

BY MARK SCHMITZ - ZEBRADOOG 2011



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Vernon Biever

## Ideas to amp your facility's storytelling...

### The image competition game is on.

It's noon on New Years Eve 1967, The Green Bay Packers are playing The Dallas Cowboys in the NFL Championship game. The winner will go on to play the Oakland Raiders in Superbowl II. It's 13 degrees below zero in Green Bay, Wisconsin, 48-degrees-below-zero with wind chill. It's so cold you're taking bites out of your coffee. Your buddies next to you just started a small fire on the concrete bleacher bench to keep warm. The official's whistles are completely frozen and seven members of the UW-Lacrosse marching band have just been

taken to the local hospital to be treated for hypothermia. The turf at Lambeau Field is solid rock and as slippery as ice because, well... it is ice. This game is going down in history as the greatest football game ever played and you can't feel your face. The worst thing is, you can't go inside to warm up. In 1967, there is no "inside". Toughen up cowboy, this is the smash mouth NFL "Experience" your cigar-chomping Grandpa loved to be a part of.

Fast forward 43 years. You arrive at your private parking

space after receiving the timely pre-game traffic congestion updates on your iPhone. You already know the point spread of the game, who's injured, what two-year extension deal the quarterback's agent just renegotiated, what former coach has the best reality TV show and what band is playing at half-time. The fully themed concourse concessions that you studied pre-game on your Smart Phone App, have names like The Munch Zone, Frozen In Time Ice Cream, Catchatoré Amoré and Goin' Deep Pizza. Your ergonomically formed

outdoor club-seat has a space heater overhead in case you get a little cold. The well-trained wait staff is very excited to offer you two kinds of white wine varitials today. One is a snappy Northern Californian Chardonnay, full-bodied, oaky with a hint of pineapple and the other is an apricot-forward New Zealand Pino Gris, weighty, rich, but soft. Today, you can choose how high-def you would like your replays and check exactly how your Fantasy Football team is doing in real time. You won't be cold, you won't have to start a fire in the seats and we promise you'll have full wireless bars in the comfortable, HDTV-filled Men's room.

What happened to schnapps in a flask?

Well people, we got bored. We have become the short attention span nation. In the last decade or less we have become conditioned to handle and expect multiple streams of

**"We have become the short attention span nation. In the last decade or less we have become conditioned to handle and expect multiple streams of information and entertainment concurrently."**

Mark Schmitz - ZEBRADOg

information and entertainment concurrently. When the Service Economy gave way to the Experience Economy in the late 1990's we needed something more to get us through game day. We needed an "Experience". Blame it on Disney. Blame it on Starbucks. Blame it on ESPN. Blame it on the App Store. Blame it on Chuck E Cheese. The fact is we MUST be visually delighted, stimulated and engaged at all times or we lose interest. If we lose interest, the franchise owners and university war chests lose money. Not good.

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## STIFF COMPETITION

We're not "fans" anymore; we're "guests." We're not "going" to the game anymore, we're "participating in the game day experience". Our stadium experiences must be able to compete with home theatre, where 62 inches of 3D gives you a stunning game view for a fraction of the cost of season tickets.

Athletic events once competed for tickets at the gate. Now they compete against the Spiderman 3, Modern Family, Aerosmith's Walking Dead Tour any other entertainment activity a family

Green Bay Packers  
Lambeau Field

Voted BEST NFL  
Stadium Experience  
for 2011

Comprehensive  
Facility Brand  
Experience  
developed by  
ZEBRADOg





might select. It's a battle for your discretionary time and dollars.

The economics of both college and professional sport require a higher dollar per capita spend by each fan at each game. Ticket price alone does not pay Julius Peppers \$91million to be the bull-rush defensive end for the Chicago Bears. There has to be multiple revenue streams coming from each fan for each franchise all year long. The only way to do that is to enhance and build the brand at every turn. And make it possible to swipe your debit card for instant cheese fries. The legalization of gambling via fantasy football has created immense interest by fans in out-of-market games. We now know what is happening in every game instantly. Sponsored by ESPN and Swiffer Dusters.

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## ORGANIZED FUN?

College football games have become orchestrated theme park events. The same music, the same chants and the same three-part "wave" all at exactly the same time each game each year after year. The fact is, that's how we like it in America. Predictable to the



### Bo Ryan - UW Men's Basketball Coach

ZEBRADOg works with Bo to visually tell his stories. Recently they installed a 100 year old peach basket 10' off the ground in his office so Bo can share the story of the day basketball was born in 1891



### Camp Randall Stadium

**WOW Room - Features a breathtaking view of the 85,000 seat bowl along with accolades from over 120 years of competition.**

masses yet customizable on our iPads and Smart Phones. Who could have imagined that Neil Diamond's Sweet Caroline would become an anthem for a new generation of student sections?

Like it or not, here we are. It's not going to change. It will, however, become more digitally-sophisticated and more diverse.

The athletic facility experience is in overdrive just like our visual culture. The trick is to cut through on a basic micro-level. As you take important steps to advance the brand of your facilities, remember this: Authenticity. Reality. Actuality. Being there can't be delivered on our iPhone or your 55" plasma!

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## YOUR VISUAL VOICE

The visual spectacle of sport must play the largest role in your facility planning. Honor the gladiators and fans with delight. Integrate truthful and historical "storytelling" into the concourses, lobbies and restrooms. Use past emotional moments to connect to the future. The grandfather/grandson traditions

must be preserved and protected. Commercial sponsorships must be integrated into the experience mix to deliver true and competitive marketing value in the ever-expanding battle for advertising dollars.

In some cases marketing messaging can truly integrate into the student culture. The Budweiser beer theme song from the 1970's has become the anthem for the University of Wisconsin athletic program. "When You Say... WIISSS-CON-SIN... You've Said It All." It's now central to an authentic Badger game day experience. Key in on words and messages that resonate with your unique culture. Do not allow your sponsors to dilute the overall message of your program or franchise. You are in control of how and where these valued advertising messages and sponsorships can be integrated into your facility. Create your own visual and graphic standards program that leverages their brand with your brand. BOTH parties can benefit from a balance of theme, color and messaging.

There is nothing worse than the stadium "Trade Show Effect". That's when we walk your concourses and





see Verizon next to McDonald's next to Smirnoff next to Miller Lite. That is the kiss of death for an authentic stadium experience. It says, you don't care about the core of your franchise. You care about confusing me. You care more about sponsor dollars than my loyalty.

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## THE RECRUITING PLAYGROUND

A 17-year-old basketball recruit and his parents come to visit The University of Wisconsin. They have seen the Badgers on TV and have visited campus once. Now, head coach Bo Ryan wants to meet with the phenom kid from Iowa.

Coach Ryan has an actual peach basket with a chicken wire backboard installed in his office. He uses that peach

basket to bring the modern game into perspective for kids that have no idea how and where the game began. By defining the ethics and honor of the game with an original actual peach basket as the prop to the story, kids walk away with a profound respect for the coach and the program.

The University of Wisconsin athletic department understands the concept of a singular Badger Experience. Over the past five years, our environmental brand designers at ZEBRADOOG have worked to visually integrate all of UW's facilities. From football to basketball, rowing to golf, there is a very real sense of a comprehensive cultural brand. A singular Badger Experience. This is critical for recruiting the very best student athletes from around the world. Most universities have a distinct separation between athletics and academics. UW purposefully integrated the two because the Badger Experience goes well beyond the basketball arena. Since the late Nineteenth Century, The Wisconsin Idea proves that education should influence and

improve people's lives well beyond the classroom. The tennis player is part of a greater good. The institution seeks to better the world and everyone in it. That principal is utilized to separate UW from its competitors. It attracts student athletes who understand there is more than athletic success in the world and that life success after athletics is built on an academic foundation.

The now-legendary basketball coach for Duke University, Mike Krzyzewski, led Duke to a fourth National Championship in 2010. Up until now, Duke Athletics had not invested deeply in their storytelling at a level that competes with the "North Carolina's" of the world. They recognize that Coach K may not always be the head coach and perhaps it was time to inject his permanent philosophies, accomplishments and teachings into their facilities so recruits decades to come will understand and emulate the Duke passion and quality of character. Duke Athletics built the Mike Krzyzewski Center for Athletic Excellence – a practice facility for men's and women's basketball, but also a student-athlete center that focuses on studying, tutoring, strength and conditioning, cardio-workouts, lounges, dining and special events for all Duke student-athletes. This connects with what is now a Hall of Fame, celebrating all 26-sports and a Basketball Museum that features more trophies and accolades than any other team in the country. Trophies that use to pile up on desks, floors and in closets are now featured in custom casework and admired by fans, recruits, staff and guests.

Duke Ambassadors tour guests through the spaces and celebrate their affinity for their favorite team – the Duke Blue Devils. These spaces all connect to Cameron Indoor Stadium to create a public entertainment venue in one of the most storied stadiums in the world. It also provides a singular spot that Duke fans can visit to surround and immerse themselves in Duke history, culture, and be with like-minded fans, outside of game time in Cameron. The recruiting, game-day and 365-day experiences are elevated for everyone. These spaces now emulate the credibility of Duke's athletic and education prowess.

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## PARTNERING WITH AN ENVIRONMENTAL BRAND DESIGN FIRM

Environmental brand designers coordinate and infuse your unique culture into your facility. They specialize in the art of "placemaking" and "storytelling" to show your fans what is unique about your space. It is their job to make sure everything in your building is integrated to speak with one common visual voice. Your environment brand design team should work in tandem with your architect and interior designer.

## TELLING AND SHOWING YOUR UNIQUE STORY

Retain the environmental design firm early on, not after some of the planning has already happened. Give them the freedom to research,

DUKE Basketball  
Museum and  
Hall of Fame







“Our ZEBRADOg experience was extremely positive from their initial conceptual planning to the final installation of our signature exhibit programs. They helped us visualize the Duke recruiting story to shape the way for Duke Athletics. We continue to look to Mark and his team for guidance on all of our athletic facilities.”

**MIKE KRZYZEWSKI (COACH K)**  
Head Coach Duke Basketball

explore, and conceptualize your “visual voice.” That’s their specialty. Many stadiums and arenas try to accomplish too much and be too many things to a diverse group of fans. That doesn’t work. The goal is one sight, one sound, one sell. Keep it simple.

Awaken the emotional senses. When it’s from the heart, it’s real. We all need a reason to emotionally connect to something everyday. Give your fans an emotional experience as soon as they walk in the door.

Add some surprises. An interactive History Hall of Fame, for example. Entertain and educate your visitors by sharing factual and insightful information they don’t know. Let them see how your stadium and program impacts your community. That’s what environmental graphics design—done right—is all about.

Redesign your space, not only for permanency and relevance, but also to create the “WOW” factor. Give your fans reasons to tell their friends about the experience you just gave them. Don’t feel you have to make all the changes at once. The visual branding can evolve over time, as funds become available. The key is to have a

plan firmly in place, at the start of the construction process. Get donors and sponsors involved. They can help fund the project while connecting their brand to your team, school or organization.

Pay special attention to the private rooms and design your recruitment spaces to capture the attention of the recruit and his or her parents. Do something they cannot get anywhere else. The peach basketball centerpiece in basketball coach Bo Ryan’s office is a great example.

Fans, faculty, friends and future players must be exposed to a space that cannot be repeated somewhere else. Design emotional touch points into the DNA of your facility to connect with your audiences and they will come back again and again. •

*Mark Schmitz is the Principal and Creative Director of ZEBRADOg a passionately unique environmental brand design firm located in Madison, Wisconsin. His firm has provided environmental branding for The Green Bay Packers, Dallas Cowboys, Duke University, TCF Bank Stadium, as well as destination resorts, master-planned communities, health care facilities and corporate headquarters throughout the U.S.*

