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From Underdogs to Brand Architects: How the Pacers Engineered a Playoff Marketing Masterclass

Outside of Indiana it was unexpected, in 49 other states it's just basketball. The story of the 2024-2025 Pacers will not be forgotten. However, within their story there is another performance that must be commemorated, and it's work of Pacers Marketing Team that needs to be celebrated. They activated a full-court press of marketing strategies. As a small market team, they understood the opportunity to expand their brand footprint beyond Indiana. Their mission was simple, to amplify earned media, connect with the culture, and capitalize on historic moments in real-time. Their result, an explosion in engagement! From a simple mission to compound reach, this article breaks down the blueprint of how to leverage a championship moment outside of the NBA court.

Since the beginning of the playoffs, the Pacers' marketing and content team understood the opportunity. The stage was bigger than ever, and it was their duty to rise to the occasion. "We know that our audience, our stage, is bigger. So because of that, we're trying to produce more," explained Pacers SVP of Marketing Tyler Beadlescomb. The team increased their production to roughly 70 Instagram posts per week during their playoff run. That effort immediately paid off—leading all NBA teams in engagement during the month of May. Why? Because the surge in Pacer content coupled with the heroics on the court led to increased opportunities for earned engagement. As the comments, repost, and shares amplified, more content creators felt inspired to generate Pacers content. The more earned media that is generated, the easier it was to connect with the community and culture.

Beyond traditional highlights, the Pacers employed cultural insights and social cues to engage with the community. A primary example of this would be the emergence of the "What the Hali" phrase, inspired from New Orleans rapper Rob49's hit song "WTH". In the chorus of the song, Rob49 referenced star PG Tyrese Haliburton. The song quickly spread across the U.S. and became a TikTok sensation. Even Haliburton himself endorsed the song by making a video singing along. The Pacer marketing team identified the opportunity and quickly had Rob49 as a fixture courtside, coinciding with fans shouting "What the Hali". Given its cultural relevance, "WTH" quickly became the unofficial anthem of the Pacers' playoff run. Paired with their signature battle cry "Yes 'Cers" (a clever twist to "yessir"), the Pacers marketing team successfully penetrated the culture and equipped their fans with memorable catchphrases in real-time to deepen loyalty.

From euphoric peaks to moments of heartbreak, the Pacers marketing team delivered content with exceptional speed, keeping us connected in real-time. In each playoff series, Tyrese Haliburton delivered a game winner, and each time the Pacers social media channels created compelling visuals to associate with the event. Beadlescomb's team treated every game like a content goldmine, not knowing when a game changing play or highlight would occur. He explained it by saying "At the start of every game, we don't know what's going to happen, but we have a whole little army... everyone trying to think, what can we tell that is the most compelling story from this game?" This approach bred creativity and authenticity. As a result, the Pacers campaign emphasized the collective effort and personality of the team, along with Haliburton's heroics. For example, they highlighted that an astounding *eight players were averaging double-figures in points during the playoffs*, exemplifying the "team-first mentality". Even amid the emotional weight of Haliburton's injury, the marketing team maintained its loyalty to the fanbase with transparency and immediacy, providing real-time updates while still staying engaged during game 7. Their commitment to providing stellar coverage during a pivotal day in Pacer history perpetuated the community/family tone of their fanbase.

Conventional wisdom says small-market teams struggle to gain national attention—well the 2024-2025 Pacer's disrupted that notion entirely. They gained +170k followers during May-June, their social engagement during this span surpassed the entire preseason and regular season combined, and nearly 282,000 national and international stories were published during their playoff run. In the end, the Pacers didn't just reach the finals—they engineered a marketing movement with lasting cultural and commercial impact. Their journey will be used as an A+ case study on how sports marketing is done right. #Go'Cers