Manifesto for Director of Marketing, Communications, and Sponsorship at Northumberland Rugby Union

Hi all,

My name is James Barnett and I am standing for the position of Director of Marketing, Communications and Sponsorship at Northumberland Rugby Union (NRU).

First and foremost, I am a fan of rugby union, a current player at Prudhoe and Stocksfield RFC, and I am enormously passionate about the game in our region.

In my professional life, I am the founding director of Aspire Digital Marketing, an ambitious full-service agency based in Newcastle. During the last 18 months, I have worked with Northumberland Rugby Union to build and launch the new website, before continuing to work for the county on a voluntary basis delivering website and social media management services.

I believe that I can bring a lot of relevant experience to this role. Running my own company puts me in a fantastic position to hit the ground running. I'm already aware of business practices and processes and I can effectively and proactively work with people at any level within a business and to challenging conditions and deadlines.

To complement this, marketing is what I do. I manage a busy agency with 4 members of staff. We specialise in helping SMEs grow their online presence and this is something that can be of benefit to Northumberland Rugby Union.

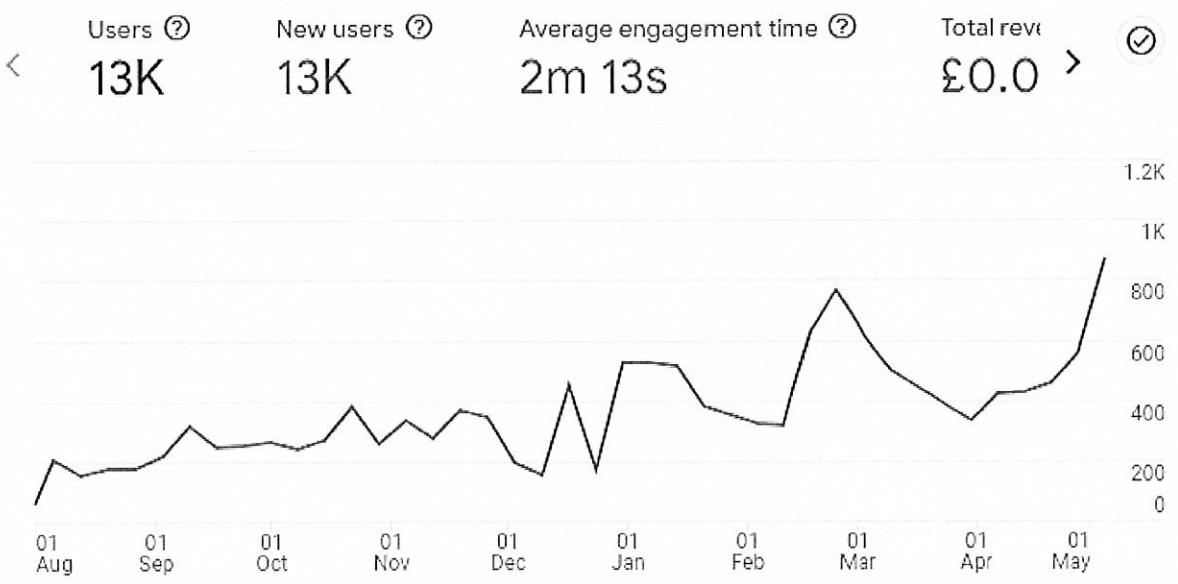
I've also held marketing positions at multiple clubs in the North East, helping to put campaigns together to hit key objectives such as player recruitment, growing sponsorship, and building awareness. Having played rugby and volunteered within rugby clubs for 17 years in the North East, I feel that I have amassed a lot of experience around what is important for players, volunteers, and club committees, which when coupled with my county experience gives me a unique perspective on growing the game in our region.

Since the website launch, I have worked almost solely with Claire at Northumberland Rugby Union to launch several campaigns and deliverables including but not limited to;

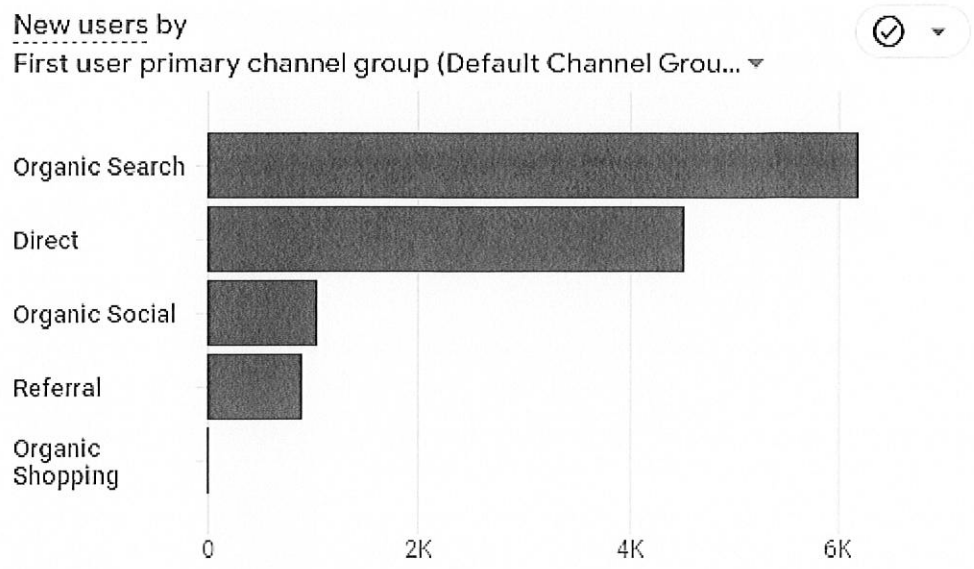
- The neurodiversity programme
- Improving safeguarding awareness
- launching and managing the international ticket raffles
- moving the completion and managing of forms to digital
- Transforming social media content
- Setting up electronic audit trails
- Giving clubs secure access to documents
- Creating a forward-facing news section on the website
- Developing online systems such as payments.

Since the launch of the new website, we have seen strong performance improvements almost month-on-month. This graph shows traffic through the website since its launch in August of 2023.

In March 2024 we achieved record traffic numbers (including the old site) and in May we are on course to hit over 1,000 monthly users.



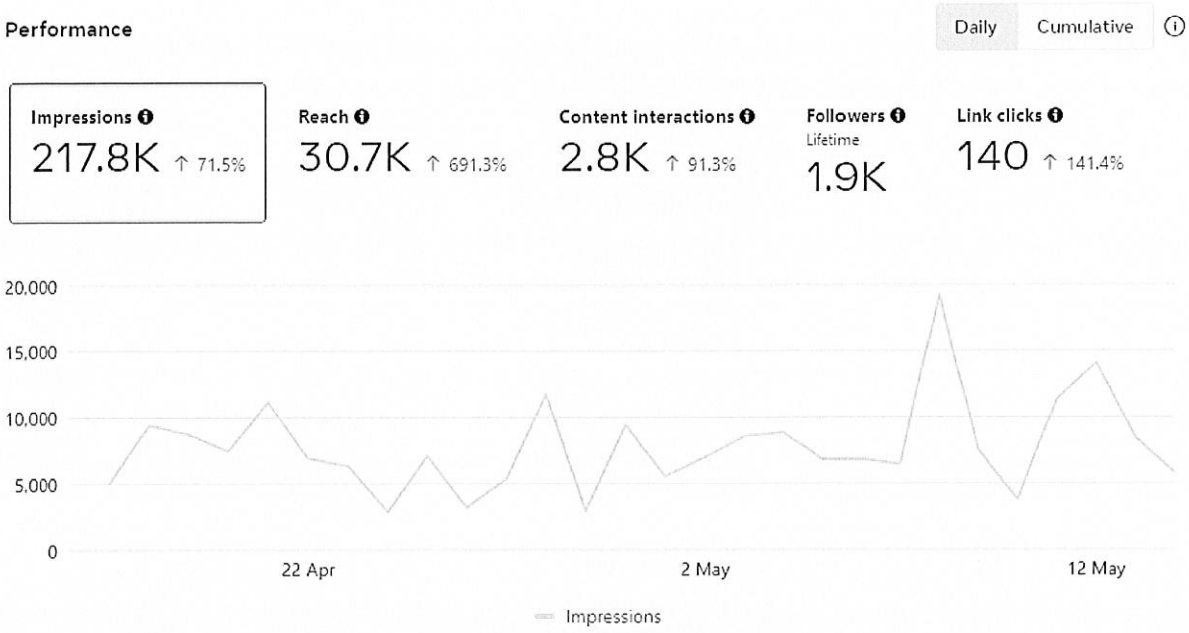
The bar chart below segments the traffic by source. For the first time, organic search, or traffic from search engines is our strongest channel. The significance of this is that the site is being found by more first-time visitors than ever before. It is key that we continue to target and convert new visitors into our audience groups.



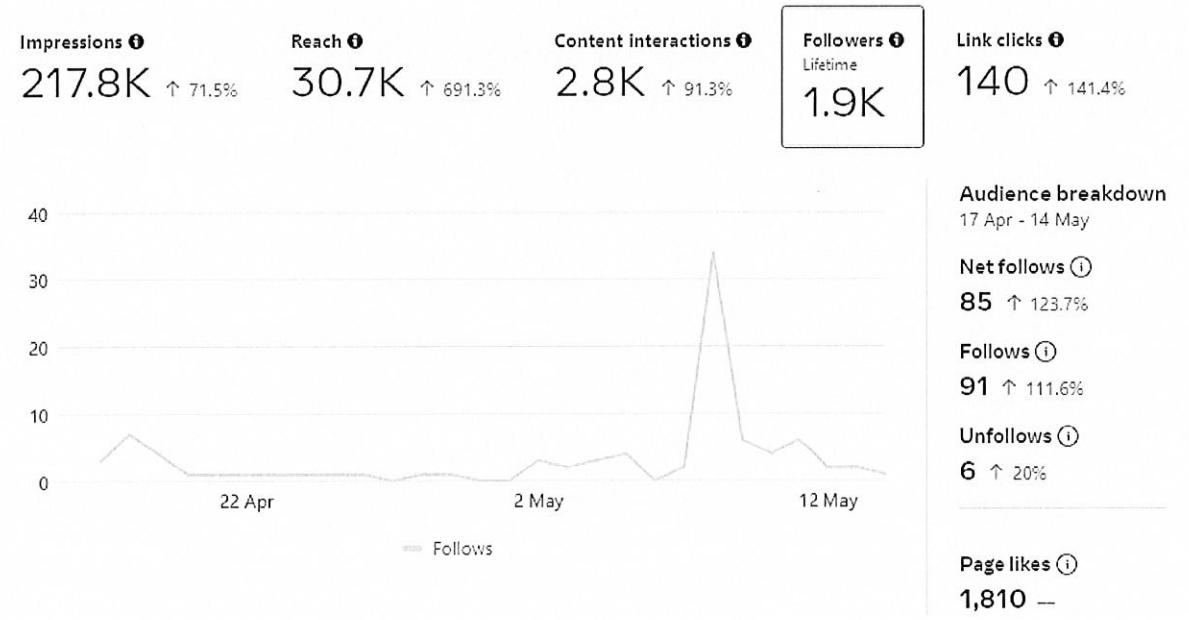
Over the past month, Aspire, has taken over management of the county Facebook page. With the assistance of my colleague Faye, we have been able to increase performance across all key metrics.

Impressions, or how many times NRU social media content was seen on Facebook in the last 28 days is up 71% to 217,800 occasions and by over 30,000 individuals which is an increase of 690%!

Our content interactions such as comments and shares are up by 90% and we have seen a 140% increase in link clicks from our Facebook content back to the NRU website.



A product of this fantastic engagement is an increase in audience. The NRU Facebook page now has 91 new followers from organic means.



Over the months I've developed a very strong working relationship with Claire Sharpe that enables us to be agile in planning and delivering new projects quicker than ever before.

During the 2023/24 season my company, Aspire sponsored NRU through the gift of time which over the season amounted to around ten hours support per month (worth £799 + VAT per month). We used this time for digital marketing support, further improving the website, creating professional standard graphics, and managing the social media pages. To compliment that I ensured that I was always available for face to face and video call meetings to support NRU where required. I also delivered and continue to deliver website training to Claire (we are currently the only people capable of managing and updating the website).

Claire and myself also set up the digital security access process for data protection and secure form management. This involved training Claire, Henry Cave as Honorary Secretary, Dave Challenger as Director of Rugby, and Mark Reade as Director of Safeguarding on managing the forms within the site. This ensures that there is adequate cover to support efficient processing and management of forms and the data submitted within them in a secure and responsible way.

My vision for the role is to unlock growth across multiple areas within the game. This includes:

- Increasing player recruitment across all forms of club rugby.
- Improve communication between the county and member clubs
- Improve communication between the county and stakeholders
- Increase county membership
- Grow kit sales through our supplier, Gilbert
- Grow the online revenue of NRU
- Develop new sponsorship opportunities
- Nurture current partnerships
- Open a feedback loop that will help us to better understand pain points from within the game and address them accordingly.

Through my digital marketing expertise, I will put in place KPIs for each objective. I am able to accurately track output, engagement, and conversions surrounding these objectives to give me a clear picture of campaign impact within the Northumberland Rugby Union's community.

Deliverables:

1. Effective Leadership & Strategy:

Objective: Provide effective leadership in all aspects of Marketing and Communications, Sponsorship & Advertising.

Actions:

- Create a strategic marketing, communications, and sponsorship plan. This is over a short-term (quarterly) and longer-term (annual) basis.
- Set KPI's to aid the achievement of each objective, measure and report on performance monthly in a transparent manner.
- Open communication channels to ensure that the views of stakeholders are listened to.

2. Promoting NRU:

Objective: Promote NRU and its interests to members and the wider community of stakeholders.

Actions:

- Execute marketing campaigns to increase awareness of NRU activity.
- Generate new creative ideas to hit performance objectives in relation to growing the game.
- Engage with partners and the local community to raise the profile of NRU across the region.
- Engage with individuals within NRU such as staff, volunteers, coaches, and players to highlight achievement.
- Maintain and keep the NRU website up to date.
- Create a range of membership packages to offer a wider range of value and options to current and potential members.

3. Raising the Profile of Rugby:

Objective: Increase awareness, engagement, and buy-in of the game across our region.

Actions:

- Build relationships with local media to improve reach on content and communications.
- Utilise the full range of media channels available to us. At the moment we use the website and Facebook. I'd like to expand this onto TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Email.
- Create player-centric content to appeal to playing-age individuals.
- Target local schools to promote rugby and raise awareness of clubs in the immediate area.
- Host community events to champion the game and grow partnerships

4. Communications:

Objective: To nurture and grow communication channels, become more transparent and open up external communication from the County.

Actions:

- Create a communication strategy to grow key audience groups such as parents, players, women's rugby, and a volunteer network.
- Act on data-driven insights to engage the county's audiences in new and creative ways.
- Introduce an external monthly newsletter which champions the game in our region.
- Open better communication channels between the member clubs and NRU.
- Issue communications in a consistent way through set channels.
- Establish a segmented contact database.
- Issue press releases when we have newsworthy content to share.
- Explore commercial opportunities with partners where sponsors get valuable but limited access to promote to the NRU database on a GDPR-compliant basis.
- Review and update internal communication methods where possible.

5. Sponsorship:

Objective: Manage and grow NRU sponsorship

Actions:

- Nurture the relationship with the existing partners and engage with them to establish ways of delivering more value.
- Create new sponsorship packages that are engaging and beneficial for the businesses we approach.
- Improve sponsor/partner communications and proactively promote them where possible.
- Look into the feasibility of hosting events and inviting partners to attend.
- Network with local businesses and raise awareness. I'm part of the North East Chamber of Commerce and will be joining the North East Combined Authority once launched. I'd like to explore opportunities within the membership of these organisations.

6. NRU Web Shop

Objective: Grow revenue and footfall through the NRU Gilbert webshop.

Actions:

- Proactively promote the webshop and the products within it across all marketing channels.
- Raise engagement around the NRU kit being publicly accessible.
- Engage with Gilbert in the hope of running some competitions.
- Explore whether we can offer member benefits.
- Track revenue through the shop and deliver campaigns at key times of the year such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

7. Budget Management:

Objective: Establish a marketing budget and accurately record and report on expenditures.

Actions:

- Create a system for tracking expenditure and the impact it has on marketing performance.
- Provide analysis and financial reports for NRU leadership.
- Ensure that we stick within our budget and maximise the performance that we get out of it.

By implementing the campaigns that I have discussed in this manifesto, I believe that I can make a positive impact on rugby in Northumberland and grow the game in its various forms.

Thank you for reading and I hope that I can count on your support.

Kind regards

James