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The World Wide Web as an advertising medium for sports facilities: An analysis of current use

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The World Wide Web as an Advertising Medium for Sports Facilities: An Analysis of Current Use

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Results from a recent study of the Web sites of sports facilities revealed some interesting findings. The ease of entry, relatively low set-up costs, universality, time, independence, and interactivity that are offered by the World Wide Web (also called the internet) are unique to this medium. So, although many business enterprises may not have a clear objective for Web presence, the loss perceived from having an undeveloped Web site still outweighs the loss perceived from not having a Web presence at all. At this point, we reemphasize the fact that the Web is still in its infancy, and therefore, clear objectives are still unlikely. Most site managers will continue to rely primarily on intuition, creativity, and marketing experience as this medium evolves.

Using the Sports Summit Sports Business Directory (Moss, 1995), the Collector's Digest (1997), and on-line browsing and search, a list of 320 sports facilities Web sites was compiled. During this process, when multiple listings were found

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for any particular site, Web sites maintained or endorsed by the particular facility were selected for inclusion in our directory over those provided by an outside group or organization. Personal and private sites were discarded.

Of the original 320 compiled, the investigation was narrowed to the population of facilities that maintain their own Web sites as opposed to those that are sponsored by other organizations. Of the 320, 178, or 55.6%, of the facilities were found to have a presence on the Web. The Web sites were then categorized according to the publisher of each site (see Table 1). Of the 178, 30% (54) constructed and managed their own site. Of these, 33 (61.1%) of the sites were found on the Web and

ovated or reconstructed.

Common features of each site were recorded. A matrix emerged that contained some features such as the following: location, field dimension, training facilities, seating capacity, and club seating.

Those sports facilities using the Web as a marketing tool present a wide variety of information on their Web sites. Figure 1 shows the content features of each facility's Web site and Table 2 presents a graph of the frequency of type of feature. The most common feature, which was found in 70% of the sites, was a calendar or schedule of events. The next most common features were seating charts and ticket information found in 41% and 45% of the sites, respectively. Although

Table 1
Sport Facility Web Site Publishers

Web Site Publisher	Percentage/Number	
Constructed individual site	30%	54
Collector's Digest, wwcd.com	23%	41
Educational	19%	34
Mediacity.com	6%	11
Ballparks.com	8%	14
Other	9%	16
Sportstour.com	2%	3
Ticketmaster.com	2%	3
USAToday.com	1%	2

consisted of the group used for analysis in our study. Reasons for the absence may have been an unavailable server or a site being ren-

most of the sites did not have a method for purchasing tickets online, information regarding ticket purchases was frequently available.
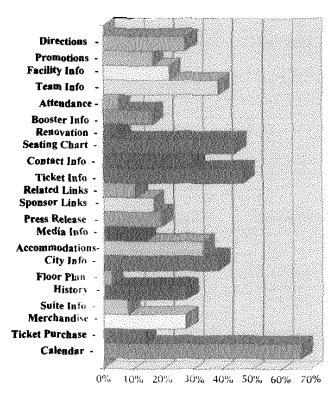
Directions
Promotions
Facility Info
Team Info
Attendance
Booster Info
Renovation
Seating Chart
Contact Info
Ticket Info
Related Links
Sponsor Links
Press Release
Media Info
Accommodations
City Info
Floor Plan
History
Suite Info
Merchandise
Ticket Purchase
Calendar

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

Figure 1
Stadium Web Site Content Chart

Only 10% had direct links to ticket-purchasing agencies such as Ticket Master or facility box offices. In contrast, in 30% of the sites, where merchandise was advertised, a method for purchase was usually made available.

Team information was a common feature to most of the sites. In fact, some of the sites had direct links with team home pages and other support groups, such as booster organizations and sponsors. Facts that were included in the team information option were team and individual player statistics (38%) and press releases (20%). Histories of the facility and of the home team were often combined, and such combinations were seen in 25% of the sites.

Local travel information was available from most of the facility sites. Where information was not available, direct links were provided to a city site that could be maintained by the chamber of commerce or other similar entities. For example, the Jacksonville Sports Development Authority has created a Web site that previews all of the city's various event centers from sporting facilities to fairgrounds, creating an image of a "major league city" (Jacksonville Sports Development Authority, p. 7). This site attempts to grab the consumer's attention by showing colorful graphics. Interest and desire are piqued through the description of one of the newest state-of-the-art stadiums in the country. However, the site does not prompt interactivity with the host computer. Typically, Web sites prompt action by requesting the on-line user to fill out an order form or questionnaire. In roughly 12% of the sites interactivity was accomplished through promotional activities that included merchandise giveaways and other games.

Educational sites constituted 11% of the total facility list. Most universities have home pages for their athletic departments, including some general information and photographs of the facility, that are direct links from the university home page. Educational sites typically have links with booster organizations and team information similar to that containted in a media guide.

The most interesting items found were uncommon among the sites. One of these features is the attendance history of the facility found on two prominent university stadium sites (University of Michigan and University of Tennessee). Another interesting feature, the seating view, allows a visitor to observe the field from various sections in the stadium. Of the facility sites searched, three provided chat rooms. Chat rooms create an opportunity for interaction between the facility and the customer or between customers. Ticket exchange, which was also uncommon, allows a visitor to buy, sell, or trade tickets with other fans.

Given that the sport industry is now the 11th largest industry in the United States ("How big's the biz?", 1997), sport management students should be encouraged to take advantage of their time and opportunities offered in college. Students could gain an advantage in attaining the knowledge and skills needed to survive and be successful in such an industry, one of which is to know how to create and manage a Web site.

Sports facility owners, managers, and marketers could use the information found in this study in several ways. First, if the facility has no Web site, this information could be used as a guide to create a Web site — the features currently being used in sports facility Web sites in this study could be used in their Web sites. Second, if a facility has a Web site, the information in this study can be used to analyze and compare with competitors' Web sites.

Older, more established, facilities such as Wrigley Field and LA Coliseum seem to place less emphasis on Web marketing than do the newer facilities. New, state-of-the-

Table 2
Stadium Web Site Content Matrix

Stadium Name	Cal	Tix	Mer	Ste	Hist	F/P	City	Acc	Med	P/R	Spo	Rel	T/I	Cont	Seat	Ren	Boost	Att	Team	Facil	Prom	Dir
Alamodomey	y	y			y		y	y	y	y	y	y										
Amarillo Civic Center						y																
America's Center Dome	y						y	y														
Astrodome																			y			
BC Place Stadium	y						y													y		
Bobby Dodd Stadium	y																					
BSU Pavilion	y												y	y								
Candlestick Park													y		y							
Carter-Finley Stadium	y											y	y	y	y	y	y		y			
Clifford and Audrey Jones					y										y			y				
Coors Field	y	y	y	y				y	y		y		y	y	y				y	y		y
Copps Coliseum							y								y					y		y
Ervin J. Nutter Center	y						y	y			y		y	y	y				y	y		y
Florida Citrus Bowl	y												y		y							
Foxboro Stadium	y							y			y			y							y	
Franklin Quest Field					y											y			y			y
Gator Bowl Stadium	y		y		y		y		y	y			y	y	y			y	y			
Georgia Dome	y						y	y						y	y				y	y		
Giants Stadium	y							y	y	y		y	y	y	y			y	y			
Great Western Forum	y		y		y		y												y		y	y
Jacobs Field	y	y	y		y						y		y	y	y			y	y		y	y
Kiel Center	y		y				y	y					y		y					y		y
Knickerbocker Arena					y																	
LA Memorial Coliseum													y									
Lansdowne Park															y							
Louisiana Superdome	y						y						y	y	y					y	y	
Maple Leaf Gardens									y										y			
Memorial Stadium (Minneapolis)	y	y		y	y		y	y					y									
MGM Grand Garden Arena	y		y					y												y		
Michigan Stadium	y		y						y		y		y				y	y	y			
Orlando Centroplex							y	y														
Palace of Auburn Hills	y		y				y	y					y		y							
Redwood Empire Ice Arena	y		y																			y
San Diego Sports Arena	y	y	y					y	y				y	y	y				y		y	y
San Jose Arena	y		y		y		y	y		y	y		y		y				y		y	y

Refer to endnote 1 for legend

art facilities seem to place greater emphasis on Web marketing because of the image that is created, in addition to the other advantages. These facilities have set a precedent for what a quality Web site should contain. Still, each of the sites is a work in progress. Objectives are still being developed and content reevaluated on a regular basis.

The Web offers potential for relationship marketing unparalleled by any other medium. As Web marketing becomes more commonplace, the pressure to establish some Web presence will build. The growth will cause greater emphasis on the quality and content of sites. In addition, customers will expect a certain standard of service that can only be provided on-line. Over a very short time, Web presence has moved from being an accessory to being indispensable to quality customer service. Indeed, electronic commerce (now being called E-commerce) will have a significant impact on the marketing efforts utilized for sports facilities.

There are implications for sport management education. Because of the marketing potential of the Web, the use of the Web as a marketing tool should be included in sport management and sport marketing curriculum. Additionally, because Web site creation and management are skills of increasing necessity, their addition to sport management and sport marketing curriculum should be considered.

Given that the sport industry is now the 11th largest industry in the United States ("How big's the biz?", 1997), sport management students

should be encouraged to take advantage of their time and opportunities offered in college. Students could gain an advantage in attaining the knowledge and skills needed to survive and be successful in such an industry, one of which is to know how to create and manage a Web site.

Sports facility owners, managers, and marketers could use the information found in this study in several ways. First, if the facility has no Web site, this information could be used as a guide to create a Web site — the features currently being used in sports facility Web sites in this study could be used in their Web sites. Second, if a facility has a Web site, the information in this study can be used to analyze and compare with competitors' Web sites.

In addition, people in related businesses could benefit from the information in this study. Owners and managers of hotels, restaurants, sports teams, sports businesses, ticket outlets, and local visitors' information centers can use the information to help them plan, add hot links to the facility's Web sites, and develop cooperative contracts in their businesses.

References

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Authors' notes

Endnotes

(1) The following is a legend for Table 2:

Cal = Calendar
Tix = Ticket Purchase
Mer = Merchandise
Ste = Suite Information
Hist = History
F/P = Floor Plan
City = City Information
Acc = Accommodations
Med = Media Information
P.R = Press Release
Spo = Sponsor
Rel = Related Links
T/I = Ticket Information
Cont = Contact Information
Seat = Seating Chart
Ren = Renovation
Boost = Booster Information
Att = Attendance Record
Team = Team Information
Facil = Facility Information
Prom = Promotions
Dir = Directions