Examining a Need to Provide Optimal Customer Service within Intercollegiate Athletic Departments

*Customer Service and Revenue Research Proposal – Indiana University - Bloomington Athletics*

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Proposed Research Topic

The proposed research topic is dealing with the ever-growing issue of providing optimal customer service within intercollegiate athletics. This is becoming more of an issue because athletic departments are looked at as a direct image of the university as a whole. The advancements in technology have made it easy for a fan to display their displeasure online to many friends/family through social media. Not only that, but the rising costs of daily athletic business activities have led to this issue being more evident over the past 5-10 years. Athletic departments need to set themselves apart from other schools to cultivate their fan base and in particular their alums/donors. In order to do so a strategic plan has to be set up to generate revenue and keep expenses to a minimum.

Customers/fans always want options. The more options a fan has the better their overall fan experience will be. One option will inevitably cause complaints among fans. The goal is not to make everybody happy, that is impossible to do, but to improve on our overall customer service. Currently while working for Indiana University Athletics, this topic is relevant to me and to my future as a professional. That is why I have decided to propose a research plan for Indiana University Athletics to utilize. My goal through this research is to decipher what makes for the ultimate fan experiences at Indiana University Athletics football games. After some ideas are in place based on the literature review and anticipated results, the next step will be proposing a plan of action for Indiana University Athletics Department. The department could then take these results to improve the overall fan experience through improved customer service.
Introduction

Intercollegiate athletics is a broad landscape of that produces mass amounts of money mainly in men’s basketball and football. The framework of intercollegiate athletics operates like a business, when in reality it is not a true business. If it were a true business only the sports that are generating revenue would be kept in the athletics department. For many schools this would only be men’s basketball and football. The rest of the sports would be cut. Because of the tight budgets of many intercollegiate athletic departments the need to provide the best customer service is of up most importance. “Just 23 of 228 athletics departments at NCAA Division I public schools generated enough money on their own to cover their expenses in 2012. Of that group, 16 also received some type of subsidy — and 10 of those 16 athletics departments received more subsidy money in 2012 than they did in 2011” (Berkowitz, Upton, Brady, 2013). Based on that information alone an intercollegiate athletic department needs to do all it can do in order to keep their longtime fans, donors, and casual fans. Figuring out strategies to generate revenue to save revenue is becoming more important as expenses get higher. Providing optimal customer service will only help in providing the necessary groundwork to achieve the goals an athletic department has.

Within intercollegiate athletics there is an “arms race” for the best athletic facilities, the best educational facilities, the best teams, the best coaches, the best recruits, and so on. All of these have a factor in whether an athletic department is successful or not. For example, if an athletic department has great coaches and great facilities they will be able to attract great recruits. If they have great recruits they will have great teams thus filling stadiums to generate revenue (winning cures all philosophy). The revenue then
generated can go back to improving facilities, hiring better coaches, and making overall improvements to the athletic department. Everything within intercollegiate athletics has to be operating at a high level in all areas for that school’s athletic department to be successful. As an athletic administrator, the need to figure out your fan base is important. What do the fans want? What drives them to the games? What makes them want to give donations? It is all about providing the best customer service to give the fans, donors, alums, and casual fans what they want. They all want options and we want to give that to them to provide optimal customer service.

Forming relationships with the fans, donor, alums, and casual fans is important to. This will lead to optimal customer service. Customer relationship management is an important and growing concept within intercollegiate athletics (Kim & Trail, 2011). Through these relationships important information can be gathered and analyzed to incorporate into the customer service strategy. This research is important to conduct because there is need to provide optimal customer service within an intercollegiate setting for the longevity of intercollegiate athletic departments.

**Literature Review**

The literature review is broken down into four categories from broad topics to narrow topics more towards the immediate problem this research is looking at. The four main topics the literature review will pertain to include: customer service, intercollegiate athletics, customer relationship management, and customer relationship management databases within intercollegiate athletics. Each of these main areas will be covered exclusively in the literature review.
Customer Service

According to a simple definition on dictionary.com customer service is defined as the assistance and other resources that a company provides to the people who buy or use its products or services (Dictionary.com, 2014). This is a broad definition that introduces the widely known term of customer service. Customer service can be seen in all areas of the business world. It is going that extra mile to give a customer a helping hand to get them through a problem, concern, question, task, etc.

Customer service can translate into all sectors of the business world. Customer service is customer service no matter what a business is trying to do. Customers want not only to get a helping hand when needed but they want this helping hand to be worth their time. If they helping hand is worth their time they are more like to come back for help again; thus building customer loyalty and retention (Emir, 2013). Through this a business will be able to keep their customers for a long period of time by giving the customer their time and effort. A little effort goes a long way.

As a business grows a solid loyal following, positive word will spread throughout a community and new customers will follow. The positive customer service the business is providing will have a ripple effect, attracting new customers to the business (Hundre, 2013). The longer a customer stays will a business the more that business will be able to form a relationship with them and get to know them better. This allows for customization to take place to better serve the customers’ needs (Hundre, 2013).

Providing for the needs of the customer is the most important aspect of customer service. With the increasing costs of many experiences there is an ever-growing need to provide optimal customer service. The customer should be the focal point of the business
going forward because without the customer the business would not survive. With this increased focal point on customer service there is need to have a plan of action for a company (Ostrom, 2011). This idea of service blueprinting is important to design a customer service plan of action for a business. Service blueprinting, when explain the ideal student experience, is “a collaboration among key contributors and stakeholders across a broad customer experience to create a visual depiction, or blueprint, of a service” (Bitner, 2012). Designing a blueprint for success is important to get an idea of where the business wants to go from point A to point B. Without a plan of action the business will inevitably fall apart. Customers should and come first and from this point going forward will be a focal point for a business to survive.

**Intercollegiate Athletics**

The athletics department at college or university has an immediate impact on the university as a whole however the overall success of an athletics department (winning or losing) does not affect the college as much (Koo, 2014). When discussing the impact the athletics department has on a university as a whole, it is mainly coming from the perceptions an athletic department gives off when it comes to overall makeup and values. The mission of an athletic department needs to meet the mission of the school. If these are not similar (obviously cannot be exactly the same with one being academics and the other athletics) there can be an impact on the university brand image (Bouchet, 2012).

The article previous mentioned above regarding the brand image of a university can be affected by the brand of their athletics department was an interesting article that examined the University of Chicago back in the late 1920’s. This once prestigious Big
Ten schools had to drop out of the conference because it no longer wanted to be associated with its football program. What the football program was doing was not up to par with what the university wanted to portray. The university wanted to portray being a leading academic university and the current president at the time thought that athletics was holding the university back (Bouchet, 2012). This is an interesting article that goes to further the point that everything that an intercollegiate athletics department does or says will have a direct influence on the university as a whole. Many view athletics and academics as separate parts of the university; however, they must work together to form the total university package.

The retaining students and the overall success of an athletic department have a strong correlation. When the success of major division I athletics departments are high the student retention rate is high. The study found (Jones, 2010), examined college football game attendance the immediate impact of freshman retention rate. The study found that there is a direct impact on retention rate and that the overall student experience weighs heavily on the success of a football team the experience at football games. Increasing the student attendance at home football game will increase the student retention rate (Jones, 2010), specifically freshman students. As previously noted football is a cash cow for intercollegiate athletics and in turn is a cash cow for the university as a whole. Providing a great student experience is important not only for the athletics department but for the university too.

Many people argue why universities are putting so much money into a department that does not even make a profit. In an article talking about this very mystery it is described that benefits gained from a well-rounded and successful athletic department.
The student life, donations, enrollment, philanthropy, and overall public support can all benefit from a “zero-sum” game (Getz, 2012). The fact of the matter is the gains of intercollegiate athletics departments outweigh any sort of costs associated with running an athletic department (Getz, 2012).

The national exposure that many big time athletics departments get, particularly at the major conferences within division I athletics, effects the enrollment at the universities. When describing a $3 million 15 year agreement between ESPN and the Southeastern Conference Brad Wolverton reported that the universities “hope the exposure will help them attract students who would otherwise not have considered their universities” (Wolverton 2009). Universities use the athletics departments as a leverage to attract students on their campus. It ends up being a win, win for the both the athletic department and the university.

Customer Relationship Management Databases

Customer relationship management is important in every aspect of the real world. Currently healthcare providers are using healthcare portals to build up their “knowledge management” as seen in research (Lee, 2010). The research looked at hospitals, governments, and non-government healthcare providers in North American and Asia. This provides the health care provider with valuable information to provide to their customer. The healthcare system is complex and the importance of implementing a customer relationship management database is important to identify the customers using the service provider. The is an abundance of healthcare information that needs to be stored in these databases that can be used to organize this information; thus allowing for
easier access for the provider and in turn providing optimal customer service for the user of the healthcare provider (Lee, 2010).

An ever-growing need to incorporate customer relationship management databases in the business industry is becoming more important. The process of customer relationship management databases involves a three-step process. First the customer interacts with a business. Next, the business meets the needs of the customer and builds a relationship with them. Finally, the customer is then more likely to come back to the business and in turn customer loyalty is gained (Okula, 2000). Building a positive customer relationship model is important in retaining the customer and in turn building loyalty between the customer and the business.

Research has been done on university student databases on their relationships built with acquiring and retaining students. Through the research it was found that with implementing a more in depth customer database by improving the overall customer relationship management, there was an increase in student loyalty, retention, and satisfaction with the programs and services offered by the university (Seeman, 2006). Universities all around the United States are slowing implementing customer relationship management databases to better understand their students and their needs.

There has been research done on a college campuses with the effects of customer relationship database management on the over satisfaction and retention rate of students but nothing done on the effects of customer relationship management within an intercollegiate athletics landscape. University Alumni databases are becoming more popular in the university setting. These databases look at the alumni as long time customers with the university. It is a want to cultivate these alumni and in turn hope that
they will give back to the university in some way. It is necessary for the continuing growth of the university as a whole and in particular individual departments throughout campus. More and more alumni are turning to their alma mater for guidance and a place to come back to. It is time to capitalize on this. There is a need to think more like the customers, alumni, to really understand the customer’s perspective (Bedigian, 2006).

Customer Relationship Management Databases within Intercollegiate Athletics

In order to develop the proper relationship needed to cultivate a donor, alum, fan, or casual fan having an effective customer relationship database is important. Forming relationships with the fans, donor, alums, and casual fans is important to. This will lead to optimal customer service. Customer relationship management is an important and growing concept within intercollegiate athletics (Kim & Trail, 2011). Through these relationships important information can be gathered and analyzed to incorporate into the customer service strategy. This research is important to conduct because there is need to provide optimal customer service within an intercollegiate setting for the longevity of intercollegiate athletic departments.

Due to the rising cost of keeping news fans within intercollegiate athletics and the rising costs of running an athletics department, athletic departments have shifted much of their focus to relationship marketing. This incorporates customer relationship databases within the intercollegiate athletics landscape. Building a relationship with a fan can have a positive effect on game attendance for multiple sports (Wang, 2012). The findings of this above study by Wang are substantial in their findings the some sort of customer
relationship with the fans, donors, and alums can have a positive impact on overall game attendance at intercollegiate sporting events.

Providing the optimal customer service will only help in providing the necessary groundwork to achieve the goals an athletic department has. The University of Miami-Florida has incorporated a new customer relationship management system that new to the college landscape. It is called the Hurricane Game Pass. When doing research on the game pass it was of interest. The game pass looks to provide the fan with incentives on coming to the games early and purchasing season tickets. There is no exact literature on this yet because this pass was introduced this past season but from the looks of the pass, it was a good way to attract customer information and build up the customer relationship database for the University of Miami-Florida Athletic Department (University of Miami-Florida Athletic Department, 2013)

Critical Analysis

The previous research has been important in that the ground has been laid for the current research to take place. The scholarly journal research article that is going to be the most benefit for me for my research is the one titled, Examining the Effects of Relationship Quality and Calculative Commitment on Sport Consumer Behaviors for Intercollegiate Athletics. The research hits the nail on the head on the type of research wanting to get look at. The plan is to take this research and expand it to incorporate more of a customer service aspect rather than just building the relationship. Building a relationship is part of it but finding out the ultimate fan experience at a college football game and what draws fans in to games on Saturdays. All of the other research articles
looked at will provide a good reference to use, especially the customer service section. In that section there was valuable information about how customer service can encourage customer loyalty and in turn increase customer retention rates. Simply, caring about what a customer has to say and providing for their needs can accomplish this.

Through the previous research the importance of customer service within intercollegiate athletics is seen but how this customer service is defined within intercollegiate athletics is not. Cultivating the donor and casual fan are both important for the overall success of the athletic department. Implementing an effective customer relationship management database is important for the growth of a university and the retention rate (Seeman, 2006). This all makes sense because to better understand a students, fans, and alumni of the universities there has be a system tailored to do so. This will help with providing for them as much as possible and in the ways they want to be provided for.

The information found on the Miami Hurricane Game Pass was of interest because this is the first system of this kind within intercollegiate athletics that a major athletic department has incorporated this type of strategy. This customer relationship management strategy is important to keep on watching and the idea behind it is intriguing. Like found in the literature for customer relationship management found, customer relationship is important for retaining fans/customers. Building a positive customer relationship model/strategy is important in retaining the customer and in turn building loyalty between the customer and the business (Okula, 2010). The game pass for Miami, though yet to be revealed, will increase fan loyalty and retention rates because fans will feel part of the Miami “family” and want to keep buying season tickets, apparel,
and other offering from the University of Miami Athletics Department. The fans can then market the university by word of mouth, which as many know is free. With the tight budgets of all intercollegiate athletics departments this is important to consider. The cost of implementing this for universities might high in the beginning but in the long run this will have major benefits for the university.

**Differentiation of Current Research with Previous Research**

This research study, unlike others that have been done will take an inclusive look at the need to provide optimal customer service to a donor, alum, and casual fan. It will also look at the overall benefit of cultivating a donor through a customer relationship system and how that has an effect on the perception of the athletics department as a whole. The study aims to find out the impact optimal customer service has on the reputation of the athletics department, specifically at Indiana University-Bloomington.

There has been research done on the effects of customer relationship management and the effects of optimal customer service on a college campus but not specifically in the athletics department. The previous research has dealt with the academic setting and retaining new and current students on campus. This research will examine more of the inner workings of customer service within the intercollegiate athletic department landscape and specifically what provides for the optimal customer service with these athletic departments.
**Problem Statement**

Many intercollegiate athletic departments struggle to stay in the positive numbers when it comes to their overall budget. This creates needed changes within the athletic department to improve on the budget issues. This is not unique to any one intercollegiate athletics department but is an issue throughout intercollegiate athletics landscape. There needs to be strategic ways at each athletic department to alleviate this problem going forward. The problem is there needs to be a better grasp on customer service management in order to truly understanding what the fan, alum, donor, and casual wants that will provide them with the optimal customer service.

**Purpose Statement**

The overall purpose of this research project is to come up with the optimal customer service model for Indiana University Athletics Department to use generate revenue and cut down on expenses going forward. A four-step process will accomplish the purpose of the research project. First analyzing existing research on what has been done and not done. Second, figuring out what fans of intercollegiate athletics want when building customer relationships. Third, finding out what characteristics make for the ultimate fan experience at an intercollegiate division I football game is important. Lastly, narrowing the last finding to only include fans at Indiana University football games will round the research all out. Since football is the main “cash cow” within intercollegiate athletics focusing on this main area will be intention of this research project. As the college football landscape will provide for the perfect sample size to further examine the problem.
Theoretical Framework

The main study that has set my theoretical framework for this research paper was the article titled “Examining the Effects of Relationship Quality and Calculative Commitment on Sport Consumer Behaviors for Intercollegiate Athletics.” Within this article relationship marketing was discussed and the need to provide the quality customer service to the fans of the university/college. According to this research study, “The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of relationship quality and calculative commitment on sport consumers’ game attendance, donation intentions, and customer referral in the context of intercollegiate athletics (Wang, 2012). The quality customer service will be needed to cultivate the relationship. A lot of money is generated through intercollegiate athletics and in order to keep the money coming in this customer service is paramount to the overall success of an intercollegiate athletics department. This study highlights this framework and was used as a guiding tool to my research paper.

Through this study the concept of relationship marketing was expanding on and used. The concept formed the basis for my initial research and the need to provide optimal customer service for fans/customers at a university is important. Forming a unique relationship with each fan is important to provide them with their needs. Building these relationships is not easy and takes time to cultivate. ‘Relationship marketing’ is defined as “attracting, maintaining and – in multi-service organizations – enhancing customer relationships” (Berry, 2002). It includes activities that are designed to create and maintain an exchange relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The execution of this relationship marking in today’s business operations has been deemed as custom by academics as well as practitioners (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). The use of
relationship marketing is expected to deal with major issues in today’s business world concerning the different customer mixes and their needs. In turn, this will deal with customer loyalty and retention (Berry, 1995; Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000). Effective relationship marketing will alleviate stress associated with large target markets.

**Research Questions**

RQ1 - What do customers/fans look for in building a strong business relationship?

RQ2 - What are the characteristics that make for the ultimate fan experience at an intercollegiate Division I football game?

RQ3 - What are the characteristics that make for the ultimate fan experience at an Indiana University football game?

**Hypothesis**

Below are the educated guesses on what I believe the outcomes of this study would be. These are based upon my knowledge of intercollegiate athletics and brief a synopsis of the literature regarding customer service and intercollegiate athletics.

*Hypothesis RQ1* – Customers/fans except from the intercollegiate athletics department to have a willingness to care about their needs, be able to provide for their needs and the ability to continue to grow with the relationship. Too many times it is all about the money, and fans within intercollegiate athletics want to be looked at more than just donor but part of the university and athletics family.

*Hypothesis RQ2* – The ultimate fans experience at an intercollegiate athletics football game is convenient parking, great stadium seating, variety in the concessions, and a
festive atmosphere. The festive atmosphere includes bands, tailgates, and overall a positive school spirit around the campus and stadium.

Hypothesis RQ3 – At an Indiana University football game fans like to have fun. The fans care about the outcome of the game but most importantly they want to see the team be competitive in the games (a commitment to winning). The festive atmosphere is the most important aspect for and Indiana football fan. This includes tailgates, food booths, bands, and the overall positive atmosphere around the stadium. Waiting in long lines is not acceptable for Indiana fans, so quick convenient service is of up most importance. The convenience factor would be evident in the parking as well. Indiana fans want the parking lots to be close to the stadium and cheap.

**Method**

Optimally through this research would be done in a survey based format but due to the time frame the proposed study will be looking at other studies and coming up with anticipated results based on the results of these studies. This will help form the extensive literature review. The studies that will be looked at will include the intercollegiate athletics gameday experience, customer service, customer relationship management databases, and different intercollegiate athletic department customer service strategies. Each of these studies will be examined in order to come up with some overall key traits that form the answers to the three research questions.

The sampling method that will be employed will be a qualitative based research. Based on the findings that are found in the literature, the research questions could then be answered to the best of the knowledge given. It will be a qualitative literature analysis
that will form the basis of the answers to the research questions posed in this proposal for the Indiana University – Bloomington Athletic Department. As much needed literature will be looked at to determine a sufficient answer to each of the research questions. There are not a set number of documents that will be looked at.

First, researching on customer service will take place. This research will look at general studies that examine optimal research practices and why these practices are important. It will begin to answer the idea of fan loyalty and the reason fans come back to games time after time.

Secondly, the importance of intercollegiate athletics will be researched. Through this research it will be examined the need for intercollegiate athletics for the overall fan, student, and university benefit. This will piggy back off of the research on customer service done above effects intercollegiate athletics and begin to answer the need to provide optimal customer service within an intercollegiate athletic department setting.

Next customer service databases will be researched and why this is important from a relationship standpoint. It will dig deeper into what a fan really wants when it comes to an intercollegiate Division 1 football game and how these systems can be tailored to provide this information. This research will provide the general make up for the theory behind the need to form a relationship with the fan/customer.

Lastly, this will all be combined to form the results on each of the research questions. The initial customer service literature, the intercollegiate athletics literature and then literature with those two combined will lead to what the overall research is trying to answer. Through the analysis of the literature the framework for providing optimal customer service within intercollegiate athletics will be obtained.
Results

The results of the three research questions are broken down into categories and key findings that were found when examining the literature.

RQ1 - What do customers/fans look for in building a strong business relationship?

Customers/fans want business to go the extra mile when creating a relationship with them. They want to feel a sense of loyalty and worthiness with the business. Many feel if this is obtained they are more likely to stay with the business than if they do not feel like they are worth anything to the business. This was an important finding in the literature review that answers the process for starting the relationship with a customer. This in turn can create a strong relationship with the customer/fan. The process of customer relationship management databases involves a three-step process. First the customer interacts with a business. Next, the business meets the needs of the customer and builds a relationship with them. Finally, the customer is more likely to come back to the business and in turn customer loyalty is gained (Okula, 2000). Customers want to feel noticed and want to feel like they mean something to the organization.

RQ2 - What are the characteristics that make for the ultimate fan experience at an intercollegiate division I FBS football game?

Overall fans want to have a great time at an intercollegiate division I football game. They want to have a quality product both on the field and off the field. On the field would include the team and the coaches. Off the field would include the convenience of the stadium and other amenities, quality concessions, and the atmosphere around the stadium. The atmosphere around the stadium is important to many fans
because they get to the games early and want stuff to do. The tailgates areas, according
to the fans, need to be filled with music, food/drinks, and plenty of shades areas.

**RQ3 - What are the characteristics that make for the ultimate fan experience at an Indiana University football game?**

The main characteristics that makes for the ultimate fan experience at an Indiana University football game is a visualize commitment to winning mentality for the football team and the administration. This is not only on the field but creating first class championship product off the field too. When it comes to on the field this would include putting quality players on the field, hiring quality coaches, improvements in facilities, and anything needed to set Indiana University a part from all other division I FBS schools. Off the field would include halftime entertainment, quality concessions, tailgating areas, bands, and the atmosphere around campus and the stadium.

**Discussion**

The topic dealt with the ever-growing issue of providing optimal customer service within intercollegiate athletics. This is becoming more of an issue because athletic departments are looked at as a direct image of the university as a whole. The advancements in technology have made it easy for a fan to display their displeasure online to many friends/family through social media. Not only have that, but the rising costs of daily athletic business activities led to this issue being more evident over the past 5-10 years. Athletic departments need to set themselves apart from other schools to cultivate their fan base and in particular their alums/donors. In order to do so a strategic plan has to be set up to generate revenue and keep expenses to a minimum.
At Indiana University – Bloomington there has to be a commitment to winning in order for fans to keep showing up on Saturday’s. The longtime fans will always show up but it is important to keep those casual fans coming back. As far as the difference between Indiana University football fans and the football fans of other division I FBS programs, there was not a significant difference. However, Indiana football fans wanted to see more a commitment to winning then the other programs mainly because of the lack of success for the team. Other than that college football fans just want to have a great time at the games with other fans who are cheering for the same college team they are. College football is college football anywhere around the college football landscape. The tailgates and overall festive atmospheres around the stadiums will always be important to fans no matter what school they are at.

The future of intercollegiate athletics is being more and more customer service driven and revenue generation driven to meet the need to compete within the conferences and nationally. Within many intercollegiate athletics department there is not a specific department designated towards customer service. The importance for positive customer service is important when it comes to repeat buyers and first time buyers. The customer service department would help to alleviate some of the questions that come into the ticket office via email and phone; thus keeping the lines open for people who want to purchase tickets and creating overall more efficient service. Time will tell if this would increase sales but it would not hurt sales. All general questions would be directed to call a certain phone number within the athletic department and to email a certain email contact within the department. The job of the customer service department would be to answer these questions and to be familiar with many aspects within the athletic department. This
would create a better experience for all customers.

How would this create revenue? The revenue may not be seen immediately but overtime positive customer service within an athletics department would eventually create a revenue generation. There would have to be a few new jobs created but some jobs within the department would be tailored more to fit this new department. This new department would be extra beneficial for the non-revenue sports because if customers are already hesitant about purchasing tickets for an event a positive customer service experience could encourage repeat purchases. Once again this is a time will tell approach but the creation of customer service department within intercollegiate athletics departments would only to create a positive experience for all.

Sometimes college athletic departments take people’s money for granted and the creation of a customer service department would give off the mindset that as an athletic department we care about your service and want to help the customer in any way possible. A positive customer service experience to longtime donors might increase their annual gifts and a positive customer experience to casual fans might increase repeat purchases and season ticket purchases. At Indiana University men’s basketball games will always be well attended; however it is extremely important to get the attendance up at football games to drive the overall success of the athletics department. An increase in an emphasis on customer service and revenue generation will only help in this goal. Not only that but, the non-revenue sports will benefit from this increase in customer service. Many customers do not know about ticket prices and fan experiences at men’s soccer, women’s basketball, baseball, and volleyball events. Explaining to them the fan experience and affordable ticket prices to these events will attract more fans; thus
increasing attendance and repeat purchase. More emphasis needs to be put into the customer service area of college athletics.

When looking at the impact of revenue generating sports versus non-revenue generating sports it is similar throughout the landscape of intercollegiate athletics. Many people view intercollegiate athletics as a pure business, however if this were true the only two sports that would exist in college athletics would be football and men’s basketball. This is not the case, as sports like volleyball, women’s basketball, track and field, golf, soccer, etc.; all exist to create a true athletic department. If college athletics operated within a true business sense the non-revenue sports would be cut immediately. Because of the many non-revenue sports that college athletic departments have there are only a few that make profit. These few will usually have a strong basketball program, football program, or both.

**Potential Practical Implications**

With the initial findings of the proposed research it was necessary to dive deeper into the numbers behind intercollegiate athletic departments. The future practical implications that might come about from this analysis are incorporating more of a focus on the cultivation of customer relationships. Whether this would be in the ticketing operations, the development office, or throughout the athletic department as a whole, there needs to be a change in the strategies on athletic departments to better provide for their fans. In particular, it is important for the university to not only cater to the significant donors, but also the casual fans who have the ability to become more than casual fans. The customer service strategy needs to be well-rounded to include everyone who has an interest in the university.
Through a little collection of research this is what was found at the most successful intercollegiate athletic athletics department, the University of Texas – Austin. The University of Texas through its football and basketball programs generates a large profit and because of this the deficit they accrue within the non-revenue sports does not substantially matter a whole lot compared to other universities. Uniquely at the University of Texas-Austin the baseball program generates about a 4.3 million dollar profit. A 2011-2012 athletic year breakdown of the three sports that generate a profit are seen below is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>103.4</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Putting more emphasis on non-revenue sports is important to growing the athletic department at the University of Texas at Austin. Everybody knows the success of the football and basketball programs but many do not know that the women’s basketball team and softball teams have a rich history, and that the volleyball team won the national championship this past year. These sports do not turn a profit but are valuable sports to the UT-Austin athletics department. A 2011-2012 athletic year breakdown of the four sports is as follows (next page):
### Ticketed Non-Revenue Generating Sports (in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Basketball</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Similar numbers will be found through ticketed non-revenue sports at Indiana University – Bloomington that are found at the most successful intercollegiate athletics department in the United States. If more of an emphasis is put in non-revenue sports from a customer service stand point and a relationship marketing stand point the deficits will not be as much in these sports. Get fans and customers the knowledge about these events and they will come. ‘Build it up, and they will come’, as the saying goes. The fans want to be listened to and provided for, and through these smaller non-revenue generating sports it is important to provide for the fans as much as possible to get these numbers turned more in the positive side. This can be done simply, by providing better overall customer service.

Lastly, like said before the Hurricane Game Pass is of interest to me and something similar to this idea could be implemented throughout the intercollegiate athletics landscape. It is a quick and easy way to provide for the fans of the university and reward loyal fans. In turn, as learned from the literature developing a customer relationship will lead to higher retention rates and increased loyalty. This would be a great idea for the Indiana University Athletic Department to look into to improve fan loyalty throughout all of its sports and in particular the football program. If the football program could gain success on the field and in turn improve the fan experience off the field, there would be great benefits to the athletic department as a whole. Previously
mentioned in the Critical Analysis section of the literature review but worth mentioning again, the game pass for Miami, though yet to be revealed, will increase fan loyalty and retention rates because fans will feel part of the Miami “family” and want to keep buying season tickets, apparel, and other offering from the University of Miami Athletics Department. The fans can then market the university by word of mouth, which as many know is free. With the tight budgets of all intercollegiate athletics departments this is important to consider. The cost of implementing this for universities might high in the beginning but in the long run this will have major benefits for the athletic department and the university as a whole.
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