

Sports Geek Nation AMA with Tim Baker

Tim Baker is the Digital and Marketing Coordinator of Adelaide United Football Club which play in the Australia's professional football (soccer league) A-League. Prior to this stint he worked with various sports and non-sports related industries that equipped him to fill in his current duties. Tim's knack in writing, content management and social media marketing has been pushing the Adelaide United FC's digital to its finest.

Connect with Tim Baker on [LinkedIn](#), Twitter [@ThatGuyTimBaker](#) and Slack [@tim-baker](#)
Find out more about Adelaide United at AdelaideUnited.com.au

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](#): How did you get your start in sports?

A. [Tim Baker](#): And thanks Sean for the easy soft ball. I got started in sports simply by writing about it initially as a freelance journalist. I started writing for the Four Four Two Australia website and built up a portfolio. When it came to applying for a Media & PR role with the Australian National Drag Racing Association, that portfolio was a huge help!

Q. [EmJaeCaer](#) ([Michael Carmody](#)): Trying to find a polite way to phrase this, so I'll just be clumsy and please give me the benefit of the doubt I mean no offense.

You are in Adelaide a less populous state, playing a code in the shadow of other codes, how do you find throwing your message seemingly uphill like this?

How difficult is it to get engagement with new fans and attract new people to your product? Do you get much support from the League Operator in messaging/marketing activities and does this make a tangible difference?

A. [Tim Baker](#): Haha no offense taken. I'll be honest, it is TOUGH! Generally the engagement from our hardcore group is high but for new fans we have to get creative. We're really only in the initial stages of trying to be more engaging after a difficult period on social and by extension outwardly. Personally I only started at AUFC in December 2016 so there is a long way to go but in working with the media and commercial teams, we are playing the long game in developing new strategies that can help us connect in ways other sporting clubs/codes are not - while also learning from what they do.

In terms of the FFA, yes we do receive some help but with all due respect to them, as I think they have great people, I'm not certain I see tangible difference. That said, around season launch they support with outdoor messaging, online and TV which does have a small impact on attendance.

EmJaeCaer: Thank you for the answer!

I'm from the esports world, so trying to "break out" from core fans to new fans is a key issue for our growth.

With an eye to the above, do you see a pragmatic cap/limit on what you can achieve?

We all like to aim for the sky, but do you have 'realistic' target based on Soccer/Footballs engagement compared to AFL?

Last semi-cheeky question. Given the Crows just acquired a Baseball team in the Adelaide Bite, would you think AU and AFC could one day see a benefit from merger/acquisition

Tim Baker: Oh wow, getting straight to it! I'll start by saying there is in no way any talks of mergers or similar whatsoever - especially given our current ownership acquired the Club in March this year. But yes, I do see that at some point there could be some collaboration. A merger or acquisition? Who knows? Never say never, right! Haha.

As for targets I think we are realistic and while we have reached somewhat of a plateau on social, we have thousands of registered participants playing football/soccer in South Australia that we have not yet unlocked. Really engaging our community in a meaningful way is one of our biggest projects at the current time and giving those players a reason to want to come and support us in addition to watching their European teams. Pragmatically we're probably looking at a cap of just over 100,000 fans locally but that is many, many more than our stadium can hold and hopefully we can chip away at increasing that!

EmJaeCaer: You mention EU teams, and I see these partnership/alliances between Au and Eu teams here and there. How hard is it to negotiate these arrangements and what benefits do you think the existing alliances are getting?

Tim Baker: I think at a Club level where football departments align etc it can be quite involved and difficult. Unfortunately in that sense I can't really answer. But in terms of linking on social and sharing ideas AS Roma have been great but also the Sportsbiz Slack has been awesome to connect. On the flip-side I did try to organise something with New York Red Bulls in an E-League sense but that was difficult. Not because of anyone in particular, timing perhaps wasn't right.

Q. [sophiemoore](#): i was wondering if you believe certain platforms to be more effective than others and why? Do you see any up and coming digital platforms that you think will disrupt the space?

A. Tim Baker: Hi Sophie, since [@seancallanan](#) likes to ask his podcast guests about an "MVP" social platform I'll start by saying that for us Facebook is still the king. By far our biggest reach comes from Facebook which may have something to do with the SA market. Traditionally when it comes to new products, gadgets, fashion etc SA are not always early adopters. We're getting better though!

Insta has been good for us but I'll be the first to admit I need to be better myself in utilising all it has to offer, luckily I have good people around me who are brilliant in that space.

IGTV is the one that has me intrigued. I think there is a bespoke way to use it but I'm not convinced I've seen it yet. I'm excited to see what content creator comes up with. I have a few ideas of my own but need to experiment.

The other interesting one for me is something AS Roma use called Steller.
<https://steller.co/asroma/> - I'm keen to look at this and see how it could work for us but it would require some education for our fanbase. That said, it could be one of the platforms we can use to grow beyond that traditional fanbase.

Sean Callanan: Good question [@sophiemoore](#) I think the "golden era" of gamechanging platforms being released every 6-12 months is over. The attention is so fragmented it is hard for new platforms to get traction like they were able to in 2010-12.

Sophiemoore: Thanks team, yeah there is so much out there that the giants Facebook, Insta, Twitter, Snap are everywhere. I do recall a 'Head of Sport' role last year being advertised for Twitter so will be interested to see how that tracks.
[@tim-baker](#) The international market is somehow just out of reach, do you have a plan in mind/motion to crack that market of engagement?

Sean Callanan: Would be good to get [@paul_rogers_as_roma](#) thoughts on Stellar

Tim Baker: Yes [@sophiemoore](#) - we have experimented by reaching out to AS Roma and [@paul_rogers_as_roma](#) recently on Twitter. They were kind enough to help us, let us use their "bad photoshop" and Retweet. But our main focus is increasing our engagement locally and building our Australian audience. Then we can start looking at how we reach people internationally. That said, if we continue to work in the E-League space and FIFA with Jamie O'Doherty (FUTWIZ Jamie) we expect to see some engagement with international sports audiences.

EmJaeCaer: OOH Eleague! I was impressed with the production value and presentation of this earlier this year. What benefit did you see directly to AdelUnited?

Tim Baker: We certainly picked up a few more followers on Twitter as a result and had some overseas interest in the whole league, not just AUFC. As you know it's a growing space so we definitely see the upside and I'm keen to grow what we do in esports but a lot of that will depend on season 2 of the E-League.

Q. Joliegee: Loving the conversations so far. @tim-baker can you describe the makeup of digital team at Adelaide United?

A. Tim Baker: Thanks! We're a very small team! There is myself, our Media Coordinator, Graphic Designer and an "Assistant Everything" that helps us out on a casual basis! We also have a couple of different video resources who help us out but growing the team is something we're working towards, but not yet. We're still in the first 6 months of the new ownership so there is a lot to do!

Q. jase (Jason Davis): How much flexibility do you have within the A-League digital infrastructure?

EmJaeCaer: Interested in this one as well, I know AFL clubs website are pretty much Telstra straight jacketed, and they can only CMS it up within that framework.

A. Tim Baker: Hi @jase - as @EmJaeCaer mentions re AFL clubs, we do operate within an eco-system of sites that are operated centrally by the FFA. The recent upgrades to all A-League Club websites was completed with a lot of feedback from the Clubs. While we do all work within the same Drupal CMS, there is some flexibility to change the look and feel of the site while maintaining a uniform shell. We're only 12 months into this and trust me, ALL of the Clubs have provided a lot of feedback about additional functions, options etc. And the FFA have been quite good in terms of implementing or scheduling implementation down the road. So far so good I think and I'm quite happy with the range of flexibility at the moment.

Jase: At least you aren't totally locked into something involving a Telstra network!

Tim Baker: Yes are lucky although regardless of how much freedom we do have, we can always do with more! We certainly haven't unlocked the full potential within Drupal just yet.

Q. Nick Splitter: @tim-baker do you use a specialist Drupal agency for builds and rebuilds? Theres one in particular i can think of that may be able to help if you're looking for assistance with Drupal as a platform.

A. Tim Baker: @Nick Splitter the FFA did utilise an agency that escapes me now, sorry. Drupal has been really easy to use actually and we get a lot of support from the FFA. In terms of builds and rebuilds that is all directed through the FFA as there are a number of

club and association sites running on the network. But that is great to know if we need additional support

Nick Splitter: No worries! Doghouse is the one I was thinking of - best Drupal specialists in the country: <https://doghouse.agency/>

Q. Liamednarski: How do you go about handling the environment that is #SokkahTwitter in creating an appropriate social media voice for that particular platform (whilst having a bit of fun)?

A. Tim Baker: Ah #SokkahTwitter... I have a love/hate relationship with #SokkahTwitter

Interesting story (maybe). #SokkahTwitter is the first to slam us for doing anything #SokkahTwitter-like as if we're all Dad's with no idea... except most of us were #SokkahTwitter before it had a catchy hashtag - and that doesn't mean we're old (though I am indeed a Dad! :smirk:

We don't specifically cater our content for #SokkahTwitter but we're not afraid to get amongst it and have "bitten" back in good humour with a funny gif or written response when they do make us a target. More often than not our fans love that and get behind it.

So while we won't cater specifically we will produce content that we find funny with a wink and a nod in their direction, particularly on Twitter where the conversation can evolve quickly. But we have also engaged the same way in the comments on Facebook and a lesser degree on Instagram.

We've had our missteps in pushing the boundaries too, and I own that. But mostly we've been embraced and A-League Memes have even given us a few positive shout outs! We were one of the first A-League clubs to actually comment on their posts and banter back and forth which helped our street cred (that sounds so lame reading it out loud!). The A-League Facebook account only just un-banned A-League Memes and have started to take a similar approach which seems to be working.

Just being accessible and not afraid to poke fun at yourself, while also able to have a dig back (but well within reason), just being real and accepting a bad result or one of those missteps I mentioned above, was always a key element I wanted to introduce on social when I first arrived. The climate wasn't quite right until recently but since March and the end of the season specifically we've allowed ourselves to just be ourselves and create a voice. That alone has increased engagement and interest in our Club.

Q. Sean Callanan: What has been the feedback from your fans on Usain Bolt potentially playing in A-League? Are they excited or has it drawn interest from new fans?

A. Tim Baker: Great question! Hardcore fans hate the fact that Usain Bolt is "making our league look like a joke," and that "Usain can get a contract without ever playing ahead of a promising youth player." Those same fans generally hate the concept of the E-League too.

Other fans are generally open and like the added exposure it is bringing to the A-League. It seems to be a 50-50 split right now.

I'm in two minds. I totally get the PR and marketing and added interest from the commercial sector. But I'm also a purist at heart and would prefer to see the marquee player fund go toward a true marquee.

Unfortunately, even with that fund we cannot compete with the MLS, Asia and the Middle East for a "true marquee" so perhaps because of that I am more frustrated at the Usain Bolt experiment than I should be.

But hey, I hope he makes it and tears it up... just not against AUFC!

Q. Sean Callanan: What has been the best (explain your definition of best) Instagram or Twitter post from last 12 months for Adelaide United? Please share link

Tim Baker: Oooh tough one... and I'm going to think about this one and go trawling through our feeds to find the links so stay tuned...

A. Tim Baker: Okay, so we all metrics and analytics, right? So while "best" could mean a high performing post, it's not everything. For me engaging and funny are best!

I'm particularly proud of this effort

<https://twitter.com/AdelaideUnited/status/1029253807710953472> - we had a lot fun developing and chatting about this concept. We even snuck in a few Easter eggs for A-League fans or those that have been following closely on Twitter.

This one was our Yanny/Laurel effort to announce Craig Goodwin's return. People loved and hated this. I loved the polarising reaction!

<https://twitter.com/AdelaideUnited/status/999900509564633090>

This post here we used across all social channels. It was for our Suit Partner at the time. I probably thought of this caption in the shower where I think of a lot of my best ideas (TMI?) there and while I am driving! It was just so simple and effective.

<https://twitter.com/AdelaideUnited/status/996163249975562241>

Only two more to come!

This Tweet kicked off the idea of collaborating with AS Roma. I was reading through Twitter one morning and noticed Bayer Leverkusen and Roma had bantered about the Bayern Munich and Manchester United's scripted banter to announce their friendly. It was like being a little kid wanting to play with the big kids. I used Roma's bad photoshop idea and used the same structure of the Tweet that was getting around in a big way to poke fun at how I was feeling while actually pointing out that AUFC is a little kid compared to the EU teams. This Tweet also sparked AUFC v AS Roma friendly rumours! :rolling_on_the_floor_laughing:
<https://twitter.com/AdelaideUnited/status/1006785740536270848>

And FINALLY I'll stop spamming my own AMA... like a lot of our posts we used this on the big 3 but this meme I created myself (thank you Frinkiac!) in response to a free pre-season friendly we were hosting seemed to get a lot of love everywhere, but especially in our Insta story...

https://files.slack.com/files-tmb/T0G94FW8L-FCR9N2RHD-0dae5e2959/image_480.png



Q. Liambednarski: The soccer community is a polarizing one within Australia. How did you establish yourself within the industry given the lack of media jobs in space? What was your unique advantage and what your advice be for others trying to make it in the business in Australia?

A. Tim Baker: Perhaps a bit of luck? Timing is everything and when the Media & PR role became available at the Australian National Drag Racing Association it fit my background in terms of media, publishing and magazine experience. I went into that interview all guns

blazing bringing with me everything I had published as a big part of the role was writing for the website and writing and editing the quarterly membership magazine.

I spent almost 3 years in that role bringing as much attention to drag racing as possible which was a MASSIVE job. But I managed to jag airtime on the Today Show, FTA news bulletins in different states and mainstream radio.

That role prepared me perfectly for where I am now and looking back I see it was all prep for my current job. Without as many eyeballs on me I was able to experiment and learn with social so that when I took the next step I was able to use the increased resources (ANDRA had next to NO resources!) at my disposal to make a bit of a splash. But given where we were at the Club I had to drip feed what I wanted to do until we were at a point where I could really push forward. And with the support of the people around me who were all begging to do the same things we're starting to turn the wheels.

My unique advantage? I can't say it's a tangible thing. It's just something within that is pushing the buttons, giving me ideas and allowing me to act on it. I just trust the instincts and take in as much info and research as I can, put it through the machine and see what comes out. This might sound crazy but I don't feel like I'm driving, however I am driven - and trusting the gut I guess you could say. Sorry, got a little deep there!

Advice... always be learning! But don't be afraid to back yourself, not in an egotistical way, just back yourself to implement and do what you set out to do. I find most people need to be shown these days. It's great to have an idea but one of my biggest issues is having an idea but not always communicating it well enough, because I see it so vividly in my head I can't do it justice when I explain it verbally. So get stuck in and show people what you can do.

The other thing that I did and I don't see enough of these days is I just did anything and everything I could to be a journo in the first place. I worked for free to build my profile and portfolio to get the necessary experience. Now, there is a fine line between volunteering/working for free and being exploited, but you have to get experience somehow so do whatever you can and when you start to build experience, then know your worth.

Lastly, there are a lot of people in top jobs that don't get the current digital climate so it can feel like your pushing uphill. Patience is a big thing, I still need lots of it!

I'm certainly not the finished product either, I'm still learning and have a way to go, I'm not an authority but hopefully there is something of value in my ramblings!

Liambednarski: Thanks for taking the time to write a brilliant reply @tim-baker

Tim Baker: No problem at all! Sorry it took so long... a lot happening this week!

Q. Liamednarski: @tim-baker How do you see your competition in the A-League in terms of social media, rivals Melbourne Victory were on the cutting edge for a time. What ideas do you take from your direct rivals or is it a more global approach for ideas given the sport is a global one?

A. Tim Baker: Victory have set a benchmark! And Central Coast have been very good in terms of engaging conversationally in comments - we've tried to take a similar approach.

But I try not to take too many ideas from other A-League clubs because people have seen them... I mean, I look at what they do as well as AFL and NRL but I really do look overseas more often than not.

I've mentioned AS Roma and Bayer Leverkusen. But I love what the NHL does and particularly my Pittsburgh Penguins! Some of the ideas I take from the NFL or NHL are bigger projects that we are not quite there yet to implement but EU clubs are a big source of inspiration and ideas.

In a response to @seancallanan I mentioned a few of the "best" posts that are clearly influenced by EU clubs.

But one idea we created last year was Football Foodies presented by IGA. This was inspired by Comedian In Cars Getting Coffee but applying it to shopping in an IGA supermarket and then cooking a meal in the kitchen.

So I generate ideas from all over the place, not just in sports but comedy, documentaries, drama, gaming, everything.

Q. Liamednarski: @tim-baker How do you envisage the conversion of e-sports fans to soccer and vice-versa given that traditional sports e-sports are a comparatively smaller market of an emerging space?

What is AU desired outcome with e-sports in season 2 of the e-League?

A membership driver? Part of club awareness or something else?

A. Tim Baker: Converting e-sports fans to fans of the game or Club is difficult. It should be easy right? They like the virtual game, why not the real thing?

I'm not sure there is a hard and fast path to be honest. We're still learning as we go but I think if we can integrate the real thing, real players with the esports version that is a start, and opens the conversation and recognition of the players with esports fans.

I do have some experience in gaming having written and produced video content for a gaming website 8 years ago now! But converting fans, I/we have a lot to learn!

Desired outcome for E-League season 2... More content, engagement, awareness, potentially events and expansion into the community via gaming events, commercial benefits are all things we'd like to see at a Club and competition level. But again, we all need to walk before we run.

I think eventually there could be some connection to membership whether that is aligned to our own esports events or something else.

This is just an idea but I'd like to see us develop a player pathway similar to what we have at NPL level. So whether its us or another organisation running local esports events, that we enter AUFC competitors into. They may eventually represent us in the E-League but it would be more about all the other FIFA tournaments throughout the year where we then have a stable of players entered, all cutting their teeth at local events and online. Maybe that grows beyond FIFA into other games but now I am really getting ahead of myself!

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.

You can join Sports Geek Nation by going to SportsGeekNation.com