

Blackhawks target young fans with new app

By [Danny Ecker](#) October 23, 2014

The Chicago Blackhawks have turned their stars into cartoons to help develop young fans.

In its latest move to better connect with families and involve young kids in Blackhawks fandom, the team this month debuted a mobile app designed to introduce kids to the team's brand.

The free **"Club Blackhawks" app**, aimed at kids ages 6 to 13, amounts to a social media tool for kids to bond over the team. It allows users to create profiles, play Blackhawks trivia games, earn "badges" for finishing games and tasks, interact with other young fans and learn about the current Blackhawks players, which are portrayed as cartoons. There's a "fantasy hockey" element to the app, too.

"We wanted to find a creative way to allow our younger fans the same access to the organization as our older fans," said Senior Executive Director of Marketing Pete Hassen in an interview via email. "Kids are consuming media differently than their parents and grandparents."

The idea for the app stemmed from a pitch from Janice Taylor, CEO of Kelowna, British Columbia-based **Just Be Friends Network Inc.**, a social application developer.

The Canadian tech company, which is seeking to create similar kid-targeted apps for all major sports franchises, approached the Hawks about becoming the first franchise in major American sports to offer an app for young fans to interact with each other online with parental supervision.

"They were looking for something to engage with youth," said Ms. Taylor, who also recently built a similar app for the NHL's Calgary Flames. "We see this as having the ability to grow over time and really figure out how to engage with kids using technology."

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For the Hawks, which also offer an **official team mobile app**, the goal is to use the app as a gateway technology for kids to get used to interacting with them online.

"This is a passionate demographic that is largely underserved because they're not quite ready for platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest," said Blackhawks Senior Director of New Media and Creative Services Adam Kempenaar via email. The app, he said, will help "bridge that gap and encourage their passion

and affinity for the team."

The Hawks offer other young fan programs, including its "**Tommy Hawk Kids Club**," which costs \$25 a year per member and gives kids access gift bags and access to special events, as well as a partnership with Chicago Public Schools and youth hockey programs.

The app is meant to create a family-friendly virtual gathering zone for fans, but it will also spill over into real life at games at the United Center this year with animation and player avatars appearing on video boards and around the arena concourse.

"We hope that kids use it on a daily basis, and by doing so, interact with their family and friends on it," said Mr. Hassen via email. "As they get older, it prepares them for the other digital platforms we use to interact with our early adult and adult fans."

Making games and the Blackhawks brand more family-friendly has been a point of emphasis for team President John McDonough. The team made as much clear just two months ago when it announced it would no longer play the song "The Stripper" for female contestants of its "Shoot The Puck" intermission game after a group of fans were protesting the practice as sexist.

Owner Rocky Wirtz talks frequently of the team's efforts to make games more inviting for families, even **telling the Chicago Sun-Times** last year that he believes the team's higher ticket prices have kept out fans who show up to games to drink heavily.

"As the tickets are more valuable, our fan behavior is becoming better," he said.

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