

Portland Trail Blazers hit record fan engagement and renewal rates with Marketo

NBA franchise amplifies its message with help from Marketo's marketing automation technology.

Since swishing their first jump shot, the Portland Trail Blazers have been one of the most successful franchises in the National Basketball Association. Despite this success the Trail Blazers have been focused on expanding their appeal beyond Portland to the rest of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. The team's management group also wants to entice more fans to experience the 150+ concert, family show and other sporting events that occur at Portland's Rose Quarter, a 30-acre sports and entertainment complex that includes two multi-purpose arenas in the Moda Center and the Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

As the Trail Blazers sought to develop marketing campaigns aimed at these different demographic and geographic groups, they needed to find a way to engage fans in a more targeted fashion. With an assist from Marketo, they made it happen.

Objectives

- **Targeting:** Move from a batch and blast to a fan-centric approach.
- **Reposition:** Turn Trail Blazers into the Pacific Northwest's team, not just Portland's.
- **Awareness:** Engage fans to showcase full range of events hosted at Rose Quarter venues.
- **Growth:** Attract more fans.

Season ticket renewal
rate

96%

Single Game Ticket Sales
Growth

30%

Open Rates

45%

“Building a 360 degree view of our fans helps us increase engagement and build life-long fans who love coming to our property.”



Vincent Ircandia
Vice President of Business
Analytics, Portland
Trail Blazers



Personalizing the message

The Trail Blazers have a broad spectrum of fans. Many are new to the Trail Blazers or to Rose Quarter concerts; some attend individual games while others buy multiple-game or season subscriptions. The thinking was that if the Trail Blazers could raise the excitement level, they could convert more fans into season ticket holders. As one of the NBA's most innovative franchises, the Trail Blazers understood the value of using tech insights to build a more complete view of their fans' behavior and supply them with relevant content, event information, and ticket offers. But this was easier said than done. After repeated attempts integrating various email products into their system, all they could manage were blanket, non-segmented email blasts that turned up little useful information. The system could neither message at key moments nor could it supply useful behavioral information that would allow the Trail Blazers to better target fans.



We went through an exhaustive process and selected Marketo because we were excited about their functionality. Particularly their ability to capture and integrate behavioral information with our Microsoft CRM data."

Measuring fan engagement

After a long search comparing competing alternatives, the Trail Blazers chose Marketo just prior to the 2013/2014 season. That allowed them to rapidly build different types of campaigns targeting different demographics and fan types at various points in the customer journey. With the implementation of Marketo Sales Insight into their Microsoft Dynamics CRM, the Trail Blazers' service team now has an accurate version of customer behavior and whether email messages to their fans are not getting opened. They can then use those insights to determine whether it warrants a follow-up phone call or email. The Trail Blazers have also implemented Marketo forms throughout the team website that promptly informs sales managers when they get filled out. The information gets sent into the CRM with the designation of "extremely hot lead" for immediate phone follow-up.

The results: A record 96% of its season ticket holders renewed this year as the Trail Blazers reported a 9% year-over-year increase in season ticket sales. Engagement numbers also climbed sharply: The Trail Blazers' side of the business registered a 45% email open rate while on the concert side, they ran around 25%. The Trail Blazers also credit Marketo Sales Insight for a 75% open rate when the renewal email campaign went out to season ticket holders. The improved conversion rates included an added bonus, helping to foster more trust and cohesion between the Trail Blazers' marketing, analytics, and ticket sales operations. In the past, leads that got served were often not qualified. The organization says it now has a very accurate way to gauge where fans are in that journey and when might be the optimal times for conversion. Looking forward to the next season, Vincent Ircandia, the Vice President of Business Analytics, says that "the team is confident that our marketing and data infrastructure will help us deliver our best results to date. Marketo is a huge part of this."



The software was very easy to adopt. We were able to pick it up really quickly and start messaging to our fans, which was huge to us."

