



The importance of a correct management in a tennis organization. How to create, expand and stay in the business

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ABSTRACT

Running a tennis business must consider different elements to be successful. The purpose of this article is to name several factors that can assist to establish a tennis organization, expanding it, and staying in the business long term. The possibilities and nature of the business in the tennis world are wide. Given the impossibility of covering all of them, this article will focus only on running the tennis programs in a recreational tennis club as a contractor partner.

Key words: club management, key factors, business, strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

There are several elements that need to have in consideration when running a business. Tennis coaching is not an exception, and it is not just about the performance implemented on a tennis court that matters but managing many other important factors. From the creation to the consolidation and expansion of the company there is a process of a few different stages that need to be ensured to succeed in the long term. Let's define what those stages are and what are the steps to follow in every one of those phases.

REGISTER THE COMPANY

Conduct a market research

Before getting into any business adventure it is essential to spend time analyzing how many tennis clubs there are located in the area where you want to set up your company. Try to gather as much information as possible from the clubs and find out about other companies operating in the region. Gather also information about potential customers and use all those data to understand if there is a business opportunity.

Make a business plan. Define the mission, vision, and values of the company.

The business plan is a written document that describes the nature of business, target, market and business advantages. It is a tool that we use to start and run a business that requires material, financial and human resources (Jarmila Guta, 2014).

As an enterprise, it is important to establish what is the purpose or the goal of the company. That defines the mission and answers questions such as "who are we?", "what do we do?" or "How do we do it?". Pretty much it gives a full description of the company.

The vision will assist to grow the business by taking important strategical decisions that will make the company more competitive and put it in a good position in the market in the future.

Punctuality, education, health, transparency, honesty, and integrity are just some examples of the values that you might want to have in your tennis organization.

All of that together is the starting point to define your business plan which is basically a roadmap to structure, run and grow the company in the short and long term. Prepare a document (PowerPoint or similar) to convince any tennis club that you have a solid project and a professional team to run the tennis programs in their facilities.

Choose a name for the company and proceed with the registration.

It sounds simple but the name plays a very important role in the growth of the company and in the people's perception. Company builds its business image on its business name and that very name makes it recognizable in the market (Bulatovic et. al, 2016). Understand what the registration process is and how long it is going to take to be able to start operating in the business. Every country got different procedures and different costs to open a new company. Open a professional e-mail account to start operating from day one.

Financial situation

Starting a business implies having some initial costs. Make a list of your financial assets and add those payments that are necessary to be operational from the beginning (marketing campaigns, hiring people, buying products, courts rent, etc.). Determine for how long the company could potentially last with no income and establish relationships with banks in case some funding is needed.

THE TENNIS CLUB

There are a few things you must highly consider when you are looking for tennis courts to run your business:

Location of the club

The location of the club is crucial, and it is going to affect indeed the future of your tennis company. Depending on the location we need to attend to the following aspects:

- Climate

The weather has a massive influence on the design of any outdoor project. Rain, snow, wind, humidity, and temperature are conditions that can have an enormous impact on our business. All the programs should be prepared and have enough capacity to respond to every predictable situation, with the aim to reduce the potential repercussions that could affect the customers.

- Geography

Find the benefits of the geographical situation. Beach, mountains, or cities can offer different business opportunities. Do not just see inside the fences of the club. We will show some examples:

- Beach: Beach tennis programs or workout programs along the beach.
- Countryside: overnight events at the club (no noise restrictions at night time).
- City: schools, financial district, restaurants, etc. Create programs that can benefit the people working around before work, in their lunch break, or after work. For example, if there are many restaurants around, it might be interesting to open group programs for low-income waiters and waitresses. But if there is a financial district around, offering private session packages might be more suitable for the executives. Make deals with the schools to offer tennis programs in their facilities (you don't even need a tennis court to run a kids tennis program).

- Transportation

Study what are all the options to access to your club and find opportunities to facilitate the transportation to your customers. As an example, if there is enough volume it could be interesting to coordinate with a nearby school a mini-bus transportation to attend your evening tennis program after their class.

- Culture

In every region of the world, there might be significant cultural differences that should be considered when designing programs. For instance, In Hong Kong, the Ladies League is very popular (doubles format) and it contains multiple teams composed of 6 to 10 ladies split into 6 different divisions. Therefore, you can find many tennis programs with coaches specializing in recreational doubles for women. Find what culture is predominant in your area and create programs according to that.

Courts and facilities

Every club has different facilities according to the extension of its territory. Analyze and negotiate what facilities can be used. The number of tennis courts, the size of the gym, or even alternative sports like squash, padel, or badminton need to be considered when managing a tennis program.

Check the green areas or the full space that the club can offer. Creativeness is key and using the whole capacity of the facility is critical to increasing the benefits. A tennis court itself is not a mandatory requirement to run a tennis program. Street tennis is a perfect example of maximizing the space of any venue.

Also negotiate the possibilities of running other non-racquet sports through your company such as CrossFit, yoga, football, etc.



Figure 1. Street tennis. Tennis lessons without a tennis court. Catalasport, Hong Kong.



Figure 2. Tennis Courts build up on the roof top of the building. Chinese Recreation Club, Hong Kong.

Maintenance

The correct use and maintenance of the tennis courts and the rest of the facilities might be directly or indirectly related to the role of your company. Either way, this can have a very important influence on the development of the organization. Make sure that the courts and the rest of the space (changing rooms, green areas, etc.) are well conserved and in good condition to be used by the members. When negotiating with the club do not hesitate to ask about the renovation plans for the different facilities. If investing in that renovation from your own funds is an option, this can be indeed a good asset during the contractual negotiation.

The negotiation

Once you have found the facility where you would like to run your tennis programs, there are a few tips to follow when starting any negotiation:

- Start building up relationships with the clubs before you need them.
- Use your networking: Some estimates suggest that up to 70% of all jobs are not published on publicly available job search sites, and research has shown that anywhere from half to upwards of 80% of jobs are filled through networking (Freeland Fisher, 2020). Use your connections to knock on the right door.
- Try always to have an alternative option in case the negotiation does not go the way you expect. Do not look desperate to close a deal.
- Prepare well your business plan and show confidence in it.
- Make the numbers and be the one preparing an initial offer to use the facilities.
- Look for a win-win agreement.
- Do not expect to maximize the profit in an early stage but to establish a long-term relationship.

YOUR TENNIS COMPANY

Crespo (2020) presented some strategies that coaches can use to create added value to the services and products they offer and emphasized the consideration of tennis and tennis coaching as a business. He presented suggestions in four different main areas: quality of service, variety of tools used, interaction with their clients, and adequacy of the services offered to the clients.

Here we recommend some helpful actions to add to your tennis organization. Most of these actions will have an impact on the staff or employees, but some others on the customers directly.

Human Resources

Tennis organizations normally are not big or profitable enough to afford an HR department. However, it is crucial to have a qualified person taking care of this role to achieve success. Let's define the role that an HR department should have in a tennis organization:

- The coaching Team
 - Strengths and weakness

Determine what the strengths and the weakness are within your coaching team. There might be some coaches more passionate and energetic in working with kids, others more experienced to deal with adults, and others that might be more capable to organize events or attending tournaments. Matching the coach with their preferred program is highly recommendable to keep coaches motivated, happy students, and attract more clients creating a positive environment.

- The nationality of the coaches

Having a team that can speak a variety of languages can facilitate communication with foreign members. Get familiar with visa procedures. Bringing experienced coaches from other countries can contribute to increasing the knowledge of the team, bringing new ideas to the program, or even opening new markets in different parts of the world.

- Promote teamwork

To run efficient and effective tennis programs, get teams of work that get along together and share similar ideas of coaching.

- Career Path

Having a clear structure of the positions that your company (in collaboration with the club) can offer to the staff makes a big difference. Make sure that the coaches are aware of that structure and give them the opportunity to grow in

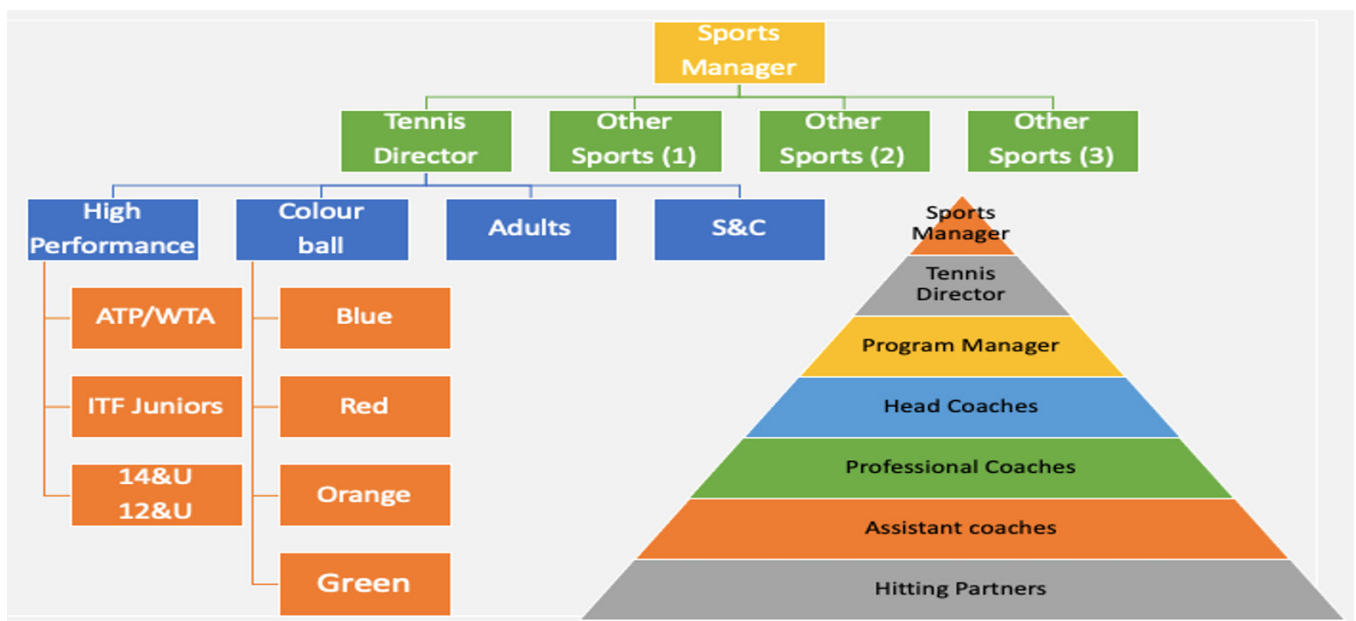


Figure 3. Example of career path within a tennis organization.

their careers within the organization. Care about their CV and develop a long-term relationship culture with the employees so they see a clear benefit of staying in the company.

- Professional Development

Coach education has been identified as key to raising the standard of coaching practice (Avner et al., 2017). The following actions can be taken as part of professional development:

- Qualifications: Help your coaches to get the highest qualifications in tennis mainly throughout the national tennis associations or international organizations like ITF, ATP, WTA, etc.
- Courses: They might be related directly to tennis itself or maybe to different areas like first aid, communication skills, team management, strength and conditioning, languages, etc.
- Conferences: Bring qualified and prestigious coaches to your club to give speeches to your staff.

It is the responsibility of the company to have a professional team motivated and updated in knowledge. Having a team well prepared will have a positive impact on the results of the company. Online learning is a perfect solution for those coaches who cannot attend educational events due to the lack of time or/and economic resources. Some studies have concluded that there are no significant differences in results between online training and classroom (Barry, Runyan, 1995).

Career path and professional development are two important factors to consider in negotiation and turn aside the salary as the only important matter of the contractual agreement.

- Establish KPI, regular meetings, reflection, and feedback

A Key Performance Indicator is a type of performance measurement. Every coach or staff member should have their own KPI. KPIs evaluate the success of an organization or of a particular activity in which it engages (Wikipedia). Set up goals and sit with your team in a regular basis to analyze whether you are achieving or not those company objectives.

Marketing and Communication

The purpose behind marketing management is to enhance the sales volume, to develop new markets, and to reach new costumers (Chandra Bose, 2010).

Define the services and products that the company wants to offer and create an efficient, solid, and regular marketing strategy. Define also the price policy of the programs and activities. Having an accessible website and a well-designed Instagram or Facebook account is crucial. Social media has obviously redefined communications. It has a tremendous impact on the way information is shared between organizations, players, users, and tournaments (Lebel and Danylchuk, 2019). With the democratization of communications, users are likely to express almost instantly their experiences about any product or service, which can affect directly the reputation of the company (Venturino, 2011).

Do not forget to launch campaigns to attract new clients such as “Fun day” or “bring a friend competition” (the beginner friend serves the ball underarm to initiate the point and the experienced member plays the rest of the point).

Customer Service

There is no business without a customer. Show a pleasant attitude towards them by offering them empathy, understanding, and caring. Be patient and a good listener, respect their time and find their needs. Keep an open and clear communication without invading or affecting their private life. A happy customer is the first step to bringing you a new one in the future. Be open to asking customers about the quality of your service and accept the critics to improve and offer a better service. You can use surveys for this purpose.

Programs and Events

Probably one of the main keys to our business. Let's propose a list of some potential and creative programs that could be useful in a tennis club:

- Private sessions.
- Group sessions. There are many different programs that can be offered. Let's see some examples:
 - Color ball programs: Blue, Red, Orange, and Green programs.
 - Elite development programs: for 12&U and older kids.
 - Adult Programs for all levels.
 - Cardio Tennis: Use dumbbells, weights, bosus, etc. Create a dynamic circuit of hitting balls combined with a workout based on all different physical abilities.
 - Touch Tennis: Efficient game for beginner tennis players, kids, and elderlies.
 - Kids & Parents: Recommendable for 2-4 years old kids' lessons. This program provides to families spend time together while doing some activity. Kids will feel more relaxed when their parents are on the court with them. Use the parents to help the kids while doing some drills, picking up the balls, etc. It will make the lesson much easier.
 - Multi-sport program: Create a program with not only tennis but also football, basketball, gymnastics, etc. The multisport practice in teaching is a very means for the development of general coordination to be able to generate transfers between different sports and racket sports to end up in the practice of tennis (Letort, 2002). Young athletes' development must focus on the development of fundamental motor skills rather than on an early specialization sport (Balyi, 2005).
 - Racket Olympics: Promote different racket sports through a few rotations (Padel, Squash, Badminton, Touch tennis, etc.)
 - Tennis for elderly: Programs for 70+ years old with soft balls and 2 bounces allowed on the court. It can be combined with a strength program, joint mobility, and flexibility sessions. Tennis & Yoga is also a good option for this sector of the society.
 - Tennis for disabled people: include the fundamental principles of human rights such as the principle of non-

discrimination and the principle of interdependence in your company. It is imperative to make full social and cultural rights achievable for people with disabilities (Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007).

- Up & Downs: Organize in different tennis courts a time-based matches session teaching tactical patterns (winners moving up to the higher court and losers moving down).
- Doubles drills: Suitable to fit up to 6-8 people on the court.
- Play & Stay Express Tennis Course: Based on the Play & Stay campaign launched by ITF in 2007. Using the slower balls ensures that starter players can rally with other starter players and guarantees more success, more rallies, more fun, and a great workout (Miley, 2017). Create express programs that last 3-4 days for people to initiate themselves in the sport.
- Events. Let's see another short list of examples:
 - Grand Slam Championship: Use the Grand Slam calendar to organize some tennis competitions with the members. Watch (for example) the Wimbledon final at the end of the event with food and drinks.
 - Summer or holiday camps: Establish commercial agreements with hotels to attract their customers during those periods of time.
 - Social events: Create social events for certain dates like Halloween, Christmas, etc.
 - Charity events: Help and raise money for those in need or help poor people that cannot afford to play tennis.
- Leagues and competitions
- Others

We are just living one of the most unique periods of all time with COVID-19. Different innovative actions that have used digital media, such as online training from home or distance learning, are allowing tennis activity to continue despite the limitations we all went through (Crespo et al., 2021).

In summary, be creative and open to define what are the best programs, events, and competitions that your organization should promote in the club to keep the members engaged with the sport and satisfied at their tennis club. Adapt your business to the environment, stay flexible and attend to the needs of the people to offer attractive deals.

Methodology

Stay updated with the methodologies recommended by the leading tennis organizations in the world. Game-based approach and constraints-led methodology are recommended rather than traditional coaching. Follow the approach of the ITF, National Federations, or some prestigious tennis academy to support the methodology run by your organization. Teach that methodology to your coaches and structure the training programs following those guidelines.



Figure 4. Kids wearing the club's uniform. Club Atletico Montemar, Spain.

Equipment and use of technology. The importance of modified equipment

The good image and the efficiency of every program will also depend on the amount, quality, and condition of the equipment to be used. One of the most important and beneficial changes for the tennis industry was the appearance of modified tennis equipment. This new model of playing tennis supports the increase in the number of player, the retention of players, and the overall technical, tactical, and physical improvement of players, especially at the young ages (Davies, 2017). Nowadays we also have to count on free or low-cost apps for portable devices that are easy to use, in tablets or smartphones (Quinlan, 2013).

Branding

Provide uniforms to the coaching staff and to the players who represent the club in national or international competitions. Provide also business cards to the whole team of the company so they can sell your business to their friends and other contacts.

Sell hats, tops, jackets, etc. with the logo of the company.

Sponsorship

Make deals with those brands that they can provide all the equipment you need (i.e. providing clothes for the coaches, rackets, balls, etc.). This is extremely important to save budget. Stablish commercial agreements with other companies creating a win-win relationship.

Relationship with the Regional and National Association.

Stablish an open relationship with the main body organization in the region. Organize tournaments, educational courses, etc. Stay active and be a positive asset for the promotion of tennis in the country.



Figure 5. Recycle ball company in Hong Kong. #recycleballhk.

Recycle and sustainability

There are thousands of balls that a club or tennis organization will use every year. Find if there is any organization around the area that recycles all the material that is not needed anymore. Study the possibility of taking the initiative to start leading the project if there is nothing around. Initiate conversations with other clubs to solve the situation. Our business needs to look after the planet and we all must contribute.

Legal and consulting department

Establish a relationship with a legal or consulting company to get advice in:

- Contractual relationships with employees and other organizations.
- Payments.
- Tax obligations.
- Insurances.
- Liability in case of an accident during running a tennis lesson: For a more rigorous and comprehensive study visit the ITF Coaching and Sport Science Review 2018; 75 (26): 20 - 22 by Alejandro Valiño.

Revenue and Accountability

The main goal of every business is to make a profit. Study deeply what your selling points are and which are your spends. Establish a budget for every year following the vision of the company. Same as the other departments, depending on how big the tennis company is, it might be recommendable to have a person specialized in accountability.

EXPANSION OF THE COMPANY

Once you are well established in a club and you have acquired a good reputation, you might want to extend your business by making new agreements with other clubs of the region.

Also, doing a good job with the color ball programs will potentially lead to opening a high-performance tennis program in the future.

CONCLUSION

An average of 70% of the business will fail within the first 10 years of life. To safeguard a new or an established business, it is necessary to understand what can lead to a business failure and how each obstacle can be managed or avoided altogether (Horton, 2022). The most common reasons small business fail is:

- Lack of passion, energy, or not enough work delivered.
- Ineffective leadership or wrong strategy.
- Inefficient business planning.
- Ineffective marketing strategies.
- Hiring the wrong people or having a negative teamwork environment.
- Lack of flexibility or innovation.
- Inadequate management.
- Not delivering enough value.
- Failure to understand the market.
- Lack of authenticity and transparency.
- Lack of personal or professional growth.
- Lack of cost control and accountability.
- Lack of concrete business systems.
- Not paying attention or not being able to compete with the competitors.
- Failure to create a sense of trust with the employees or customers.

If you want to stay alive in the business, stay alert and well organized, be creative, energetic, flexible, and willing to adapt to the changes and new circumstances. Get surrounded by a good team of people and work together as a team trying to achieve the goals of the company.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

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