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### Brand Audit: Big Ten Network

Many sports broadcasting stations exist, and some are so small they have only the means and ability to cover a single university's athletic program (Consider our local MUTV station). In 2004, the Big Ten Conference and ESPN entered negotiations to expand the Big Ten's broadcasting contract and rights fees. ESPN recoiled, however, and the Big Ten commissioner, Jim Delany, entertained the idea of creating his own network. Two years later, Big Ten Network (BTN) formed out of a 20-year joint venture between Fox Entertainment Group and the Big Ten Conference ("Big Ten Network", 2019).

At 8 p.m. Aug. 30, 2007, BTN launched with a program called *Big Ten Tonight*. Days later, the network's first live broadcast aired a football game between Appalachian State and Michigan ("Big Ten Network", 2019).

One audience group for BTN are Big Ten Conference students. Big Ten schools are divided between the East and West divisions. The East division comprises of Indiana University, The University of Maryland, University of Michigan, The Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Michigan State University and Rutgers University. The West comprises Northwestern University, University of Illinois, University of Iowa, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska, Purdue University and the University of Wisconsin. Thousands of

students attend these universities collectively, but males across all ages make up the largest audience demographic at 71 percent (Comcast, 2018). This is a broad audience that encompasses future students, current students, athletes and alumni of East and West divisions who continue to follow athletics.

Most Big Ten Universities are the largest schools within their respective states (The Ohio State University, University of Michigan, Pennsylvania State University, etc.) Sports programs of this magnitude often draw in “locals” or, simply, people who live in that state. For example, many Buckeye fans I know never attended the university but remain loyal to that program. People ranging between 35-55 years old are the largest demographic watching BTN at 82 percent (Comcast, 2018). Beyond the entertainment of watching sporting events, sports analysts and other broadcast networks often gather information from various sports networks, BTN included.

One message stated clearly by BTN is that they are “Committed to Women’s Sports.” The website’s “About Us” page highlights that BTN features nearly 500 women’s sporting events annually (“About Us”, 2007). Some of these sports include basketball, lacrosse, tennis, volleyball and golf. BTN also incorporates basketball tournaments and the *BTN Women’s Sports Report*, which exclusively highlights female Big Ten athletes and discusses their athletic accomplishments. Upon forming BTN, the network stated their desire to expand the broadcasting of women’s sports (“Big Ten Network”, 2019).

Another, less direct, message conveys BTN as a hub of statistics and information for all Big Ten schools. This message is consistent through most platforms. There are dozens of subpages on the website’s homepage that lead to YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and

Twitter accounts for each individual Big Ten university. Blog posts and articles detailing game match ups extend this message as well.

There are some noticeable weaknesses in BTN's efforts to reach their audiences. One example includes their website, Instagram, news articles and YouTube channels do not align with a message they claim they are dedicated to – woman's sports. Men's sports, statistics, articles and videos are the center of attention on all these platforms, contradicting their "dedication" to women's sports. Additionally, BTN hosts countless links and channels of information on their website and navigating through it becomes convoluted and very overwhelming. Part of this issue could be the website design. As a viewer, it's easy to become exhausted by the messy website. BTN's Instagram page is very similar in aesthetic (or lack thereof.)

To fix these issues, I have two specific recommendations. First, BTN should host pages dedicated to woman's athletics on each communication platform. If BTN is truly dedicated to this message, highlighting woman's sports is essential. It amplifies their dedication to female athletes and makes finding information about female athletes much easier.

Due to the massive amount of BTN's data and information being shared on each platform, I think they should consider hosting multiple websites and corresponding social media pages. Professor McKittrick displayed Coca-Cola as an example in class. They strategically tailored each website for a different audience (consumer, business etc.) to avoid confusion and overwhelming amounts of information on a single website or platform. It seems BTN has this issue. With one website dedicated to information and statistics and another website dedicated to characters and stories, BTN can separate their audiences in an orderly fashion and prevent

overwhelming a viewer. BTN is a successful sports broadcasting network that is nationally recognized. There is always room for improvement and to further align their messages with their outreach, these are my constructive recommendations.

About Us. (2007). Retrieved February 5, 2019, from <http://btn.com/about/>

Big Ten. (2018, September 14). Retrieved from <https://www.comcastspotlight.com/content/big-ten>

Big Ten Network. (2019, February 03). Retrieved February 5, 2019, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Ten\\_Network#cite\\_note-5](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Ten_Network#cite_note-5)