

Chapter 4: Full Menu Marketing

Ground Rule #4: Use Full Menu Marketing and you will be more successful selling season tickets than ever before.

As much as I hate to say it, *a full season ticket isn't for everybody.*

How can I say that, particularly after I've stressed selling at least 75% of your seats before the season starts and most of those sales need to come from season tickets?

The *full* season ticket is, of course, the most common ticket package sale. This is where the fan buys a ticket to all the team's home games. You gotta love those folks. Usually the full season ticket is bundled with some perks and perhaps even a discount. However, we shouldn't limit ourselves to thinking that the full season ticket is the *only* acceptable ticket package sale.

What if your team's environment allows you to sell only 20% of your building's seating capacity as full season tickets?

Full season tickets are the lifeblood of any of the Big Four professional teams (football, baseball, basketball, and hockey) and many colleges. However, *it's not possible to manufacture a big gain in full season tickets if little desire exists for such a product.*

A goal to just try to sell a lot more full season tickets in a market where there isn't the consumer desire will just add up to frustration and failure.

If you're in a situation like that, what do you do? *What do you do?*

Do you start training your sales staff in hand-to-hand combat? I know a sales manager of a team that did something close to that. He brought in a consultant that had experience training direct sales companies like time-shares and aluminum siding (yes, there still are The Tin Men).

This consultant taught the ticket sales staff brass-knuckle, one-call-close, leave-no-prisoners high pressure sales tactics. The sales manager showed me their pitch. It was beautiful. He had a large colorful fold-out presentation that would be eventually placed during the pitch on the prospect's office desk or kitchen table. There were two false closes and then *wham* the full power-packed close complete with special gifts for ordering *now*.

Did it work? Sure, they sold more season tickets—about as many to make up for the loss of season ticket renewals from the season before. There was no net gain in full season tickets; they were just back where they started.

Did they keep those new full season ticketholders the next year? Less than 40% of them renewed. Now, to just get back to even, his armed sales staff would have to scour their market for more targets that would succumb to the high pressure.

While I'm a huge believer in full season tickets, I'm not a big believer in jamming a product down somebody's throat. The reason is quite simple: If they're buying something they really don't want, but buy because of extreme pressure, then a large percentage of those buyers won't renew. I would much rather sell the fan a package that is acceptable to them at initial purchase time *and* at the subsequent *renewal time*.

To reach the level of selling out every game, you're in the *ticket renewal business* as well as the ticket selling business. You absolutely need a very high percentage of renewals to reach sold-out levels.

We'll get into how to *package, sell, and renew season tickets* later in Chapter 10 in this *Playbook*. However, to dramatically increase season ticket sales, you first need to know the principles of **Full Menu Marketing**. Using Full Menu Marketing, *you will be more successful selling season tickets than ever before*.

For Full Menu Marketing to work, you need to know the dynamics of selling the non-season ticketholder a bundle of tickets in advance.

HOW TO SELL SOMETHING THAT THE BUYER WANTS TO BUY

Many teams seem to want to sell a product that fans don't want to buy. That's a difficult dynamic for dramatically increasing season ticket sales. Here are three reasons why a full season ticket is *not* right for most people in your market:

- **Money.** A pair of NBA season tickets in a desirable section can cost up to \$12,000 and more. That's \$12,000 in *cash*. When the economy is poor, that's a \$12,000 decision that is often difficult to make for many companies. For individuals, that \$12,000 could go a long way in mortgage payments or car payments. There is an army of people who just can't come up with that type of money in cash. Even if you gave a major discount, like 20, 30, or 40%, you're still talking about a big chunk of cash for someone to fork over. Does that mean that fan should be ignored as advance ticket buyers? Should we relegate this fan to being a walk-up buyer? Absolutely not on both questions!

Economics should never be a reason fans don't buy ticket packages.

If you skimmed over the paragraph above, here's a chance to read it again:

Economics should never be a reason fans don't buy ticket packages.

A smaller ticket package can solve the money problem.

- **Time.** If you're involved in the community, a 40+ game NBA or NHL home schedule puts tremendous pressure on your calendar. Imagine an 81 game Major League Baseball schedule! A 41-game home schedule works out to almost two home games a week. Instead of relaxation and fun, attending games blurs into school board meetings and charity functions. An 81 game baseball schedule works out to 3 or 4 games a week, almost every other day. Even worse, in baseball there could be a home game on *eight straight nights*. Quickly, attending the games seems to be an *obligation*, instead of recreation. One or two games a month, however, would be an anticipated respite to a busy schedule.

While some people are very active in the community, others don't get to spend much time in theirs. I'm not just referring to long-haul truckers or traveling salespeople. Many business people have to travel on a regular basis two or three days a week. Sure, they're home most weekends, but more than half of NBA games aren't played on those days.

Only football is a perfect fit for most fans' schedules and bank accounts. In college football, the fans have six to seven Saturdays to attend home games. In pro football, it's only eight Sundays during the regular season (and maybe an occasional Monday night substituted for one of those Sundays).

- **Interest level.** Not every fan is a fanatic. These types of fans enjoy the sport and the team, but they're not committed enough to go to *every* home game. Will their interest level increase with more attendance? Perhaps. Or it might become a grind and they stop attending even most of the games. At season's end, that buyer might look in a desk drawer and see all those unused tickets and do some quick math. That quick math would show that hundreds or even thousands of dollars were wasted, ending up as unused tickets in a desk drawer. The team would then most likely lose that buyer the following season for any package.

Let's face it: For *most* fans, *a season ticket isn't right for them*. For a long season sport like basketball, hockey, or baseball, it's better that the fan *shares* season tickets. In most of those cases, it's better for *the franchise* that the fan shares tickets, attending about two to four games per month. Those can make attending the games something special—having dinner before the

game at a favorite restaurant and perhaps a cocktail after the game. This keeps their interest fresh, it is not a grind, and it keeps them coming back.

YOU'RE ALREADY DOING SHARING WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT

Here's how your fans are already sharing full season tickets:

1. **Corporate sharing.** A corporation that purchases season tickets naturally shares those tickets. The Chief Executive Officer isn't the only one that can sit in choice seats to see the home team play. There are other departments in the corporation from sales to engineering to accounting that shares those tickets as well as clients. Sure, for the *big game*, the CEO might exercise his clout for the tickets. For the other games, however, even the janitor gets to share. With this corporate sharing, it doesn't put a burden on any one person's time. Sharing keeps the interest level in attending games high.
2. **Friends sharing.** It's common that friends will get together to share season tickets. This can range from just two people to six or seven or even more. When schedules for the upcoming season are announced, they'll get together to have a "draft party." This is where they'll conduct a draft process like the NFL and NBA do for players. In this case, the draft is to choose which games each person will attend. They each consider their personal schedule and opponents they would like to see. This by itself is a fun event for people that share season tickets. Many times, the drafting of games is just the first step. Second and third steps are filled with negotiations like: *I'll trade you a Bulls and 76er game for a Lakers game.*

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

The best of all possible worlds concerning season tickets would be *where every seat in the arena was shared by at least four fans*. Heck, we pretty much did this with a minor league baseball team, the Dayton Dragons. With the Dragons, we capped full season tickets at 3,000 even though the ballpark sat 7,500 people. We could have sold a lot more full season tickets if we'd chosen to. Instead, we chose to sell *smaller* ticket packages. We sold 18-game plans, or one-fourth of the season. We sold over 12,000 of those! (The Dayton Dragons, by the way, broke the global professional sports team sellout record in 2011, previously held by the Portland Trail Blazers, and the Dragons have sold every ticket to every game for twelve years, over 900 games.)

This type of sharing benefits the fan and benefits the team. Where it benefits the fan is:

1. **Less financial commitment.** Sharing takes the financial investment in tickets down to a level where *more* can afford them.
2. **Limited calendar conflicts.** Sharing doesn't put a crunch on anybody's personal calendar.
3. **Anticipated experience.** Sharing keeps the experience of attending games fun and fresh.

Where it benefits the teams is:

1. **Less dependent on one buyer.** If four people share season tickets and one doesn't renew, the team still retains 75% of the order. The team resells that ticket package to someone new while retaining the other three accounts.
2. **Limit fan burnout.** Teams don't have to think about this for one or two seasons of sellouts that are dominated by full season ticketholders. But, what about in eight or nine years? If enough season ticketholders went to the majority of the home games, a certain portion will burn out. When they do, hope that your team is on an upcycle. Otherwise it might be difficult to replace those burned-out fans with new full season ticket buyers.
3. **Livelier, more fun crowd.** As I have said, there's nothing like going to a sold out sporting event. However, if your arena is filled with full season ticketholders that go to *every* game, you'll find that they cheer *less*. It could be that they are pacing themselves for the long season. Or it could be that they are somewhat jaded by the action—only the spectacular play will push their emotions through to whooping and hollering. When this happens, there is *less crowd electricity* making that sold out sporting event a little less fun. When each person has a little less fun, chances of non-renewal start building.
4. **Serving the fan better.** Instead of selling the fan what the *team needs* (a full season ticket), the team is selling what the *fan wants and needs*. When the fan's wants and needs are the point of focus, the fan enjoys his tickets more. When this happens, the rate of renewal whisks past that 95% level.
5. **Higher potential revenue.** Most full season ticketholders think of the total dollars the tickets cost them and not the price per game. How much cash do they have to come up with to buy a full season ticket? When people purchase partial season tickets, it's possible to raise the ticket prices and still keep the financial commitment of each person that shares at a reasonable level. Let's take a look at the NBA 41-game season:

HIGHER TICKET PRICES ON PER GAME BASIS

Type	Games	Cost per tix	Gross Cost 2 tickets
Season tickets	41	\$150 ea.	\$12,300
10 games	10	\$150 ea.	\$3,000
10 games	10	\$175 ea.	\$3,500
4 10 games + 1	40	\$175 ea.	\$14,350

In the diagram above, two season tickets would cost the fan \$12,300. If four fans shared that same pair of season tickets, each would have to pay \$3,000 (one would get the 41st game and have to pay \$3,300). The \$3,000 cost puts it into the realm of affordability for a far greater number of fans than the \$12,300 does.

If, however, those same tickets to the shared season ticketholders cost \$175 each, their gross cost would be \$500 more at \$3,500, but the final price would not be so prohibitive that they couldn't buy. With that scenario, the team would receive \$2,050 *more per two season tickets*. Multiply this by 3,000 pairs of tickets and your revenue

increases by \$6,150,000! That's like walking down the street and finding \$6,150,000 just sitting there in cash, waiting for you to pick it up and deposit in your team's bank account, making a profit for your team and you a hero to the owner.

That's not all. Since fans buying partial ticket plans go to fewer games, they spend more per game on concessions. Just think, if you went to a full 41-game schedule of an NBA team, how enticing would those hot dogs be? Or popcorn and peanuts. But if you go once or twice a month, that hot dog tastes pretty good.

6. **Less demand for great seats.** When fans are sharing season tickets by purchasing a partial season ticket package, there is a lesser need to have *great seats*. For the occasional game, fans will tolerate what is perceived as less than prestigious seats. This, of course, is essential to selling out all season long. You need a large number of fans that don't *need* the best seats in the house to enjoy your games.

IF SHARING IS THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS FOR THE FAN AND THE TEAM, WHY DO WE RUN AWAY FROM IT?

The reason I brought up The Best of All Possible Worlds is to illustrate *the importance of fans that don't buy full season tickets*.

Most teams ignore these fans for a large portion of the selling season. The thinking goes:

“We've got to sell as many full season tickets as we can. We can't let a potential buyer buy *less* than a full season ticket. If they want to see the better games, if they want to sit in the same seat for games they attend, they will have to buy a FULL season ticket. Or let them eat cake.”

After 90% of the selling season has passed, the prospects for non-full season ticketholders get some attention. After seemingly pressuring every man, woman, and child in the community for months to buy full season tickets, many teams will *then* spring Plan B onto the public a few weeks before the season starts. They launch smaller ticket packages like a 10 or 20 game plan.

WHY IN ALL BILLY HELL SHOULD YOU WAIT?

Think of all the sales calls that a team's sales staff makes trying to sell season tickets. Hundreds. Hopefully thousands. Do you have an *exact* number for your team? (You should, by the way, but you'll learn more about that in Chapter 22.)

Think of the ammunition the sales staff from most teams currently has when they're out on a sales call. It's basically: *Buy a full season ticket or see you later*. What percentage of sales calls actually end up with a purchase of full season tickets? 5%? 10%? If it's 10%, which is considered pretty good by most teams, some teams would call that a victory. But let's look at the full picture:

1. 90% of the sales calls were failures.
2. For 90% of the sales calls, your salesperson wasn't able to present the *best* product for that person.
3. For 90% of the sales calls, your salesperson wasn't able to present the *best* product for the *team*. (Remember about renewals.)

So, why wait? *Why walk away from a prospect when that prospect clearly can't or doesn't want to buy season tickets?*

To reach 75% sellout before the season starts, most teams *desperately need* the fan that *can't* buy a full season ticket. The team *desperately needs* more of their sales calls to produce *sales* of some sort. If a team is selling only full season tickets, they could waste 90% of their sales calls selling a product that the customer can't or won't buy.

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FULL MENU MARKETING

There is a way to increase sales per sales call: Offer every ticket package you have up front. You don't wait until a few weeks before the season starts; you sell the items from the first day of sales calls. This includes full season tickets and whatever other ticket plans you have. It could include half season tickets, 15-game plans, 10-game plans, 5-game plans, weekend games-only plans. In other words, a **FULL MENU**.



“Whoa! Just wait a minute,” a standard reply from The Naysayer would be. *“We can't offer all those mini-packages upfront. That would take away season ticket sales. Fans would buy less rather than more.”*

“Whoa yourself!” I would shout out.

I would say, “You will actually sell *more* tickets than ever before. You would actually use *marketing*, not using a “buy or else” hammer and tong approach. Why would you want to follow the tried-and-*false* way? We're in the business of *selling tickets*. Let's sell them all year long.”

Yeah, what a novel idea, let's sell tickets all year long.

In the next chapter, I'll explain the two keys to getting fans to buy the package that makes the most sense for them, and therefore, the most sense for the team.

