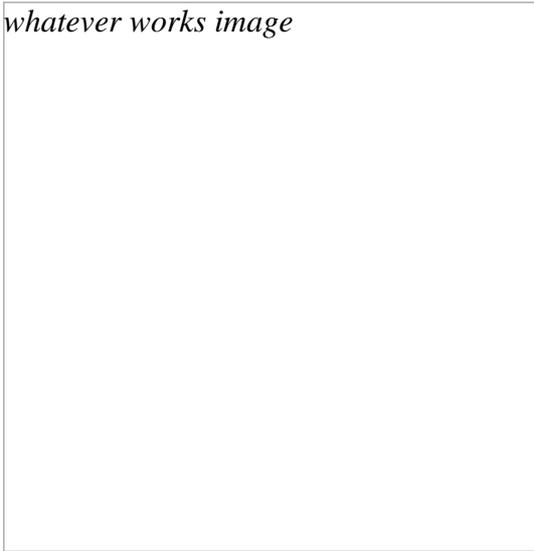


Whatever Works - how young people's love of apps and tech can be turned to your advantage

Published 09/10/17 by [Rob Maaye](#)

This blog first appeared in the Summer 2017: No Limits issue of Coaching Edge and has been posted with their permission. You can find out more about Coaching Edge [here](#).

whatever works image



To engage with kids, sometimes you have to try and see things as they do. Nowhere is this more the case than with modern technology, as Crispin Andrews of [Coaching Edge](#) argues.

Trends show that kids are spending more time using technology and less time doing sport. So, if coaches put tech front and centre in their sessions, then more kids will do sport. Right?

Sounds logical, but whether it turns out like that will probably depend on whether adults use the technology to actually make the kids' experience more like the experience they have when they use technology at home, or with family and friends. Or, whether we fall into the trap of using technology to find clever new ways of hitting our own sporting targets and ticking coaching boxes.

Most kids who use tech aren't nerds who love tech for its own sake. They aren't the sort who want to know the ins and outs of how this or that gadget works. Most kids aren't producers of technology, they're consumers. They play games, surf the net to find cool stuff and connect with friends and like-minded peers.

In fact, [children](#) today use technology for the same reason that in the sixties, seventies and before, previous generations used to play sport, with friends, in the garden, road and park. Technology offers them freedom to interact with friends, unsupervised, or unrestricted. Freedoms that have been restricted in the outside world, as modern-day culture becomes more fearful and risk averse.

[Amy Whitehead](#), a lecturer in Sports Coaching and Physical Education from Liverpool John Moores University, recently told me that it was important to bridge the gap between how coaches use technology and how participating kids use it. Whitehead was involved in last year's [UK Coaching report into the impact of technology on coaching](#), and she's absolutely right.

A coach might use social media to communicate with players, to tell them about the next match or training session, to get to know a new player a bit, before they turn up for the first time. They might use apps to analyse player performance.

Important routine business, but for the average kid, still really boring. How about instead, have a coach use their contacts to arrange an interview with a sports star and post that on social media for all the players and their friends to see.

A few years ago I remember hearing Chris Gayle, the West Indian cricketer, speak to a group of teenage boys at a London cricket project via a webcam. They were really into that. Those few moments, created by technology, didn't make the youngsters better players, fitter, healthier, or even better people. But using technology, the way they use it at home, to bring a world star into their lives is something that they, and their friends at home and online, would want to be part of and stick at. Then, the longer they stick at their sport, the more likely they are to get better and benefit.

So, with this in mind, how about running a live feed from a local sporting event or a big match back to your own session? You could link it to a social media group that either you, or the kids themselves, have set up. Or how about running live footage from your own session, via the group, out into the kids' online world?

One of your players is up for an award at school, or has been picked for a representative team. How about they stick a camera on their head and report on what they're up to for the rest of the group to see?

Someone's going to Wimbledon, the Super League Grand Final, or a Premier League game. Get them to report back via social media, from outside the event. Or get them to send a running commentary during the event to the group social media page for others to comment. The chances are that they'll be doing this sort of thing already, so why not make the most of it.

Whitehead told me that for this sort of thing to work, the coach, or someone involved in the session, needs to have an understanding of the technology, what is out there and how to use it.

Absolutely. But what if that someone is one of the kids? Or a group of them? It's nearly always the case that kids today know more about this sort of tech than adults. So why be constrained by our own limitations when we have so many experts right in front of us.

Let them run with it, run their own Facebook page, Twitter feed, YouTube channel. They know what to do, how to do it.

Get them doing this, before, after and even during your sessions.

They might not be doing sport the whole time, hitting all the sensible, physical activity targets. But it still adds value to what's going on, gets more people involved and engaged creatively.

You never know, with all this creative juice flowing, some bright spark might come up with some idea or other about how to involve technology in the actual coaching sessions that you'd never have thought of.

Soon, the group's profile will become more popular. That's more people getting into sport, potentially wanting to come to your session.

All of a sudden you're using social media not just to connect with a wider audience, but also to connect the kids' sports session with the rest of their life. It all becomes one big interconnected world. Just like the world that kids inhabit when they're engaging with technology at home.

That is something a lot of people could really get into.

Gaming Tech

For [Amy Whitehead](#), Pokémon Go was useful because it used technology to get people moving around.

How about extending that concept, but with people actually doing something physical to get their green flashing bauble. Play a bit of basketball, run part of a course, do five minutes stretching. "How about getting people to compete with a friend in some sort of sporting challenge?" Whitehead suggests.

How about a downloadable cartoon version of a famous sports star popping up on tablets and handheld devices, offering physical activity or coaching advice? A daily fitness tip, or a routine, just something quick they can do to stay healthier. Or some skill they could practice. Desktop Mourinho anyone?

Digital Safeguarding

[David Turner](#), ConnectedCoaches Community Champion and UK Coaching Safeguarding Lead, suggests a few top tips for keeping children safe when using digital technology.

- Make yourself aware of your governing body of sport's digital safety policy.
- Avoid 'befriending' under 18s on social media.
- Use open team groups on social media to keep in touch with team members and parents without the need for private messages to under 18s.
Copy parents or a welfare officer into mass communications to under 18s.
- Check out the free Child Protection in Sport Unit guide to social media and Internet safety on their [website resource bank](#).
- Try the UK Coaching eLearning module on Safe Communication with Digital Kids as part of our [Safeguarding renewal package](#).

Research

[UK Coaching research from 2016](#) found that coaches can use technology to get more people active.

The report also found that technology provides opportunities for coaches to work with participants remotely, supporting them as they use apps as well as offering them face-to-face sessions.

To be effective, technology should provide opportunities for:

- feedback – presenting individuals with information about themselves, obtained during assessment, and their use of the technology
- inter-human interaction – either enables contact with professionals or peers, or allows the user to share information, support or advice
- adaptation – tailored, specific messages for specific individuals
- user targeting – personalises by, for instance, using the name of the user and recognising the recipient's birthday
- goal setting – specific and achievable
- context awareness – sending content to individuals at the right time
- self-learning – technology that can update its internal model of the user by recording progress over time. By doing this, targets can continually change and develop the user further through the [behaviour change](#) continuum.

Next Steps

If you enjoyed this *Coaching Edge* article you can [find out more about the magazine and how to subscribe on the UK Coaching website](#).

What did you think of this article? Please leave a comment to let us know your thoughts.

Login to follow, share, comment and participate. Not a member? [Join for free now.](#)

tags : technology, apps