How to Grow FIRST Faster



“We need to grow FIRST faster!”



This challenge came from **FIRST** cofounder Dean Kamen in this year's **Power-Up** kickoff video. Team 4915, Spartronics, completely agrees. It has been our mission since we were founded in 2013 to grow FIRST faster. **It’s been our discovery that one of the main roadblocks standing in the way of growing FIRST faster is a lack of success in marketing and fundraising.**

Team 4915 is confident we can help. Spartronics has been exceptionally successful when it comes to fundraising. **In just the last three years, we have raised nearly $100,000 from an average of 21 sponsors per year.** This massive fundraising was accomplished in a community of 23,000 people. A community that has no big box stores, no major manufacturers, and small-town retailers.

This year alone, our fundraising exceeds $37,000 from 28 sponsors and is still growing. **We’ve created this document to share our fundraising, marketing and social media knowledge and tactics with other teams** to help teams break through the many of the fundraising and marketing roadblocks they face **and help grow FIRST as fast as possible.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Building a Social Media Footprint	Page 4
Growing Facebook	Page 5
Growing Instagram	Page 6
Growing Twitter	Page 8
The Value of Public Relations	Page 9
Fundraising Strategies: Getting creative	Page 11
The Power of Video	Page 12
Going Door-to-Door	Page 13
Mentors Funding	Page 14
Parental Support is Priceless	Page 15
Extra Special Events	Page 16
Sponsor Relations Program	Page 17
History of Spartronics: A Case Study	Page 18
Planning for the future	Page 20
Good news, bad news	Page 21
A Marketing Culture: Everyone's a Marketer	Page 23
Building a Brand	Page 24
Don't fear to fail	Page 25
Final Marketing Rule: Everyone must dance	Page 27
Contact us	Page 28

Building a social media footprint

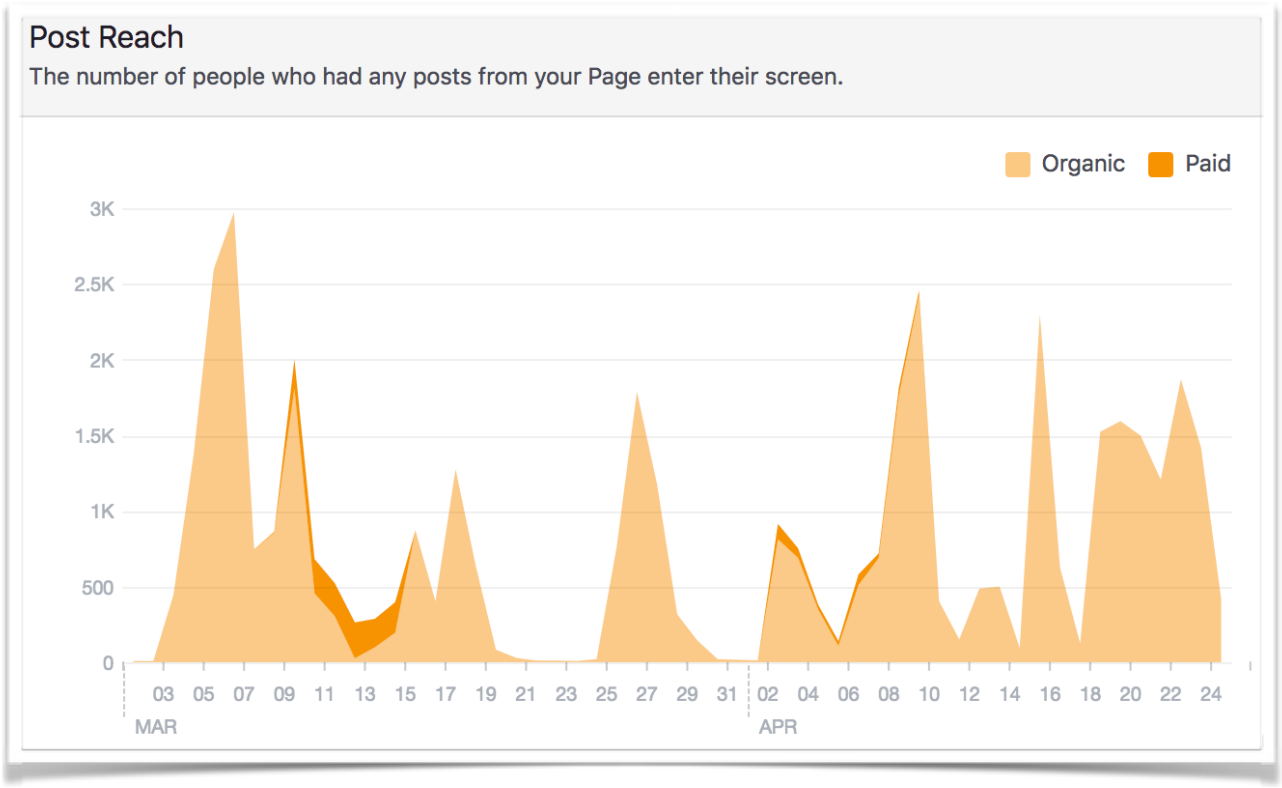


Spartronics Facebook page targets parents, Sponsors and our community

Spartronics believes the key to building a social media footprint is to do it organically and authentically. That means doing it bot-free. The first step: one person needs to be in charge of EACH social media channel. They need to OWN it. That's the best way to develop organic growth. While it may be tempting to hire a programmer or go online and contract someone to take a shortcut to add thousands of "likes" or "followers," don't do it. Your team can build a nearly bot-free social media footprint with consistency and effort.

What follows are our best practices and how we grew a massive social media footprint, organically, over the last five years on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Stay tuned for our next focus, YouTube. If you have built a successful YouTube channel, or have another idea to share, chime in! Email our team at spartronics4915@gmail.com, and we will add great ideas to this document!

Growing Facebook



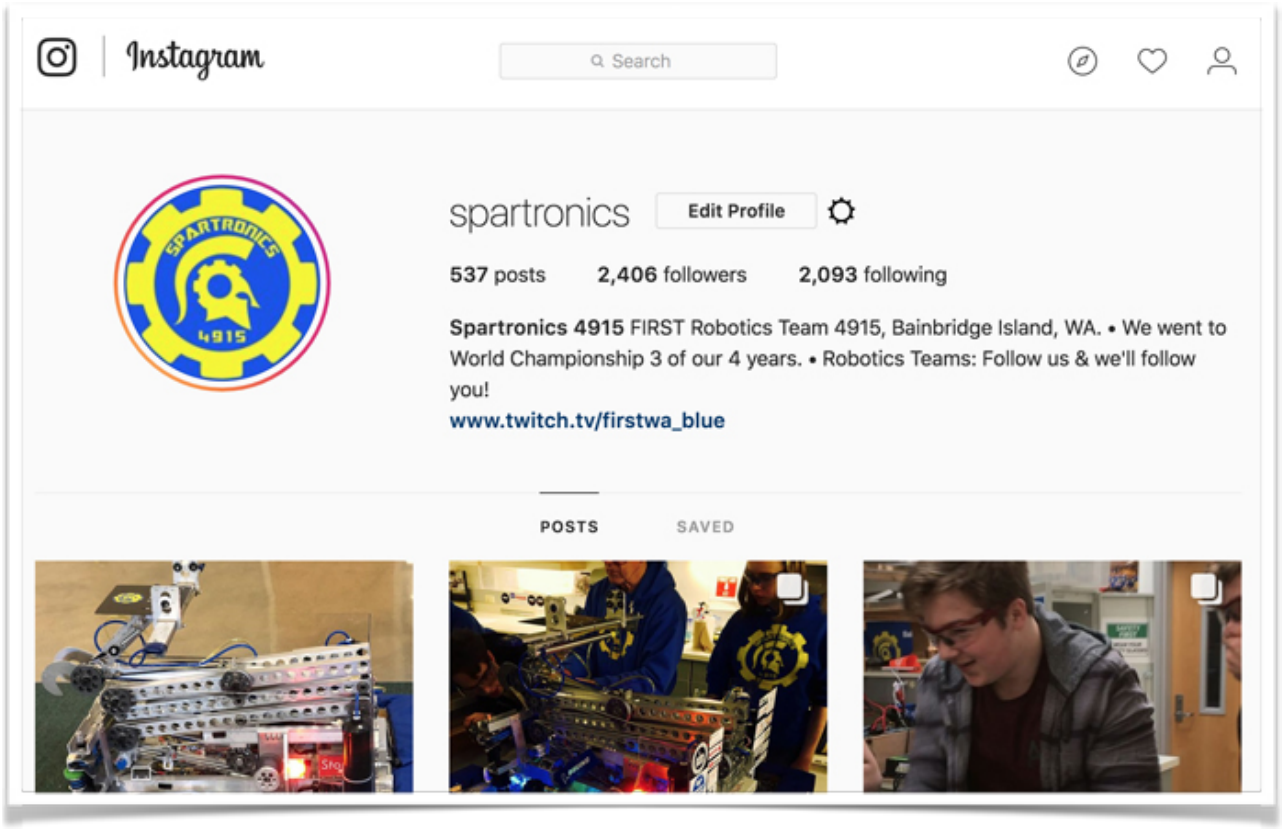
During competition season, we often have 1,000 to nearly 3,000 views a day on Facebook, mostly organic

The key to all social media is knowing your audience. On Facebook, we are talking to our parents, Sponsors and our community. We don't use Facebook ads (yet). We do boost posts when we are fundraising and found them to work incredibly well.

Photos are vital. Videos are even more powerful. The key is quality. Great photos that are close up and show emotions are the most effective ones. Robots with kids interacting do even better. Dancing videos always win!

Our number one videos of all time are videos of our Coach dancing and the head of our school system dancing. If it is unexpected - or funny - it is going to engage. Remember to comment back to anyone who comments. The key to Facebook success is engagement: keep the conversation going and post what's happening with your team. Your followers want to know what's going on!

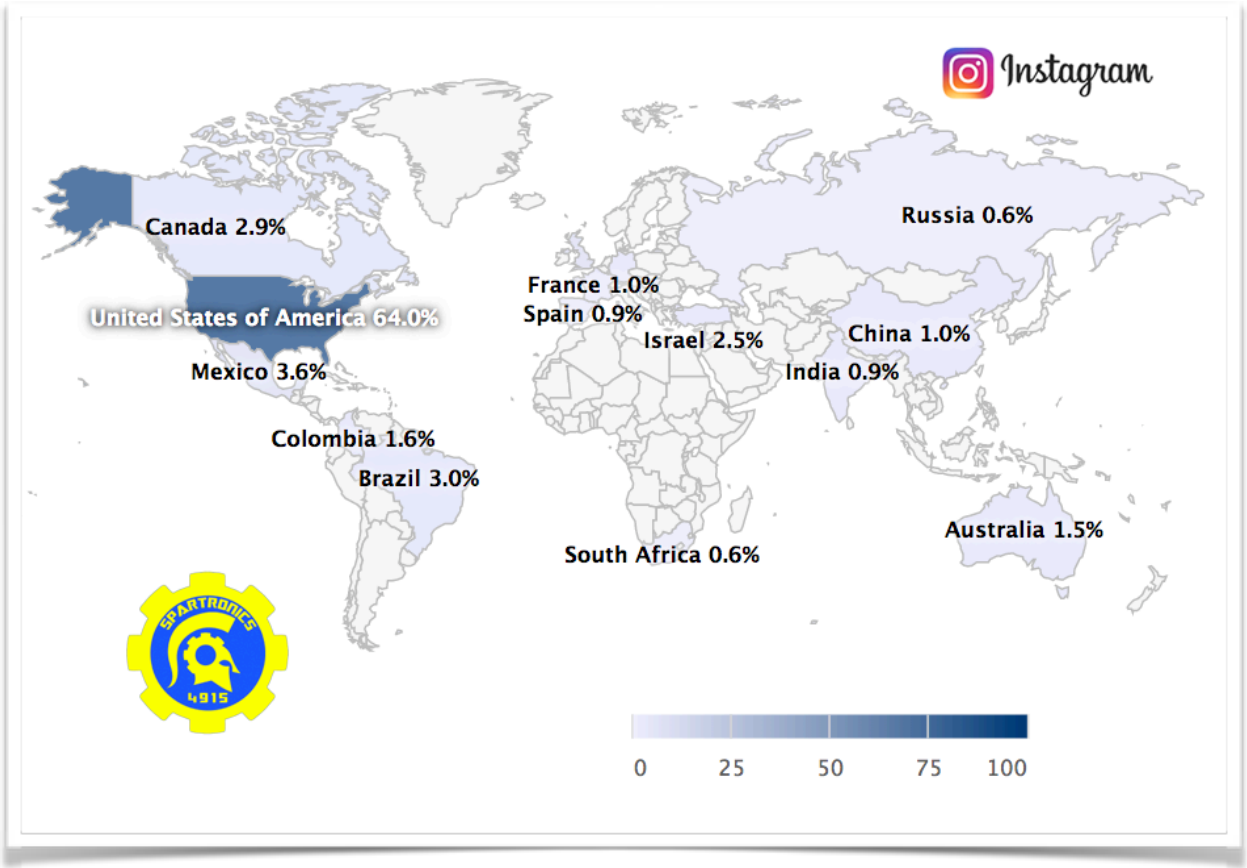
Growing Instagram



The majority of our followers on Instagram are other robotics team and robotics students

We've found that Instagram is the best platform for reaching out to other FIRST teams and young people in general. We have built one of the most massive Instagram followings in the FIRST community with more than 2400 followers (as of March 2018).

We have a global reach through Instagram. 34% of our Instagram followers live outside the United States. Overall, our Instagram metrics tell us that the majority of our reach is to other robotics teams and young people interested in robotics. We reach students in Mexico, Brazil, Canada, Israel, Columbia, Australia, China, France, Spain, India, South Africa and Russia, just to name a few countries.



We have a global footprint on Instagram, with more than a third of our follower outside of the U.S.

The key growing Instagram is six things:

1, Post great content: interesting photos, videos or stories and focus on fun.
2. #hashtags are vital. Check out this and this as resources for hashtags.
3. Do not over post - we try not to post more than one or two per day unless we have something spectacular to share.
4. We focus on what we think other teams and young people will be interested in, as this is the social media channel we engage together on and we use language/slang they understand.
5. Reciprocate! When someone follows you, quickly follow them back!
6. Engage: keep abreast of what other teams are doing and like their posts as well - that's important.

Growing Twitter



Don't forget Twitter: it is an excellent resource to update sponsors and parents during competitions

Twitter is often the forgotten social media channel by high school robotics teams. But we found it to be a powerful way to connect with the business community - and outside of our sphere. It's also an immediate communication channel, so when we are at tournaments, it's one of the best ways to keep our sponsors and supporters informed about how our team is doing, match by match.

We have more than 1200 Twitter followers (again 98% bot-free) and have built this following, but using these principles:

1. Make sure your tweets are relevant to the audience. Because your followers are business people, they want to know about your robot and your team. Keep them posted on your progress.
2. Use #hashtags and that will expose you to potential new followers.
3. Follow people back, but make sure they are not bots because sometimes, they are!
4. Use Twitter actively when you are at competitions and attach photos and videos. Post your team's schedule and then the results of each match — engage your audience: they will appreciate it and keep following you!

The Value of Public Relations



One of our Mentors, Binnur, is interviewed at FIRST Worlds for their promotional video

Public Relations is an essential tool that helps build your brand and supports successful fundraising. Our team's reputation in our community has come from a highly successful public relations effort. This includes securing a local **Media Sponsor.** In our case, it's the Bainbridge Review, our weekly community newspaper. This has helped ensure that our entire community knows who we are and about our most important accomplishments.

Here are some PR activities you can do to help spread the message of your team - and FIRST:

- Write news releases about participating and success in tournaments, your community outreach activities, and awards and honors your team or members have won.
- Send calendar announcements about all your activities in advance of all events.
- Contact the editor or reporters by email.

- Many reporters use Twitter: follow them and you might even "pitch" them a story using a direct message through Twitter.
- Most importantly — CALL them: Hardly anyone calls reporters on the phone anymore. When you do, they will love it, and it will help increase the chance of your story getting covered!



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Feisty to the finish: BHS stops Sealth with incredible comeback. A14

Let's rock and robot!

Game time draws near for BHS's first ever Robotics Club

BY LUCIANO MARANO
Bainbridge Island Review

A group of teenagers from a small island community must surmount the odds and learn to work together as they engineer and construct a sophisticated robot to compete in a national robotics challenge.

If you think this is the plot of a John Hughes movie, you're wrong (but wouldn't that have been cool?).

It's actually real life at Bainbridge High School where, over the past several months, 35 students and nine adult mentors have come together to form the school's inaugural robotics club: The Bainbridge Spartronics.

The Spartronics will complete their customized robot and compete in at least two district competitions before setting their sights on the annual FIRST

Landslide yes vote for levies

BY BRIAN KELLY
Bainbridge Island Review

Bainbridge Island voters overwhelmingly approved two levies to pay for educational programs and operations and technology improvements for island schools during Tuesday's Special Election.

According to the initial vote count on Election Night, voters approved the Bainbridge Island School District's Educational Programs and Operations Levy with a 75.4 percent "yes" vote. Approximately 24.6 percent of Bainbridge voters cast ballots against the measure.

"We are just so incredibly grateful to our community for their commitment to education and support for our schools," said District Superintendent Faith Chapel.

"I think the level of support means a great deal to our staff," she said.

While voters on Bainbridge Island gave a beefy boost to public schools with their landslide approval of two three-year levies on Election Day, but no where was the support more stunning than in Crystal Springs

Fundraising Strategies: Getting creative



Our "Student Stories" video target sponsors that ended up contributing 70% of our funds in 2018

Two words: Get creative. That's the message from Team 4915 when it comes to Fundraising. Four more words: Think positive, be positive. We have worked with several teams to help them solve communications and fundraising problems. We have found their biggest hurdle is themselves. We first have to convince them they *can* do it.

Spartronics believes that nearly any community can support a full pipeline of robotics teams. We know because we live on an island that does not allow big box stores and shuns franchise retailers. We have 23,000 residents. But we have great local business and residents who "buy local." We have tapped into that island spirit, and we have been successful.

Here are some of the successful strategies we have used, and please share yours so we can include them here by sending us an email to spartronics4915@gmail.com.

The Power of Video



This is a clip from our first "Digital Door Knock" video, asking Sponsors to donate via email with a custom video

Sometimes, student schedules and Sponsors schedules don't match, and that's what we found when we first went door-to-door, meeting with local businesses soliciting donations for our team the first year.

Then we did something different: we videotaped students knocking on the door as if they were talking to a Sponsor face-to-face. The rest of the video informed the Sponsor about the team and FIRST. We used FIRST video footage too. That part was used in every video. The introduction and the closing were customized for each Sponsor. The results were fantastic. We raised enough money to pay for our robot the first year and exceeded our initial fundraising goals.

Every video Spartronics makes has students involved every step of the way. From scriptwriting to editing, students can use their creativity and passion to help shape our video content. Moral of the story: Get creative!

Going Door-to-Door



We are a student-led team, but this is where we ask our Mentors for help. They know a lot of local business owners and have many connections.

Every presentation begins with students walking in the door together, wearing our team shirts. Our recognizable brand and community outreach usually lead to us being recognized before we even open our mouths. We then proceed to the actual presentation, which the students always give, not the mentors. Spartronics students can successfully communicate their passion for robotics exactly how the team has helped to change their and others lives. Businesses have a tough time saying no to students.

We often bring a blank invoice and ask them what amount should we fill in before we leave. You have to ask for the sale.This is a clip from our first “Digital Door Knock” video, asking Sponsors to donate via email with a custom video



ACE Hardware of Bainbridge Island owners Steve and Becky Mikami are legacy Spartronics sponso

Mentors Fund Our Team Through Their Hours and Dollars

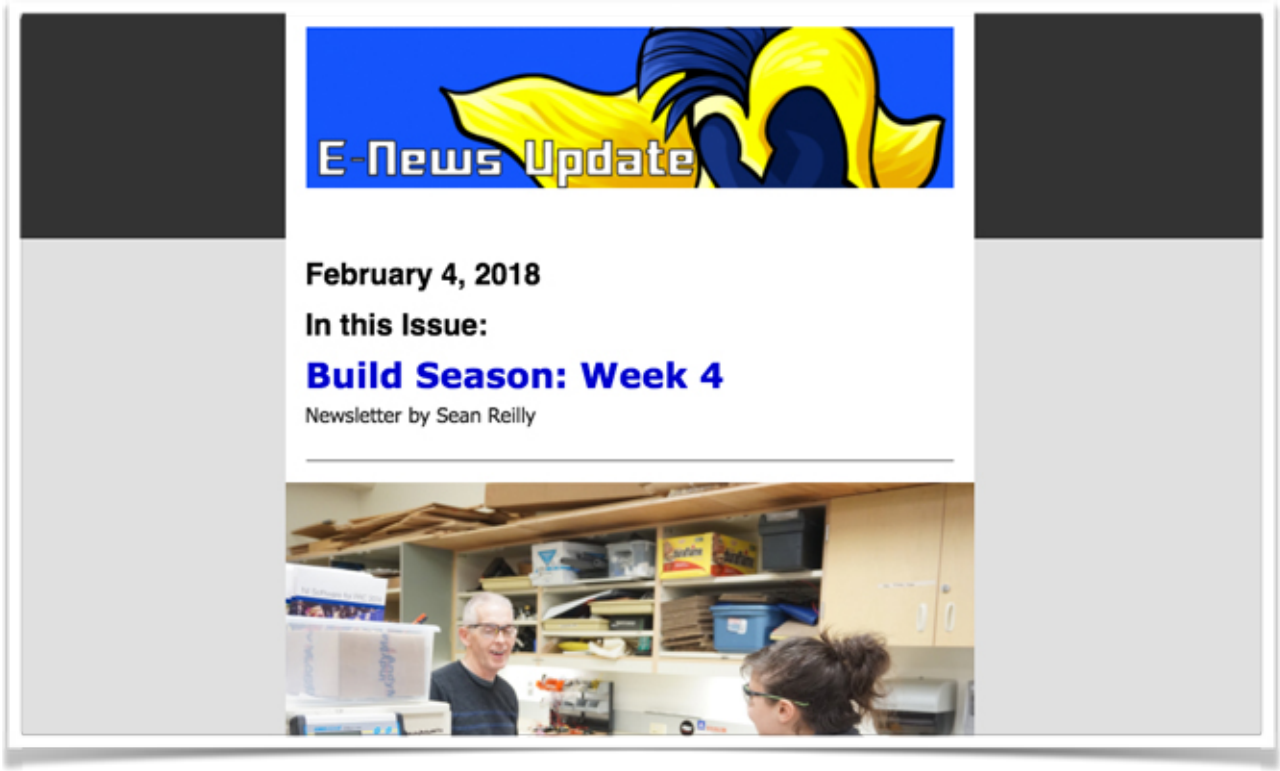


Our mentors support us in many ways: with their time, talent and even their dollars

Here's something many teams may not know. Some companies will pay a nonprofit for each hour their employee volunteers. At Team 4915, we have Mentors from Adobe, Boeing, and Microsoft. Each of these companies makes a donation to our Schools Foundation for every hour they work. Our Schools Foundation provides those funds back to Spartronics.

Last year, those donations totaled several thousands of dollars, so we are extra appreciative of our amazing Mentors. Many of our Mentor firms also are sponsors. Several other Mentors make significant personal monetary donations to the team, in addition to their time, talent and energy. There is perhaps no greater resource for any FIRST team than your Mentors!

Parental Support is Priceless



We keep our parents updated through a weekly newsletter during Build Season - and beyond

One of our oldest and most important communications tools that also supports our fundraising, social media channels and our website, is our newsletter. This is our main communication channel to parents, family, friends, supporters and our community.

Our newsletter is sent out weekly during build season, so parents know what is going on and why we are spending so many late nights at the high school!

We also ask families to provide a $200 donation per student to support our team. While this is optional, we typically receive support from 80% of our families. This helps to pay for student meals (we feed students two dinners and snacks each week during build season), the team shirt and more.

Extra Special Events



Special events used as fundraisers can give a big boost to a Team's bottom line

We have done exceptionally cost-effective special events like a takeover of Westside Pizza, one of our Sponsors, and in four hours, we earned $800.

But the most successful special event in our history was Spartronics Day on April 9, 2015 - 4.9.15. We were able to get our Mayor and City Council to declare the date Spartronics Day, as it only comes once in a Century. One of our students, a team leader and programmer, Tarkan, recognized this would happen. He told the Marketing subteam, which quickly built a clever fundraising event around the date.

The entire team were stationed all over the island. Everyone was wearing team shirts and holding Ace Hardware-donated red fundraising buckets. Our Media Sponsor at the time, Inside Bainbridge, let us take over their Facebook page to fundraise. We sent people online to give. In 49 minute and 15 seconds, we raised over $4,000 for the team, which our team would use to help support other FIRST teams.

Create a Sponsor Relations Program



Building long-term relationships with your sponsors are key. We have more 2than a half-dozen "legacy" sponsors who have supported Spartronics five years straight since we started the team.

"Swag" is essential. We have given our Sponsors gifts every year, including team shirts, hats, hoodies, stickers, buttons, coffee mugs, koozies, and more: all branded with our colors and Spartronics logo.



We put their logos on everything once they hit the $500 donation level and above: Sponsor banner, our website, team shirt, even the robot. We promote them in social media, do a feature story on them in our newsletter, ask our students and parents to "like" their Facebook page and more.

We subscribe them to our newsletter, send them VIP invitations to kickoff and our annual Robotics Open House, encourage them to drop in on us during build season meetings.

Create a Sponsor Relations Program, stay in touch with them year round, and you have a better chance of keeping them!



History of Spartronics: A Case Study



Boeing engineer and co-founding Mentor of Spartronics John Sachs and Enrique Chee during Season 1

A Physics teacher, a Boeing engineer, and a PR pro walk into a room. While it may seem like the punchline to a bad joke, the situation was completely serious. This eclectic group had to pool resources for the successful creation of an FRC team and convince their local Bainbridge Schools Foundation to provide the much-needed initial funding. Luckily for us, they succeeded.

During that meeting in the spring of 2013 and Team 4915 — Bainbridge Island's first high school robotics team and the FIRST first team — was born. Not only was this Bainbridge's first FRC team, but it would also be the only robotics team on Bainbridge Island, then a population of 20,000 people. This presented a massive challenge of raising awareness and funds. But through the dedication of Spartronics members, which included 25 students, 6 professional mentors, and Coach Enrique Chee, we not only survived our first build and competition season, we thrived.

"The goal the first year was to build a robot that moved," Coach Chee reminds each group of newcomers at the team's annual orientation meeting. Our first robot, ATLaS,

did more than that. We went to Districts in Portland and on to the FIRST World Championships in St. Louis, our first season as a Rookie team, earning our slot based on points, not awards.



ATLaS, our Rookie team's first robot, which went to the FIRST FRC World Championships in St. Louis

Planning for the future



Our first team photo (some students pictured made the photo, but left the team before competition season)

Team 4915 started out with a couple of dozen students, a handful of professional mentors and a thoroughly committed Coach Chee. A marketing subteam of seven students and two professional mentors - one highly seasoned Marketing veteran and one highly skilled Public Relations expert. Together, they spearheaded an effort to create an entirely new brand, including a team name, logo, team colors, a mascot, and more.

What emerged from a Marketing subteam's efforts of careful planning and collaboration was a powerful brand. The team colors: Bright blue and sharp yellow. A team name that modified the High School's "Spartans" nickname, with a high-tech spin. A logo that could be recognized if it were a half-inch in size, and be even more visible on a team shirt when seen from a long distance. Spartronics was more than just a name: it was a complete brand. With PMS and HEX colors, a special type font selected for printed material. The first Marketing subteam planned for all of it to be used forever.



Good news: We made Districts! Bad news: We have no money!



One of our first fundraising videos: A "digital door knocK" because someone is always home

We had spectacular success in our first year of fundraising as a team. On an island known for its Arts and Literature culture, we had to educate our Bainbridge community about STEM and robotics. So we did extensive local outreach.

Part of our success, from the beginning, has been a result of our creative approach to fundraising. Backed by our robust brand, our Marketing subteam first went door-to-door, meeting with local business owners. The students made the presentations, but the Mentors helped with the final "ask."

Truthfully, it was a little awkward, as it was hard for many local business owners to stop in the middle of their day - the only time students could gather easily was right after school - so we wanted to find a solution.

We created a video "ask." We did a "digital door knock," videotaping students going to a door and knocking on it to open each video. Every potential sponsor received a personalized video.

Sending a video link by email allowed each sponsor to view the "ask" on their own schedule. Our favorite story is about the Westside Pizza owners. They had just bought the business, and had other primary jobs, so it was not convenient for them to meet with students in person. They opened our email and watched the video in the evening on the day we sent it. They sent an email back, explaining that they had just watched it, loved it, and they were in as sponsors! The email they sent came in at 11:35 p.m.

We had raised in the pre-season that first year, plenty of funds to build a robot and pay for all the food to feed our team. Plus, we had funds to create buttons, stickers, a team brokers, team shirts, and more — all designed to promote our brand. What we had not planned on was qualifying to play beyond our regular District Events.

In the spring of 2014, as a first-year Rookie team, Spartronics qualified by points to compete in the District Championships in Portland. This was composed of the top teams from Washington, Oregon and Alaska. That was the good news.

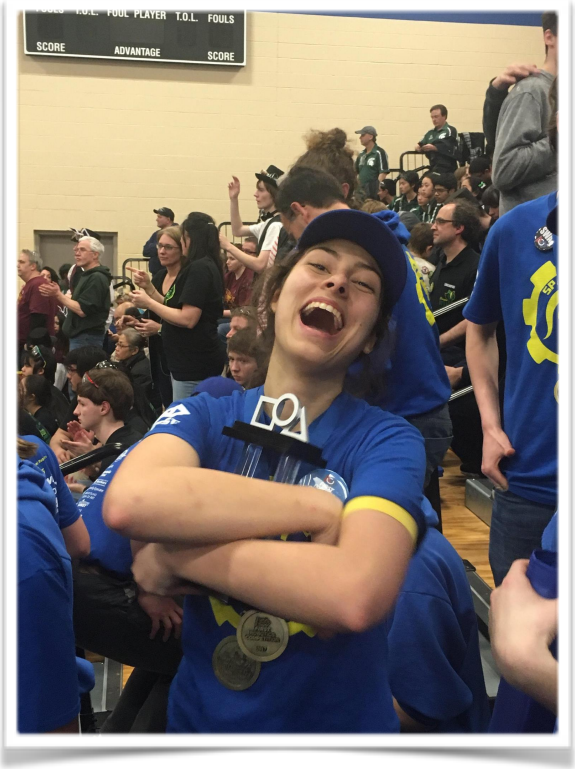
The bad news was we had *not* budgeted for the registration fee for Districts nor any of the team meals or travel expenses. So we took to email, social media, and we worked with our media sponsor to get the word out to our community that we needed help. In less than a week, we had raised all the funds we needed to go to Districts - several thousand dollars poured in.



Then the unbelievable happened: We qualified for Worlds! Worse: we had less than 10 days to raise funds we needed to go. That did not deter our Marketing subteam, and we went back out on social media. We posted videos of our school district's Superintendent dancing the YMCA at one of our competitions. We also posted a video of our Coach dancing. All of our messages appealed for more support and directed people to donate online. We raised the funds we needed, and our island was talking about robotics!

CREATING A MARKETING CULTURE

“Everyone’s a Marketer”



A freshman teammate said, “Everyone’s a Marketer” in her rookie year. She was a spokesperson for the team. She wrote the team’s first brochure. She later would join the mechanical subteam, be responsible for all the electronics in our robot, and become a team co-captain. Today, Clio Batali is a Spartronics Alumni attending MIT.

Her mantra lives on as this is Spartronics core culture: Everyone is a Marketer. The behavior of every person wearing Spartronics apparel, good or bad, reflects back on to the team. In order to build a good reputation, we try to ensure that members of our team are always professional. Gracious professionalism comes naturally when you understand this.

If we are all going to grow FIRST successfully, we all need to become Marketers. Because wherever we are, we all represent the image of FIRST and each of our teams. Spreading the message of FIRST is something everyone can do, and that means everyone is a Marketer.

We also know that at competitions, communicating a clear message is vital. That’s a life skill that is crucial to being successful in business as well. Our team believes that our success in competition has always benefited from our ability to communicate our message effectively to everyone, especially judges.

Plus, everyone knows someone in their community who owns a business or their parents or friends do. That’s how you fundraise!

So remember the Spartronics mantra: “Everyone’s a Marketer.”

Building a Brand



Spartronics bright blue and bold yellow brand colors stand out in any crowd from any distance

You build a powerful brand with many things. Your logo is the cornerstone of your brand. It is one of your most prized assets. Protect it. Never change it (unless you rebrand entirely or refresh your brand).

Using your name and image, again and again, is the key to good branding. The repetition you create builds on itself every year, allowing people to recognize your team name and logo at a glance.

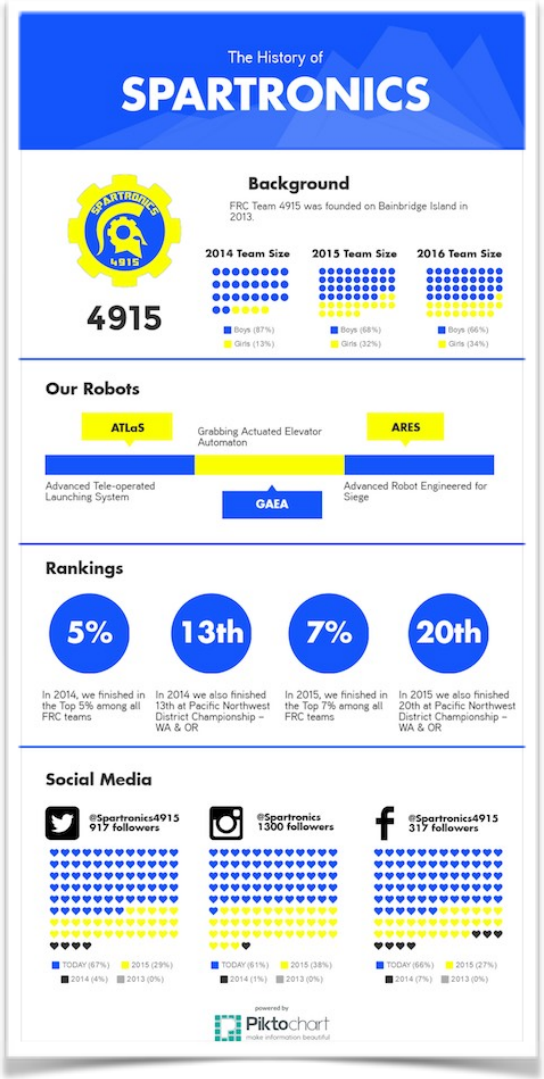
A second important thing to keep in mind with logos is color choice. Google "color psychology" - that's a great place to start. Then make some visual observations: which colors stand out in a crowd? We use bright royal blue and process yellow. The contrast of these colors has paired well when used together and immediately draws the eye. This helped us create a distinctive theme and image.

Your brand is the foundation of all your communication efforts and must be followed to ensure consistency of your brand. Brand consistency is paramount to creating and protecting your brand's long-term value.

Don't fear to fail

Spartronics recently "retired" its mobile app, which was available for iOS and Android

Getting the best fundraising results often requires experimentation. That means you need to test different social media and marketing channels, different strategies and different communication tactics. Spartronics has a presence on every primary social media platform, including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

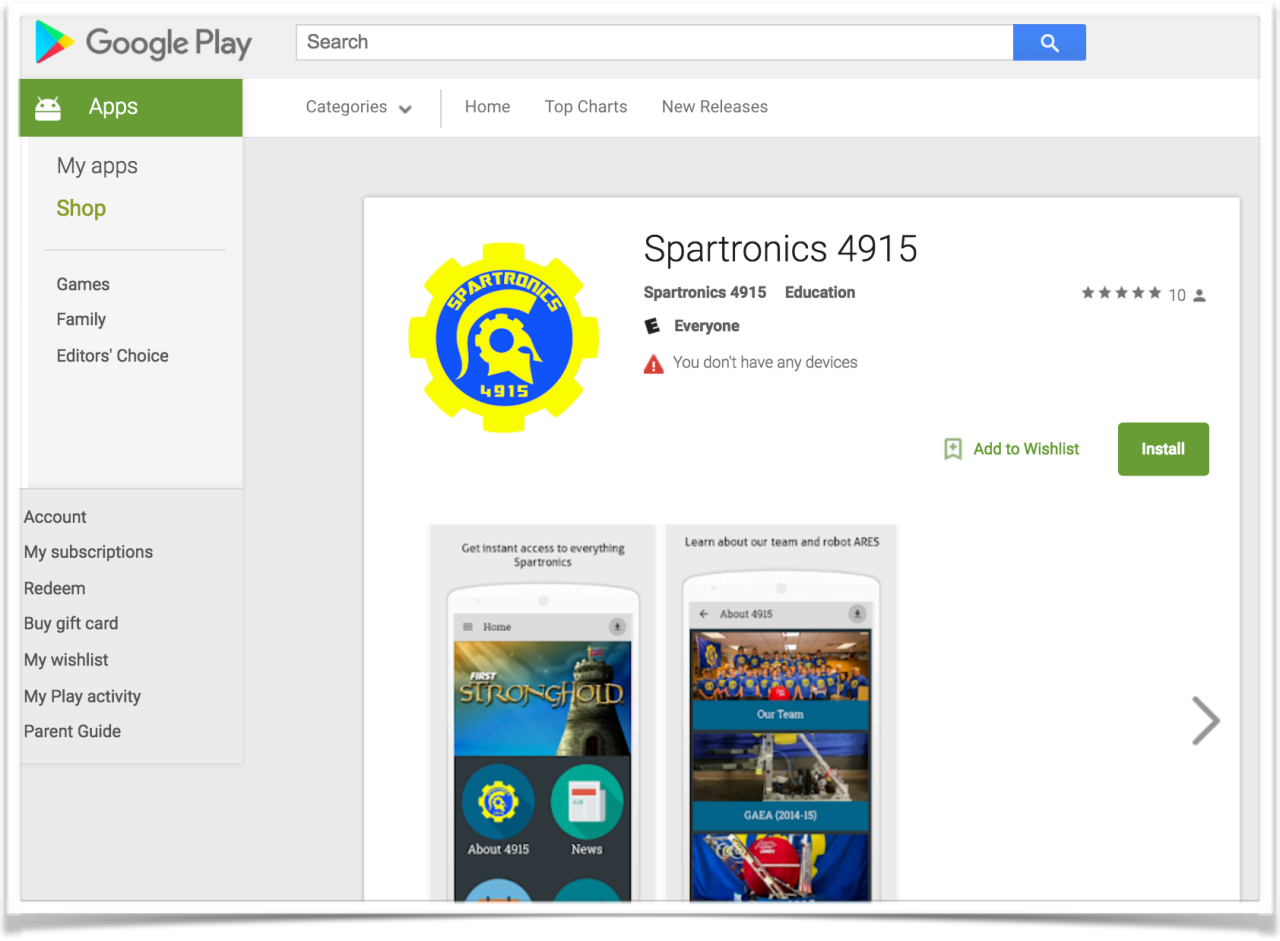


We also use our YouTube channel, a weekly email newsletter, and of course, our website, for outreach. For a student recruiting campaign, we used Snapchat. The key is this: every communication channel can be used to reach a different audience. Just be sure your message fits each channel to reach each audience.

We created print brochures to tell our team story, flyers for events, and business cards to hand out to potential sponsors. We created custom thank you notes that we sent to our current Sponsors and Infographics to display at our annual Open House to illustrate the history of our team and how we built a robot. We have tried and tested nearly every marketing channel to spread the word of FIRST, STEM and STEAM, locally and globally.

When used together, all of the channels we use give Spartronics a sphere of influence that reaches our entire community and beyond. We never would've been able to impact our community so profoundly had we stuck to one or two channels of communications. We are glad we kept trying new things.

We did fail. Our first website was highly fundamental and looked terrible on mobile devices. We let our website be hosted by a business donor, and that was great because it saved us a lot of money. But when our website was hacked, we had to wait until our donor could find the time to back up our site. It took time to get back the things that were changed, including our home page.



We also created a mobile app. It was a GREAT experience. You could even download it from the Apple App Store and Google Play. But keeping it updated was challenging. Technology also has moved towards web apps, so we “retired” our mobile app. Everyone learned a LOT, especially the student who led the development of it. The moral of our story: Try new things because it’s okay to fail. Just get back up, and try again!

Final Marketing Rule: Everyone must dance



Dancing is part of our team culture and even our Coach dances with us

Everyone on our team is encouraged to dance during the competition.

Why? Because when we dance, we are more enthusiastic and engaged. We apply this same logic much more broadly. Spartronics knows that the actions of every member of our team reflect back on to us, good or bad. In the past, this has given a massive boost to our reputation. When individuals representing our team have engaged with our community in a positive manner everyone, including potential Sponsors, take note of this. It's merely gracious professionalism.

But we do dancing one step further. Check out our "Dance Challenge" videos on our YouTube channel. What started as something we did for our fun, we sent out to other teams and shared the fun.

Our Contact Info

We recognize how hard marketing and fundraising can be. If you need any further help or have questions, you can email us. We also know other teams have brilliant ideas to share and we'd love to hear those too:

Our email is spartronics4915@gmail.com

Our website is at www.spartronics4915.com

Check us out on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/spartronics4915

Instagram at www.instagram.com/spartronics

Twitter at https://twitter.com/spartronics4915

YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCafP7tQu6irqjxNQ_uDED_Q

Thank you!

Team 4915
Spartronics

Bainbridge High School
Bainbridge Island, Washington



wwww.spartronics4915.com