



Secrets to Successful Baseball Sales and Marketing

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How Baseball Clubs Can Increase Profit Margins This Year

Let's say you own or manage a professional baseball team. In the summer, your costs for the year are relatively established, but every day you play another game. And every day, there are seats that are both empty and unsold.

This means that every time you fill that seat with a paying customer, you make money—and most of those dollars at this point go right to the bottom line.

Given this, what could a baseball team do to get more aggressive in filling those seats?

Below are some ideas. And remember, as opposed to the opera or a play, for a ball club the revenue opportunity is as much about at-game revenue (concessions and souvenirs) as it is about the ticket. So you can get creative about both ticket prices and cost of acquisition. For example:

- Want to sell more premium seats? Get others to buy premium tickets for returning military as a “thank you” for service. Or, get others to buy premium tickets for families of those still deployed. It's a great PR move, could be tax-deductible, and fills your most expensive and visible seats.
- What if premium seat buyers could go onto the field after the game? Would you let them throw a few pitches from the bullpen? Have the team photographer take pictures of them in the dugout? High perceived value in these low-cost incentives.
- How many teams have established and coordinated relationships with hotels, car services, restaurants and

concierges? Couldn't these travel-related services be more actively recommending a trip to the ballpark for both business and pleasure travelers?

- How could you turn part of the ballpark into a singles bar? Perhaps it's a section or “terrace” that has plenty of good drinks but is also a gathering place for the town's young, single and looking crowd. Make the ballpark a place to see and be seen.
- What about youth baseball teams and summer day camp groups? Could you offer them a short on-field baseball clinic after the game?
- For particular sections that don't sell well on a regular basis, how can you get them filled more often, even with really low priced seats, so those visitors are also buying concessions and other game-day elements to drive incremental revenue? Things like:
 - Get in free for your birthday: Get a free upper-deck ticket for a home game during your birthday month (will get friends/family to come too)
 - Students: \$1 tickets day of game w/ID (do you think you'd make it up with college students buying a few \$6 dollar beers?)
 - Active military: free ticket when the rest of the family comes too

The opportunities go on and on. What would you recommend?

How To Market a Last Place Baseball Team

Sales and marketing for a professional sports organization is far easier when you're winning. But each season, only a handful of teams enjoy that opportunity.

The objectives for every team, however—good or bad—remain the same: sell tickets, drive associated revenue, make money. When the product on the field isn't at the top of its game, you have to shift how you think about what you're selling.

If fans in your market think of your team as purely a competitive product, you lose. Your product isn't very good (at least right now). But what if your product is about more than just the game? Who are you really competing against in your marketplace?

Consider the alternative options for entertainment in your market. If the team is winning, more fans will want to come and enjoy the game. But even if the team isn't

winning, you still offer a compelling product. A family atmosphere. A place for young people to come hang out together. A great place to enjoy a warm summer afternoon.

Think of the pockets of the market that care less about team performance and more about the experience. Kids that come for the cotton candy and mascots don't care about the scoreboard, yet they bring their family with them. If the outfield veranda becomes known as a great place for young singles to hang out, you'll sell a lot of beer despite your team's ERA.

Your ballpark, your games, can become a gathering place for the community. Your market's premier family destination. The ideal corporate offsite. The cool place to go with friends after work.

The product doesn't change. You're still playing baseball. But that doesn't mean what you're selling is just baseball.

Hot Stove Baseball Marketing Ideas

If you're a baseball fan, winter is particularly difficult. Still cold outside, and spring training doesn't begin in earnest until March. But for our professional baseball clients (in the major and minor leagues), this is a busy time preparing for the season ahead.

This is also a great time to engage fans early, get them thinking about the season ahead, and use those engagement opportunities to increase individual, group, corporate and luxury box advance sales.

Below are several ideas for brightening the days of baseball fans in your market. Some of these are more geared towards major league teams, others for the minors, some equally for both.

- Give fans access to newly-signed players via a live chat. Could be done strictly online, via a call-in line, or via a video feed (or a combination of 2–3 of these).
- Add dedicated webcams to your spring training facility. Let fans catch a few minutes of practice as early as February with cameras trained on practice fields, pitcher's mounds, dugouts, etc.
- Find players, coaches or general managers who are willing to tweet this season, and get them started now. Most of them are getting ready for the season already anyway. That direct window will be highly compelling to fans.
- When the season starts, add a batting-practice cam to your home field. Great way to let more fans peek in on early practice before game time. This could also include the under-the-stands batting cages.
- Create a season ticket referral program. Encourage current season ticket holders to add their friends. For every new season ticket holder referred, maybe they get 10 percent off their own tickets for this year (either as a rebate or credit towards next year's tickets)
- Create a fan "insider" program where news, insights, player tidbits, etc. are shared exclusively with fans via your Facebook fan page and/or Twitter account. Great way to widen your regular fan base into the social media world.
- Launch sports bar trivia nights. Make it a rotating event for the next few weeks, at a different sports bar each week.
- So many sweepstakes and promotional ideas. In exchange for joining your email list, or Facebook page, or Twitter followers, you could give away: shagging balls in the outfield before an early-season or spring training game, manage a split-squad spring training game (would be great for PR too!), take a bus ride on a spring training road trip, or more.
- It's summer in January! Let fans come out to the ballpark, play in the snow in the outfield. Let first responders (police vs. fire) play a softball game on the field—in the snow...
- Let local high school teams conduct a practice in February in your ballpark. Allow their family and friends to come and watch, open concessions, sell advance tickets for the upcoming season...
- Host a sports card and/or memorabilia show at the stadium in the concourse area. Invite all fans to bring their stuff for a "baseball swap meet."
- Host a "biggest team fan" contest in the local elementary schools; there's a winner at every school, with winners recognized on field at an early season game.

Maximizing the Revenue Halo of a Championship Season

If you own, operate or manage a professional sports team or organization, the entire point of winning is to increase and sustain revenue and profitability. That may be a cold statement from a fan's point of view, but competitive teams drive interest, which can be translated into ticket sales, corporate sponsorships, higher broadcast fees and more.

It's been fascinating to watch the varying levels of effectiveness by which teams across sports take advantage of this opportunity, especially when they win a championship. From the moment you hoist the trophy over your head, there's no more valuable time when the local and national markets have their eyes on you—your team, your accomplishments, your future.

The immediate halo of opportunity, if you do nothing to extend it, can fade quickly. If you field a competitive team year after year, that halo can extend, but it's never as intense as when you win the whole thing.

The opportunities in the short-term are fairly easy. Accelerate ticket sales, increase conversion of corporate sponsorships, strike while the iron is hot. But the real opportunity, and challenge for most organizations, is to use the immedi-

ate championship halo to build long-term relationships with fans, businesses and the broader market for the slow times.

This starts immediately, of course, as you capture interest, registration, subscriptions, new social media followers, etc. in the days and weeks following the championship. Dig into your old databases of season ticket holders, corporate sponsors, and get them back engaged with the team. Use the immediate halo to create as many two-way relationships with fans as possible.

What you're working towards is building loyalty with the team independent of the play on the field. You want to make the relationship and value exchange between team and customer about the game, the stadium, the experience, the family atmosphere, even the players.

Your goal is to become the hometown team. Loyalty beyond results. And in a world where intimate relationships at a 1:1 level with millions of fans is possible through a variety of online, social, mobile and word-of-mouth channels, this opportunity clearly exists for every team in every sport.

But no team has a better advantage or opportunity to capitalize on this than a team that's just won it all.

Last-Minute Baseball Season Ticket Sales Ideas

We've had the pleasure of working with a handful of professional baseball organizations, and March is crunch-time for season-ticket sales. Although season tickets are sold throughout the year (with renewal campaigns mostly done by this point, and mini-package sales ranging through most of the season), this is the last chance to get full season tickets sold before most teams start playing for real in April.

Sales teams are reaching deep into their playbook by now, but here are a few additional ideas that might help get even more fans into the ballpark this year.

- **Social media mining:** Every team—in the major and minor leagues—has a vast ecosystem of social networks, blogs, Twitter streams and other social content devoted to their every move. How effectively is your team mining that stream of content for prospects who are ripe to buy tickets? Is your team participating as an active member of these communities, offering inside information about the team peppered with occasional ticket offers?
- **Past customers:** Not just renewals, but those who were once season ticket holders but have been dormant for a while. How far back does your database go? How many past customers might be interested again, and just need another phone call to get them over the hump?
- **Fans of other sports:** What about a co-marketing opportunity with the local football, basketball or hockey team? Season ticket holders of sports that aren't played during baseball season need something to do until late summer. Why not give them a deal on a baseball package to keep them occupied? Could you partner with the other organization (professional or college) on a joint marketing campaign? Would you get creative about the ensuing revenue to make it worth their while?
- **Corporate incentive programs:** I worked at a start-up that had four season tickets to the Seattle Mariners for years. Those tickets were most often used as incentives by the sales team to drive performance. Which organizations in your market could use season tickets to drive employee, sales team or customer behavior? How can businesses in your market use season tickets to make money? The possibilities here are vast.
- **Charity contributions:** What if for every season ticket sold during a specified week, you donated a percentage of the ticket costs to a local charity? What if the featured charity helped promote this offer to their own lists? Could the buyer get a tax deduction for the percent of the ticket price donated to charity? Could the charity and contributors be recognized in a pre-game ceremony sometime in April?
- **Food vouchers:** Buy season tickets today and get \$X00 in concession vouchers to enjoy throughout the season. There are countless ways you could play this, but the end-game is incremental revenue. Better to sell that empty seat and get some income. Plus, you know well-selected food vouchers will lead to additional food and other concession purchases at that and future games.
- **Little League:** Could late season ticket sales also be a fund-raising opportunity for the local Little League organization? For every ticket sold, a percentage goes back to the local Little League. Or, if at least ten season tickets are sold to people within a specific local Little League organization, a team from that league will get an opportunity to come onto the field before a game, meet a player or coach, etc.
- **Season ticket sharing:** Are there groups who could buy a set of season tickets and share them with their communities? Would a condo building do this? What about a retirement facility, or the yacht club, or a local union? How could you make it easy for them to buy, maybe even give them tools to help organize and split up their tickets?
- **What about April?:** The season starts, and fans are filling into the stadium. How many of them have bought just an individual ticket? Do you know who those fans are? How do you reach them, register them, and follow-up with them with a compelling package for the rest of the season, or at least a mini-package? Could you make package purchase offers that expire after the ninth inning? Every game, especially early in the season, is an opportunity to capitalize on your best sales tool—the product on the field—to upsell those fans into more great game experiences.

34 Ways To Drive Revenue At an Empty Ballpark

Before spring training begins, most major and minor-league ballparks will sit dormant for the majority of the winter.

And although weather conditions in many parts of the country limit what can be done outside, there are dozens of ways baseball teams and their facilities can drive revenue when their teams aren't playing.

I've had this conversation with a few teams, and below is the start of a list of revenue opportunities these teams have—in the coming months before spring as well as during road trips within the season. Think of this as the first 34 ways. I bet 15–20 minutes of brainstorming inside baseball organizations could easily double this.

Facilities

- Memorabilia shows
- Holiday parties
- Company kick-off meetings
- Family reunions
- School field trips
- Corporate “rewards” trip
- Executive retreats and/or offsites
- Non-profit fundraisers
- Baseball skills clinics
- Sales team meetings or Q1 kick-offs
- Host a high school dance

- Little League tryouts
- Chalk talk with a coach or player
- Meet the alumni event
- Cooking show
- Weddings
- Concerts
- MLK Day rally
- Garden show
- Community/neighborhood holiday party
- High school reunion

Parking Lot

- Motorcycle skills course
- Skate park
- Auction
- Political rallies
- Police driver's training
- RV show
- Used car sale
- Driver's ed
- 3x3 basketball tournament
- Carnival
- Farmer's market
- Craft fair
- Swap meet

The Most Innovative Marketers In Baseball (And What You Can Learn)

The minor leagues have always been a breeding ground for innovative, out-of-the-box ideas to drive attention and ticket sales. And many major league teams and owners over the years have become (in)famous for their marketing stunts.

But in today's game, the Cleveland Indians may be the most innovative marketers in Major League Baseball. Consider the evidence:

- **Fan Advisory Council**—The Fan Advisory Council is a consultative group of 12 to 14 Indians fans, comprised of both individual ticket buyers and season ticket holders. The group meets once per month during the regular season to discuss anything and everything related to Indians baseball and the Progressive Field experience.
- **Snow Days**—This past winter, the Indians turned Progressive Field into a winter wonderland, complete with sled runs, a harvest maze, skating rink and more. No ballgames? No problem. Admission, concessions, merchandise, tickets for next season. All sold.
- **Social Suite**—Want to write about, blog, tweet or otherwise talk about the Indians on your social networks during a game? Apply for a spot in the Indians Social Suite. Different attendees every game to mix up the experience and the coverage.
- **Picture Contest**—Want your Indians photo featured in future Indians promotional or marketing material? Snap a picture and send it in (and show your Tribe Pride on Facebook and your other social networks as well).
- **Batting Practice Xtra**—Premium seats not good enough

for you? Stand behind the batting cage and meet members of the Indians at a game of your choice.

- **Indians Music Festival**—Plenty of stadiums host music events, but the Indians have taken it to a new level with their own branded Indians Music Festival—featuring A-list musicians as well as an interactive water area.

Now ask yourself these questions for your organization:

- Are you gathering regular, direct feedback from your customers and fans? Is this ad-hoc or a formalized program that not only captures feedback but recognizes and rewards those who participate?
- What assets does your organization have that can be monetized when otherwise not in use? How can those assets drive revenue, awareness or other value for the organization?
- What are you doing to get more citizen marketers to write about you? How are you making bloggers, tweeters and other online influentials feel special?
- What are you doing to encourage your customers and fans to interact with your brand? How and where are they sharing their connection with your brand with their peers and networks?
- How are you better monetizing your premium customers? What else can you offer them to further tap into their intense interest in your product, service or brand? What opportunities does your organization have to create and deliver a high-perceived value product with minimal actual cost?



More Information About Us

About Matt Heinz

Matt Heinz is the Founder and President of Heinz Marketing Inc. Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a Seattle marketing agency focused on sales acceleration. Heinz Marketing helps clients achieve sustained sales success by growing revenue from existing customers and cost effectively identifying and winning new customers.

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