

It's been a while since I have updated my post on what business in the NBA is in. Seemed like now is as good a time as any !

Just as it has been for the past 7 or so year, I continue to get business proposals for new ways to alter the NBA in-game experience. Without fail the proposal starts out with some form of "Today, everyone has a smartphone and can't disconnect from their phone" Then I get the meat of the pitch which is some derivative of stats, Jumbotron pictures, fantasy games, gamification apps, instagram pics, social sharing, etc, etc.

They all seem to forget what business the NBA is in.

In order to understand why I hate these proposals you have to understand first what the Mavs sell. **The NBA does not sell basketball !**

Think back to the first professional sporting event you ever went to. It was probably a parent taking you to the game. What do you remember ? Do you remember the score ? A home run ? A jump shot ? A pass play ? Or do you remember who you were with ? I remember being with my dad at a Pirates game. My dad and my uncle at a Steeler's game. Think about your fondest memories at a sporting event. Again, what do you remember ? Hanging with your buddies ? A first date ? A last date ? How you felt after the team won or loss ? A business partner or customer ? Or the score ? I'm guessing its not the score.

We in the sports business don't sell the game, **we sell unique, emotional experiences.** We are not in the business of selling basketball. **We are in the business of selling fun.** We are in the business of letting you escape. We are experiential entertainment. We are in the business of giving you a chance to create shared experiences. I say it to our people at the Mavs at all time, I want a Mavs game to be more like a great wedding than anything else.

You know the wedding I'm talking about. The one where everyone is up dancing, smiling , cheering, laughing. The one where Grandma Ethel has her annual vodka gimlet and is singing "old town road" at the top of her lungs. The one where the whole place still does the Macarena while laughing so hard they are crying. The one where everyone sings out loud to every song and you hug the cousin you haven't seen in 10 years and hope you don't see for another 10. It doesn't matter if half the room doesn't believe the couple will still be married at the end of the year. It matters if everyone in the place is having a great time. It matters if its the type of wedding that everyone in the room wished or wishes their wedding was or will be like this one. It matters that you leave the reception and your hands hurt from clapping , your mouth hurts from smiling so much and your throat is sore because you were laughing , singing and hollering so much. That's a great wedding.

That's how I want a Mavs game to be.

I want it to be very participatory. I want it to be very social. I want it to be very inclusive. I want it to be memorable. I want it to be so much fun people talk about it to their friends and can't wait to go back. I want every parent to get tears in their eyes when they see their kids jumping up and down whether the score is 2 to 0. or 120 to 84. When they are chanting Lets Go Mavs . When they are dancing and trying to get on the jumbotron.

I want the guy on the date knowing that the longest he will have to talk is during halftime and then after the game, and until the next date, he can talk about the game itself and not have all the pressure of trying to think of something to say while his date can be relieved that she can enjoy the game without him talking. Or vice versa of course. I want everyone coming to a Mavs game to be able to find their own personal attachment to that night. I know I can't control what happens on the court every game, but I can do my very best to make sure that no matter what the score, we have done all we can to make the fan experience like a great wedding.

IMHO, that means eliminating as many of the "look down" moments in the game as I possibly can. Once you sit in your seat, the only time I want you to look down is to pick up the soda or beer you set down under your seat and maybe to check your phone to see if you got a text from the sitter or your buddy about where to meet after the game.

I want you always looking up. Looking at the game and the entertainment in the arena. You can't cheer if you aren't watching. It's my job to give you something other than the game to look up at.

It may be looking at the fun videos we put on the big screen to entertain you.

We are going to try everything and anything we can think of to make it fun and memorable. Just as a DJ responds to the energy and attitude at a Wedding in real-time and tries to choose the right song or activity to keep the fun and energy up, we try to do the same thing at a Mavs game. We recognize that what makes our games unique is that like a wedding, Grandma Ethel can be sitting next to a goth looking 16 year old she has never met before, and if both are watching when the Mavs hit a shot right as the 24 second buzzer sounds, they can high 5 each other like they are best friends. That if Grandma Ethel is chanting defense and being a key 6th man for her Mavs, the 16 year old will feel better about cupping his black nailed hands together to do the same. That if we put a fun video up on the big screen, they both might just sing along

Video and music are two simple components of what we do.

Part of what separates going to a game from watching at home is the energy. The energy should start to build as you walk up to the American Airlines Center. It should build further as you see other excited fans inside. It should grow with the introduction video. We have continued to use Eminence Front as our intro video because we want everyone who has ever gone to a Mavs home game to have a common link. We want them to know the game is about to start and Eminence Front reminds them its time to take their energy to another level

I can't think of a bigger mistake then trying to integrate smartphones just because you can. The last thing I want is someone looking down at their phone to see a replay. The last thing I want is someone thinking that its a good idea to disconnect from the unique elements of a game to look at replays or update their fantasy standings, their bets or concentrate on trying to predict what will happen next in the game. If there is a good reason to show this information, we can show it on the many screens in the arena.

There is a huge value to everyone collectively holding their breath during a replay, or responding to a great play or a missed call and then spontaneously reacting to what they see. We want people cheering or booing or chanting at the top of their lungs. We want everyone so intently watching the game they all simultaneously react to what just happened.

You lose that if people are looking down at their handhelds. The fan experience is about looking up, not looking down. If you let them look down, they might as well stay at home, the screen is always going to be better there.

As in every business you have to always ask yourself what your product is and the best way to deliver it. In the NBA our product is fun, unique experiences and energy. The last thing we need to do is encourage our customers to stare at their phones.

Sports is the only place in life where we encourage you to yell and scream at the top of your lungs and clap for the good guys. That is who we are. We have to do everything possible to encourage more of it !