

Public Relations Proposal for Improving Image of Jake Smith

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Project Description

Highly touted Auburn University Football Quarterback Jake Smith, who came to Auburn on scholarship through the transfer portal from Ohio State University, was named Auburn's starter at QB this past fall. Four games in, he's thrown five interceptions, was benched for this past week's game, and now faces a challenge. He came to Auburn through the support of the coaching staff and university, but also received significant Name Image and Likeness (NIL) funds from sponsors and Auburn's NIL Collective. He'd like to continue to increase the number of sponsors, but he's now also focused on keeping the ones he has – his family relies on that money for support as they are lower income and his father recently lost his job at an automotive factory. He has decided to hire a publicist (you) to help improve his image, not only on campus, but also in the community and among key donors, alumni and existing and potential sponsors. Everyone is criticizing him on campus for his game performance, but all signs are pointing to him starting next week. What will you recommend to help him build his image back, gain favor amongst supporters and sponsors and attract new supporters so he can support his family?

Research

The 3 types of research that I will use to help the client restore his image, gain favor amongst supporters and sponsors and attract new supporters and sponsors are Qualitative, Organization and Quantitative research.

Qualitative research would serve the goal of humanizing the client in a way that would seem genuine and not artificially provoked. I think this method does this better than other research methods because it allows for more objective measures to be taken where the public would make judgments for themselves based on the interviews that we provide. I think leaving the interviews unedited and raw would help with this as well. I would conduct interviews of different family members affected by the clients NIL funds, as well as different spokespeople on campus to communicate how the Auburn Family shows up for each other in times of need. This is all going to be primary research completed by the contracted publicist.

Organization research would serve to figure out what NIL was initially created for and how it is perceived in the public eye. Also in this research method I would incorporate the Auburn creed to provide a sense of togetherness when facing this problem. By researching the organizational aspects of NIL and Auburn as a whole, I think we would be able to better explain the purposes and benefits of supporting NIL to current and potential donors. As a part of organizational research, I think it would be beneficial to engage in social media research by looking at athletes that are really popular not for their success on the field but for their relatability on social media. (Look at Dylan Cardwell, he is not the best basketball player but still receives a good amount of NIL funds due to his presence on social media and engaging with

students and sponsors). I think this type of research encompasses a wide variety of options to research physical documents for these organizations.

Quantitative research would aid in the process of running the numbers for the different metrics that we would need to collect in terms of current and future NIL partners. The ability to run numbers is why I think this is the best research method for these objectives. I think the numbers aspect of Quantitative research would help with expectation management in terms of what the client foresees as his goal of NIL funds. Running numbers like the percentage of season ticket holders that have a salary of over six figures or the percentage of current NIL contributors that make enough money to continue to contribute would be useful.

Target publics

The specific publics that I would like to target for this plan are Auburn Students, Current NIL Investors and Sponsors, and Season Ticket Holders. Auburn students are the pride and joy of the Auburn Family. When the students aren't happy the investors are not happy. It all starts with the students. The Season Ticket Holders are the people that I want to target for new NIL partners and sponsorships. If they are willing to come to almost every home football game, even in losing seasons, I would bet that they would be willing to partner with On To Victory to provide support for athletes even if they are still working on performing at the top of their game.

- Demographic information for Target Publics
 - Students
 - 34,145 Students at Auburn University
 - Gender and Ethnicity (Auburn Office of Institutional Research)
 - White Males account for 12,984 students
 - White Females account for 13,978 students
 - Black Males account for 710 students
 - Black Females account for 918 students
 - American Indian Males account for 38 students
 - American Indian Females account for 48 students
 - Asian Males account for 489 students
 - Asian Females account for 496 students
 - Hawaiian Males account for 12 students
 - Hawaiian Females account for 11 students
 - Hispanic Males account for 746 students
 - Hispanic Females account for 778 students
 - Total Male population is 16,671 students
 - Total Female population is 17,474 students
 - Economic status (US News and Data USA)

- "The average need-based scholarship or grant awarded to first-year students at Auburn University was \$11,912. Additionally, 35% of first-year students received need-based financial aid in fall 2022."
- 65% of Auburn students were awarded funding through FAFSA in 2022
- Current NIL and Sponsorship Contributors
 - Minimum contribution for On To Victory is \$17 a month which is \$204 a year, which shows that current NIL supporters don't have to be in the top 1% of the economic bracket.
 - The reality is most of the donors are large businesses that have their roots in Auburn. Those business men and women would be in the top 1%
 - Sponsors are almost always businesses like Gatorade, Room2Room Movers with Towns McGough.
 - Nearly 73% of donations are allocated to football at any given university, which could be assumed to mean that NIL donors care the most about football when compared to other sports.
- Season Ticket Holders
 - Usually either Auburn Grads themselves or have kids at Auburn.
 - This would mean that most would be able to afford Auburn tuition and living expenses for their student.
 - If they are Auburn parents, "The median family income of a student from Auburn is \$143,000, and 65% come from the top 20 percent" (New York Times). This means that they are probably in a place to contribute to NIL if they so choose.
 - The average season ticket package is \$1,680 a year, plus taxes and fees. This would also contribute to my hypothesis that these are the people that we need to be asking for NIL support.
- Psychographic information for Target Publics
 - Students
 - Generally not mature enough to emotionally regulate when a loss comes
 - Tend to blame the person first available, or the most obvious contributor to the problem. In this case, the leader of the team being the quarterback.
 - This generation uses social media to promote their ideas no matter how extreme
 - Generally most are somewhat intoxicated at football games, which inhibits their capacity to understand what is actually happening in front of them
 - Current NIL and Sponsorship Contributors
 - Have an attitude of pretentiousness when being asked for more money. More of a "what's in it for me" kind of attitude.

- Independent NIL contributors probably have more of an eye on the success of the program.
- Somewhat of a lack of connection to the “Auburn Family”, which would lead to a lack of care for the family based campaign.
- Season Ticket Holders
 - Most Season Ticket Holders are long time Auburn fans that have a better sense of the ups and downs of Auburn football.
 - A good amount will have students enrolled at Auburn, which would mean that they come to games to visit their students as well. These people would be less likely to just give up their tickets because they are coming for more than just watching football.
 - Care more about the success of the program than anybody because they have been there through the ups and downs. More likely to contribute out of care for the future than for momentary success.

Goals

I have two main goals for this PR initiative, they are as follows: to increase the motivation of my public so that they are more inclined to support athletes and their families through NIL and to spur awareness of the diverse lives of athletes in every sport.

Key Message

“It is more than a game.”

Objectives

- Informational Awareness Objective: Name Recognition for family members
 - An integral part of most PR initiatives involves promoting name recognition among target publics. While name recognition usually refers to companies, brands or products, I think it could be beneficial, for this initiative, for the target publics to be able to recall the names of the clients' family members that their positive or negative support involves. A good starting point would be, at game time this Saturday, 50% of current NIL donors, 75% of students and season ticket holders, and 25% of sponsors can recall one member of the clients family that are directly impacted by their contributions. We would measure this through a survey of all donors and students released in the “Pregame Festivities” in Jordan Hare Stadium as well as sent out via email.
- Attitude objectives: Decreasing Negative Attitudes and Increasing Positive Attitudes

- For decreasing negative attitudes among students and season ticket holders
 - Hopefully the personalization of the client and his family will help decrease the negative attitudes of students and season ticket holders, the people that are sitting through the unsuccessful games and continually coming back to support despite losses. I think a good starting point for this is, by the time the starting quarterback is announced, negative social media posts decrease by 25%. In other words, if before this initiative 75% of tweets about our client were negative tweets and 25% positive, after this initiative 50% of tweets about our client were negative and 50% positive. This would also be a simple survey of the tweets associated with our clients name.
- For increasing positive attitudes among students and season ticket holders
 - One thing that I think could help with positive attitudes are getting old players that have been successful for Auburn Football to come out and make statements in support of our client. It is understandably hard for lifelong Auburn fans to listen to new coaches talk about new players that are not succeeding. I think the most important platforms for this are the Auburn Football Instagram, Twitter, and ESPN or the SEC Network (something televised). A good objective for this would be at least 3 former players releasing 1 statement on each platform by game time on Saturday. I think Cam Newton (fellow QB), Charles Barkley (Auburn Superstar) and Chris Davis (Kick 6) would be great candidates for this.
- For increasing positive attitudes among NIL contributors
 - I think one aspect that would help with people contributing their hard earned money would be showing them the work being put in outside of the game to get better every week. One objective for the week before the game would be to have a day where Auburn Football hosts the NIL Contributors to a day where they go and watch practice (like an A Day kind of situation but just for donors). It would be called “On to Victory Day”, after the name of the NIL Collective at Auburn University. A goal for that would be 55% attendance for all NIL Contributors on the day that Auburn Football decides will be a day of real practice (not walkthroughs). We would take attendance, and maybe give the coaches an opportunity to talk to the contributors and an opportunity for the contributors to ask questions.
- Behavior objectives
 - I would like to see the students start to get behind our client by posting positive commentary on social media throughout the week, staying the whole game, cheering etc. I would like to see the season ticket holders consider contributing to

NIL through the different efforts that we have throughout the week to show them the other side to these contributions. I would like to see current NIL contributors not pull their funds after a couple weeks of bad play, but instead be reinvigorated with the contributions that they are making and the confidence that those contributions are changing the clients family life.

Strategies and Tactics

- Strategy 1: Increase positive attitudes around the client by increasing our use of social media platforms, thus creating a pseudo virtual friendship element to the audience's interactions with the client. The best practice that I would be using for this strategy is “Influencer Engagement”, which basically means that you hire influencers to engage with your plan of promoting your client to the public.
 - Tactic 1: Getting 3 former Auburn football players “Influencers” to post on their individual accounts in support of Auburn Football. Their statements are geared more towards why they love Auburn Football regardless of wins or losses.
 - Tactic 2: Have the client do a social media takeover where they take the audience through a “day in the life”. This would serve to humanize the client, and bring the fans closer to the real life aspect of a college athlete.
 - Tactic 3: Holding a “Media Day”, but for social media influencers to interact with Auburn Football players. Perhaps a day of practice or a day of walk throughs where different engaging influencers are invited to come make content with the team and especially the client.

- Strategy 2: Decrease negative attitudes around the client by putting intentional time and effort into the relationships that the client and the organization have with students, donors, and potential donors. This best practice is called “Relationship Management”, which means that you put effort into managing the relationships that have input into your clients reputation.
 - Tactic 1: To effectively manage relationships with students, we will hold a live open scrimmage like they do for Auburn Basketball. Separate from “A-Day”, this scrimmage would be just for students and would hopefully increase positive attitudes toward the client, coach and team as a whole.
 - Tactic 2: To effectively manage relationships with donors, we will hold something similar to what we would for students. Another event separate from “A-Day”, donors will be given the opportunity to sit in on a full padded practice accompanied with a post practice live Q&A session.
 - Tactic 3: Potential donors: To effectively manage relationships with donors, we will use the email function that all season ticket holders sign up for to release first hand exposés of the lives of the family of our client.

Evaluation

- Informational Awareness Objective: Name Recognition for family members
 - Evaluation method: At game time this Saturday, during the “Pregame Festivities”, we will put a QR code on the Jumbotron that would link to a survey of Auburn football players. This would act almost as a sort of trivia game. Our goal would be that 50% of current NIL donors, 75% of students and season ticket holders, and 25% of sponsors would be able to recall at least one member of the client's family that is directly impacted by their contributions. This survey would also be sent out through email to all donors and season ticket holders.

- Attitude objectives: Decreasing Negative Attitudes and Increasing Positive Attitudes
 - Evaluation method 1: By the time the starting quarterback is announced, negative social media posts decrease by 25%. In other words, if before this initiative 75% of tweets about our client were negative tweets and 25% positive, after this initiative 50% of tweets about our client were negative and 50% positive. This would also be a simple survey of the social media posts associated with our clients name, which would take an algorithm made by a contracted computer analyst.
 - Evaluation method 2: This objective was all about receiving positive feedback and credibility by using the opinions of popular former players like Cam Newton, Charles Barkley or Chris Davis. I think we would evaluate this objective by looking at how well this content was engaged with, especially in comparison to previous posts before our efforts began. This means surveying like counts, repostings, comments etc.
 - Evaluation method 3: This objective was in concern to the “On to Victory Day”. A goal for that day would be 55% attendance for all NIL Contributors. We would take attendance through an RSVP sent out before the event.

- Behavior objectives: Amount of positive content being posted and shared
 - Evaluation method for students: This objective was all about student participation before, during and after the game. Posting positive commentary on social media throughout the week, staying the whole game, and cheering are all part of this objective. We would measure social media goals by surveying hot words or hashtags through the same algorithms previously mentioned. We would measure the volume of students staying until the Alma mater by using the data the university collects for “block seating”. We would measure cheering by taking the data from the decibel monitor in Jordan Hare Stadium.

- Evaluation method for season ticket holders: Consider contributing to NIL through the different efforts that we have throughout the week to show them the other side to these contributions. We would evaluate this by one, looking at the number of new donors after our efforts, and also sending out all season ticket holders a survey asking how likely they are before, during and after the game to donate to NIL.
 - Survey:
 - Before the game Q: “On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely are you to contribute to NIL?”
 - During the game (Halftime) Q: “On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely are you to contribute to NIL?”
 - After the game: “On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely are you to contribute to NIL?”
- Evaluation method for current donors: The objective here is to see current donors continue contributing despite a couple weeks of less than ideal results, and be reinvigorated through the different resources given through this PR Plan, with the confidence that their contributions are changing the clients life and the life of his family. This would be evaluated by keeping a close eye on how the contributions are increasing or decreasing and cross referencing that data with the different social media and personnel stunts we are doing.