

## Sports Geek Nation AMA with Alistair Hogg

Alistair Hogg is a communications professional who is passionate about digital media. His decade of experience spans from various sports and clubs in Australia before heading to Dubai to be the Digital Content Manager of the International Cricket Council. The ICC is the global governing body for cricket and Alistair is the one responsible for its digital content and social media production and distribution as well as overseeing the content operations for world events including the Cricket World Cup.

Connect with Alistair Hogg on [LinkedIn](#), Twitter [@alistairjhogg](#) or [@AlistairICC](#) and Slack [@alistairjhogg](#)

Find out more about International Cricket Council at <http://www.icc-cricket.com/>

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

**Q. [Sean Callanan](#):** I'll kick things off with an easy one. What is it like working in Dubai? What is the sports business scene like there?

**A. [Alistair Hogg](#):** Thanks [@seancallanan](#), Dubai is a fascinating place to live and work and is one of the reasons I accepted this job around 18 months ago now. There's a lot to get used to besides the obvious climate, but the city (and broader region) is ultimately whatever you want it to be.

It's a great time zone for business (particularly working in a sport like cricket) but on a personal level, it also opens up many travel doors that you wouldn't likely consider as an Australian - India, Oman, Jordan, the 'Stans' and even the Emirates themselves.

The sports business scene is quite niche to be honest and I am definitely keen to reach out to anyone else in the MENA region through this group! While there are a number of sporting events (Abu Dhabi F1, tennis and golf in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi, football internationals etc.) it's certainly a very different local landscape compared to Australia, the US or Europe.

**Q. [Andrew Walton](#):** where do you see innovation on social channels, particularly Instagram, playing a part in engagement at ICC events ahead.

**A. [Alistair Hogg](#):** Thanks [@andrewwaltonx](#). Talking about Instagram specifically, we are placing an increased emphasis on Stories. Not only does it allow you to provide a 'blow-by-blow' account of a sporting event without spamming a conventional social feed, but it facilitates engagement with polls, questions, interactivity and the 'swipe up' traffic it can drive back to a website is incredible. I'm not a fan of click bait whatsoever, but there's only so much you can explain on a Story slide, so having the ability to link someone back to an article, or a match centre for full coverage, or a video is fantastic.

I also like the fact that an IG Story can be 'imperfect' with images snapped on the go, annotated and unfiltered, unlike your traditional IG feed which was typically a show reel of high quality content (although that's certainly not to say that there's no place for this on the Story). In many cases, you'll see a team or league post a really slick, gorgeously designed templated graphic to promote a game, then the next screen will be a vertical snap outside the arena with a location tag.

One of the things we occasionally find challenging in an ICC event context is simultaneous/overlapping games. At some events, we've had as many as four games being played at once in different parts of a country, which can make a timeline or story look jumpy if you try to cover everything, so we scale back a little on days like that and only provide the key updates. Thankfully next year's Cricket World Cup only has six days where the second innings of a day game overlaps with the first innings of the night game.

The exciting (and challenging) think about this part of the sports industry is that we never know what's coming next, so need to remain open minded and agile to pivot and adapt strategy when required.

And just on the above, I also think it's worth mentioning Twitter. Lately there's been a lot of talk about the changing algorithm which has resulted in a more curated, less chronological feed. Users will have their own opinion on how this alters their experience, but for any brand that uses Twitter to cover or follow a LIVE event, this certainly bears consideration into how the platform is used within your game-day/event strategy.

**Sean Callanan:** Agree @alistairjhogg the "Twitter is where live happens" slogan died with algorithm changes and it took away from Twitter's USP for mine

**Q. [Olivier Spaeth](#):** How do you deal with the fact that cricket is mostly a "commonwealth" sports and it is not as global as football, for example ? Even if you probably have almost 2 billions fans over the world.

**A. Alistair Hogg:** Hi @Olivier Spaeth. Thanks for the question - lots to unpack there!

While cricket is not a core sport in as many countries as football for instance, the numbers emanating from countries in which it IS popular are immense, and is the backbone to our digital success.

In the past week, the ICC Facebook page has experienced more than double the engagement of the FIFA World Cup, F1, US Open, Premier League, MLB, NBA and NFL. We of course take this with a grain of salt, as there are far broader considerations and

metrics to take into account, but it goes to show the immense power of our global fan base, even if concentrated to certain regions.

What it also shows is the pulling power of platforms such as Facebook across the subcontinent. While the platform has been facing some publicly reported challenges in other parts of the world, it remains incredibly strong throughout Asia and actually has the fastest-growing digital ad market:

<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/04/in-india-google-races-to-parry-the-rise-of-facebook.html>

So while we may not currently have the global breadth of a sport like football, the fans we do have are vast in volume, passionate about the game and digitally engaged.

Of course one day we want to see cricket played in more countries (we have a development team that works tirelessly each day to grow the game) and digital is also a key driver of that particular strategy. We're on the record as saying that we are working for cricket to be part of the Olympic Games and the T20 format particularly has been identified as a key driver of growth, both for established, but especially for emerging nations to embrace the sport.

We recently released the results of a global research survey which contains more information and context if you'd like to read more:

<https://www.icc-cricket.com/media-releases/759733>

**Q. Joliegee:** how can you compare working with Cricket & Super Rugby?

**A. Alistair Hogg:** Thanks @joliegee - two very different sports and organisations.

SANZAAR (the coalition of rugby unions from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Argentina) is appointed by these federations to run Super Rugby and The Rugby Championship. What most people don't realise is that as an organisation, SANZAAR is very lean (just seven people when I was there) and is more of a 'management company' than a true governing body, as the power and resourcing is ultimately held at federation level.

A good example is the fact that each rugby union had their own naming rights sponsor for the tournament in their territory. It was ultimately more financially beneficial for each to do their own local deal than to procure a global competition sponsor. As such, anything we pushed from the centralised global accounts was clean (which was an operational blessing, but a commercial drawback).

One of the things I enjoyed about rugby was building the social brand from scratch to north of a million. While those numbers pale in comparison to cricket's footprint, it was a thoroughly enjoyable few seasons where we experimented online, had a lot of success, some failures and learned from all of these. The rugby community is quite 'informal'

compared to cricket. Memes and banter generally went down extremely well and while they can often do so for the ICC, you need to pick your moments a bit more carefully. Unlike SANZAAR where we were communicating as a popular sporting competition, the ICC are global custodians of the gentlemanly game of cricket (like World Rugby would be for their sport). In all cases, you will have positive and negative reactions when you push the boundaries on digital platforms, but I've found the cricket audience to be generally more conservative and require a bit more care in planning and executing.

Another major difference between the roles is the scale of resourcing. In rugby, we had a basic match centre which was largely automated statistics. In cricket, I've been fortunate enough to have this, in addition to bespoke in-game highlight clipping, live commentary, blogs, statistical overviews and a team of staff across India and the United Kingdom to oversee social, as well as on-ground presence at major and pathway events. We have news desks in Bangalore and London (and a few staff here at Dubai HQ), rotating around the clock to keep the website and social platforms refreshed and up to date with the latest cricket content.

At Super Rugby, 100% of the website and social output was me, which I thoroughly enjoyed, but was ultimately unsustainable beyond the years I was there, watching rugby at all hours. Here, I've had the opportunity to take a step back and become more strategic and 'bigger picture' than being the nuts and bolts of the output, although I admittedly miss the adrenaline from time to time!

The other noticeable difference is the audience size, demographic and therefore the way in which you engage with them. Rugby was predominantly the countries of the southern hemisphere, plus the UK, Ireland and a bit of the Americas. Cricket is obviously skewed heavily toward the subcontinent which impacts the times you post, how you post, what you post, the platforms you use and brings more language considerations into play (which is on our roadmap).

In summary, I love both roles for different reasons! Rugby was incredibly good to me and proved an immensely enjoyable and successful three seasons of digital brand development while cricket brings a much larger audience and with it, broader commercial obligations but also opportunities to drive growth and success.

**Q. [Tod Caflisch](#):** as a sports tech junkie I'm curious what cool new technology you're seeing incorporated into the cricket fan journey or to aid the teams in competitive advantage.

**A. [Alistair Hogg](#):** Hi @Tod Caflisch. Not one I can shed much light on (yet) as our digital roadmap for the Cricket World Cup is currently in progress.

In Q1-Q2 next year, we'll be able to reveal some cool products and innovations around enhancing the fan's CWC experience, whether they are attending 10 games in the UK or watching from their living room on the other side of the world.

We're also in the process of onboarding with a new infographic provider and a new social media management platform; both of which will help us streamline our digital output, among other benefits - but neither of which I have much actionable insight from at this stage.

Sorry if this answer hasn't provided much context! It's an inopportune time for the question as we adopt some new tech and refine existing plans for next year. Please DM me and I'd be happy to create a reminder to get in touch in early 2019!

**Sean Callanan:** I was chatting with someone who was discussing putting tech inside the cricket ball to measure speed, power etc. I'll find out more and come back to you, it sounded like it would enhance broadcast as well as coaching

**Tod Caflich:** I love the idea but certainly not a new. I don't think MLB has done it yet but NHL and NFL have. Lots of great data to be collected for player development, competitive advantage and broadcast.

**Sean Callanan:** Yeah execution always beat ideas @Tod Caflich will be interesting to see if they can get it to work

**Q. [ilvettojr](#) (Marco Vettoretti):** How many people work with you in the Comms area of ICC? Do you outsource some stuff to agencies of third parties?

**A. Alistair Hogg:** Hi @ilvettojr. For the first time in my career, my social/digital role sits under Commercial, rather than Media/Communications. Our Commercial team consists of around 25 and is responsible for functions such as sponsorship, marketing, broadcast, media rights and digital. Our website/social team within that broader matrix consists of three (1 x product, 2 x content) however there is a great deal of overlap with our sponsorship team as well. Ultimately, what any of us do has broader impacts in other areas, so it's a very close-working team.

We operate news desks in Bangalore and London which are outsourced (but managed by the ICC) and scale up when required for major tournaments. This team is imperative to our digital operations as it gives us the bandwidth to watch and cover the game 24/7, which simply couldn't happen with three sets of eyes in Dubai that are predominantly focusing on more strategic projects. We also have a video editor in-house, but some video and graphic production is also done externally depending on requirements, and upscaled for ICC events.

**Sean Callanan:** It's always interesting to see where Digital sits under, thanks @alistairjhogg

**Ilvettojr:** Thank you for the very detailed answer, @alistairjhogg! The size of Comms/Digital teams is probably the topic I'm mostly interested in.

**Q. Sean Callanan:** what was your biggest social/digital lesson working at Sydney Airport?

**A. Alistair Hogg:** These examples aren't specific to Sydney Airport. In fact, it's interesting how many lessons, insights and experiences transcend industry and office.

1) Read the room. Sometimes you can engage someone with humour, banter, memes, GIFs etc. but using that same approach on someone else may well be fanning the flames of discontent. I'm all for showing personality, but you need to know when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em.

One of the most memorable bits of engagement we had was with Nicole da Silva who plays "Franky" on Wentworth. She sent an angry tweet about how we confiscated her scissors - perfectly legitimate - but naturally a legion of fans took her side. Rather than give the standard copy/paste response, I drafted a series of messages saying that our security was tighter than the prison (in the show Wentworth) and the result was a quote tweet with her laughing hysterically and complimenting us, which has a ripple effect throughout her fans. A good example of reading the room and turning a negative into a positive.

Another time, Richard Quest of CNN hammered the infrastructure network around the airport while stuck in traffic. Rather than get cute or funny, we provided a standard response (tailored slightly). Take each case on its merits and use your judgement.

Also remember that as a 'corporate' account, any light hearted content will naturally draw a more significant reaction. Fans are used to memes and banter from parochial pro team accounts. It's a bit more challenging to carry this from a corporate account, whether Sydney Airport or the ICC.

2) Be prepared. One of my final projects before departing for the ICC and Dubai was developing a digital crisis plan that would be activated in the event of an emergency, transforming the website and social accounts into a hub of relevant and real-time information relating to an incident. This involved things as critical as drafting FAQs and emergency communication for any conceivable situation, to as superficial as pulling the plug on advertising and scheduled posts (imagine pushing an ad to Facebook encouraging passengers to eat at a certain bar when the precinct was locked down!)

It was an extensive project that touched almost every business unit and is one that I hope is quite literally a waste of time and will never have to be used. Emergency planning was a critical part of life for airport operational staff and emergency services, so why shouldn't digital have one too? (or in a sports team context, be aware of the plans of the league/venue you compete in).

3) Subconsciously distance yourself from online criticism. Understand that while you WORK for the brand, you are not THE brand. We copped a barrage of criticism at the airport regarding the price of parking, train fares, the food and beverage choice, delayed flights, curfew policy etc. some it warranted, a lot of it not.

The same happens throughout the sports industry. Performance of teams/players, selection policy, poor form, venue issues, decisions made at board level - all of which is completely out of your hands. You learn to develop a thick skin over time and not let it get to you.

Most people know the social admin doesn't dictate strategic corporate policy, but there will always be the few who don't, or choose not to acknowledge it for the sake of a social rant.

Will try to think of some more.....

**Sean Callanan:** 3 is an important point and it's important to circulate what is being said online so the response does not only fall to the person behind the social account

**Q. [liambednarski](#):** How do you approach ICC digital marketing in the emerging markets, those below the top tier?

**A. Alistair Hogg:** Hi @liambednarski, thanks for the question. Initially I'd be interested to know what you define as an "emerging market" as I suspect ours may differ from a lot of the SportsBiz industry!

**liambednarski:** Hey @alistairjhogg cricket outside of the 'test nations' for a lack of the official terminology.

The ICC member nations below the highest tier.

**Alistair Hogg:** Good question, thanks @liambednarski. The ICC has regional staff stationed across the world, working with associate members to develop cricket and drive interest in the game.

Centrally, we are fortunate enough to have a social footprint of ~45 million fans, so there is immense power in utilising these channels to push development messages. While highlights between Guernsey and Sweden for instance may not be as coveted for many of our core fans as a bi-lateral clash between two established nations in an

elite cricket sense, we run the best clips on main ICC social platforms and publish all clips to the website.

As part of our video strategy, we commission coverage of these regional qualifying/pathway events. In the coming months for example, we have events in the United States, Malaysia, Oman, Botswana, Philippines and Thailand - having just staged one in the Netherlands; from all of which we'll produce clips, team/venue features and highlight packages depicting the best of the action across the tournaments.

There's so much cricket being played beyond the traditional core members and it's our responsibility to help showcase this, both to support our associates and the tremendous strides they are making, but also to drive global interest and awareness in what's happening beyond the Test-playing nations.

The aforementioned Guernsey v Sweden clip drew 75k views on Facebook alone with more than half a million fans reached, so there is always an incredibly appetite for content, irrespective of the status of the match.

## What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

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