce and automated reporting, giving athletes full control of their digital brands.

There's also a merchandise element where the athlete uploads a logo and MatchKit sources clothing and handles shipping and returns.

Tell us about your campaign approach.

It was ultimately a coordinated PR campaign that allowed us to leverage our founders' social media followers. Between us, we have 1.5 million to 2 million followers across various channels.

With Bryan Habana being a global sporting icon and our credible co-founder, we went to market by targeting the rugby media. We approached local sports writers, rugby writers in Australasia, Asia, Europe, and South America, and a few niche writers in the United States.

And what were the results?

We launched MatchKit on 3 June 2020. In the first month, we signed up athletes with a collective global social media fandom of about 2.7 million people, so it exploded right out of the gate.

We signed up the South American Rugby Championship players who came from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentina.

A year later and we're really making an impact and gaining traction. Collectively, the athletes we've signed up have reached 6.78 million fans around the world and their MatchKit profiles have been viewed 85,000 times.

Rugby players form our largest user base, followed by hockey, cycling, football, and water polo. We've signed the USA Olympic swimming team, golfers, world champion bodyboarder. It's quite a mix.

Where there any unexpected results?

Heavy Chef named MatchKit among the top five start-ups of 2020.

We were also accepted into the AlphaCode fintech accelerator programme. We made it into the top four and unlocked a further R500,000 in funding, so we really hit the ground running. It's been a rollercoaster. The year has flown by but I'm super proud of what we've achieved.

Do you have a stand-out memory from this campaign?

South African hockey always gets the short end of the stick – no pun intended – when it comes to financial support. The team was devastated when SASCOC decided not to send them to the Tokyo Olympics.

We approached the team about eight months ago and proposed using MatchKit and our PR capabilities to see if we could crowdfund the money to get them to the Olympics. We created profiles for all the players, and, in every interview, we made sure to mention MatchKit and the crowdfunding drive.

The coach's profile was viewed 7,000 times in the last three months, and we've raised R300,000 so far. It's nowhere near what they would need to get to the Olympics, but it proved that there was definitely something in our model.

But that wasn't even the best part.

Because of the pressure this campaign applied to the body through every major radio, TV, news, and lifestyle show, SASCOC announced last week that they would send the men's and women's hockey teams to the Tokyo Olympics.

That gave me goosebumps. Deeply caring about people is kind of our thing. If we can enable and empower athletes, then we've achieved what we set out to – and it's just the beginning.

Care to share future plans?

By the time this is published, we would have launched our new education module, which we're very excited about. It includes videos on things like 'Social Media 101 for athletes', how to post on the various channels, how to make better content for Instagram.

We've also got a financial literacy section that will deal with things like planning and investing.

We joke about being the Avengers of Sport because so many of our experiences, our networks, and our 'powers' have combined to form this. We've got Bryan, we've got Ben Karpinski with his ultimate understanding of sports fandom, and my digital and PR experience, and we're bringing it all together to help athletes.

What was your biggest learning?

Initially we charged athletes \$20 a month to subscribe to our services. But for some athletes who aren't sure when their next pay cheque is coming, where their next meal is coming from, and who have had to sleep in their cars, \$20 was a bridge too far.

So, we changed our approach and targeted the teams and brands to sponsor athletes' subscriptions. It's why we've been able to sign up quite a few Puma and Cobra golfers, who are sponsored by Betway. We're always looking for ways to take the financial burden off the individual and have the team or sponsor cover it. That way, both sides benefit. The team gets the collective value of a group of golfers and the individual can position themselves more professionally.

We're able to pull data insights and analytics from the Instagram API that we report back to the teams who, in turn, report back to sponsors or potential sponsors. Being able to show sponsors that, through Instagram, these players reached six million people over and above traditional media starts quantifying the value of teams.

How can people get in touch?

Athletes can go to matchkit.co, set up a MatchKit website in five minutes, and start a free 30-day trial.

They simply register and connect their Facebook and Instagram accounts. Instagram should be set to a 'Business' or 'Creator' account to enable the platform's analytics functionality through secure APIs.

For now, MatchKit is only available as a mobile web app, via matchkit.co. We're still thinking about creating a full-blown app.