**The Top 5 Ways to Win in Sales When Your Team Isn’t**

*“Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” ~ Vince Lombardi*

That may be true on the field, court or ice, but it isn’t necessarily true when it comes to ticket sales. Sure, we all know winning will make things easier and will act like the sales version of a jock strap, give you a nice lift and support, but there are ways to be successful even when your team isn’t winning.

Sports Business Solutions reached out to a number of top sports ticket sales professionals around numerous leagues who have found themselves in the uneviable task of selling a team whose lackluster performance makes them less than desireable to fans. These are their top 5 secrets on how to creatively sell completely independent of a team’s win/loss record.

1. **Focus on fan experience/entertainment**

The simple fact is we’re not really selling sports per say, rather we’re selling entertainment. While we can’t guarantee a win or a loss when a fan comes to our venues, we can guarantee that they leave having had a great time.

“At the end of the day, we sell entertainment,” says Brad Lott, Senior Vice President of Consumer Sales for the Detroit Pistons. “It’s about our value proposition to consumers, understanding how they view the tickets and why they’d buy. From there, it gets past the wins and losses aspect. We want to make sure the fans have a great time regardless of how the team is doing.”

This means that the sales staff and other departments such as stadium hospitality, digital media, marketing, and others must work hand-in-hand to be on the same page in order to offer fans the best experience possible. If the fans have a good time when they come to games, that’s the most important factor in establishing a loyal consumer base.

“Our approach doesn’t necessarily change, regardless of our record,” says Ryan Holmstedt, Arizona Diamondback Senior Director of Ticket Sales. “It’s about the experience in the ballpark and our relationships with fans, which doesn’t change. Generally speaking, we control what we can control: the ballpark atmosphere, concessions, seat locations, and other special perks.”

**2. Shift focus to business audience**

While your hardcore fans are important, there is a reason fan is short for fanatical. Sometimes, especially when times are tough for the team, they can be finicky with their disposable income. The corporate and business audience is different. As we all know, their main goal is to wine and dine their clients. To show them a top notch entertainment regardless of the team’s performance. Making sure you’re providing a high end group sales experience is key.

“We definitely target more group sales when team isn’t doing well,” says Bob Sivik, the Cleveland Browns Director of Season and Group Sales. “This season was a huge emphasis on group sales for us.” Last season the Cleveland Browns were 3-13, so their on-field product was evidently not the main drawing factor for ticket buyers.

“[The Pistons] biggest controllable is group sales,” says Lott. “We’ve taken group sales from dead last to top-five in the past 2 years by focusing on the entertainment aspect of our games.”

**3. Use technology to your advantage/work smarter**

Working smart and not necessarily harder is a key to overcoming a team’s struggles. Targeted marketing and an emphasis on using reliable data over gut feelings have made selling, especially in down times, less of a guessing game and more of a science.

“We have really had to work a lot smarter in recent years,” says Holmstedt of the D-backs efforts. “We lean heavily on our analytics team.”

More specifically, Sivik and his staff “use certain data to create “look-alike” audiences, or profiles who we think resemble our customer base accurately. Then we take this data and apply it digitally to things like social media, for instance targeting Facebook account holders who fit our profile criteria.”

In Detroit, Lott and his team are one of the more technologically savvy in all of sports. They focus on the data as the key aspect of all that they do.

“We use a ton of stuff. The backbone of everything we do is our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system,” Lott shared. “It’s essentially a warehouse that collects data on everything fans do, their purchases, where they sit, etc. It builds profiles of fans, and allows us to be efficient with our targeting and make sure the right people are getting the right content.”

Perhaps the best analogy for using these technological capabilities is that “it allows us to use a ‘rifle’ approach as opposed to a ‘shotgun,” says Lott. “Every team is headed in this direction, if they aren’t there already.”

4. **Be sensitive to price adjustments**

Ticket pricing can be much like ballroom dancing. One slight misstep can throw everything out of whack and create issues that are difficult to overcome without appropriate corrections. Being strategic from the get go is key developing dynamic pricing methods that allow you from having to over correct up or down too often.

“[The Pistons] are not big believers in our prices going down,” says Lott. “We have four tiers of pricing, and dynamically price our tickets from there within those tiers.”

“We’re fortunate with the Browns to have a remarkable fan base, and we try to be sensitive to that and not subject them to huge price increases,” says Sivik. “We want to have something for everyone in terms of our ticket prices.”

The takeaway? Pricing is of the utmost importance. It is imperative to offer the experience to as wide a range as possible in order to build fan loyalty and maximize business. A strong core fan base is the lifeblood of a franchise and increased loyalty will help you stem the tide.

5. **Foster the right culture**

Culture is where everything starts, and is perhaps the most important element of any business strategy. Ticket sales are no exception, and it can be hard to stay motivated to sell tickets if the team you work for is a bit lackluster. It takes a great culture to keep the business operations employees focusing on what they can control, even when the team’s performance is debatable.

“We put a huge emphasis on culture,” says Holmstedt of he and the Diamondbacks. “Our staff has a good understanding that we have to control only what we can control, which is our attitude and effort. We have an intense screening during the hiring process to pick the right people for our environment.

“We have a lot of fun, we do sales contests and outings to focus on improving one another and doing our best. We promote a team atmosphere, and attacking goals together.”

To add to this, the Pistons want people who, “when things are getting rougher, can combat that with high end customer service. This is what challenges us to get better every day.”

It’s not just baseball and basketball that culture is important in. NFL sales teams have to have a solid experience for their sales staff as well.

“The Browns provide an environment that promotes growth and learning,” Lott said. “You have to get your staff built up to take advantage of opportunity, and build relationships throughout the community so that when the team starts winning, the opportunity for sales is there.”

While Mr. Lombardi was right on a lot of things, he wasn’t in terms of winning. Winning isn’t everything or the only thing for a sales staffs. If you follow these five great tips, you can overcome any performance, good or bad.