

## Chapter 7: Full Menu Magic

*Ground rule #7: Define the seating areas where you have a reasonable chance of selling out on a full season ticket basis.*

It must be some metaphysical law: No matter how cleverly you create your 5-game packages, one package will be more popular than the others.

When creating your ticket packages, you will have figured that you had perfectly balanced the attractions, the weekend dates, the premiums, and promotions into different plans. You *know* the fans will have difficulty in choosing between Plans A, B, and C. And yet, one of those plans becomes more popular than the others.

What are the consequences when that one 5-game package *sells out*? Celebrate! You've just sold out five games! Now you've reduced your targeted games by 33%! You've sold out 5 games, you have 10 left. With one 5-game package selling out, you just created another new chapter of *The Sellout Mentality* for your team.

Because of an early 5-game sellout success, don't enlarge your present target of 15-games. Keep your focus on selling out the other 10 targeted games. *Next season*, you'll be naturally expanding the number of sellout games.

### **FULL MENU DYNAMICS**

Let's look at the dynamics that *Full Menu Marketing* will bring to your sales staff.

Imagine your salespeople out on their sales calls. Remember, their previous positioning was: *Buy a season ticket or else*.

Now your salespeople become *problem solvers*. Your salespeople have a package solution for every problem. They actually have ticket products that prospects want to buy!

Imagine the objections that were used in previous sales situations:

1. **Objection #1: “That’s just too much money.”** To many prospects, \$6,000 (or \$25,000) is too much money. When your salespeople were selling *full* season tickets, the only financial solution to this objection was to try and sell season tickets in the cheaper nosebleed seats. No corporation would want a low prestige seat like those. But, most people can afford \$750. And, you’ll make it easy on them to pay. In the NBA of 2013, could a prospect really pass up LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Kevin Durant and Carmelo Anthony in one 5-game package for about \$750? That’s a difficult package to pass up.

If you’re a minor league team, could your fans really pass up five week-end dates where they can get good seats (just outside the *season ticket zones*), great entertainment and guaranteed free gifts?

2. **Objection #2: “We just don’t have that many clients or employees who like basketball (or baseball or whatever sport you’re selling).”** That’s a powerful reason for not buying *full* season tickets, but it really is not valid for your biggest attractions packaged in attractive 5 or 10 or 15-game packages.

With smaller packages loaded with benefits, it’s far more difficult for a corporation to turn your salespeople down. Instead of walking away with only a “*maybe next year*” reply, your salespeople will be walking away with *an order!*

Sure, the order may not be a full season ticket. But, it will be an *advance ticket package order*.

If the fan buys a 5-game mini-package, don’t despair. You’re starting to get them in the habit of attending your games on a semi-regular basis. They will be enjoying all the electricity and excitement that a sold-out arena brings. And, 25% of those the 5-game or 10-game package buyers will upgrade to a larger package next year.

In fact, more than 25% will order *more games during the current season!* (To encourage these fans, you should send a letter to these buyers introducing a 3-game ticket package add-on that they might be interested in. You’re not sending out a full season ticket brochure; it’s just a small add-on of key games to their current package.)

With Full Menu Marketing, you’ve put your sales staff in to the problem solving business and you’ve put yourself into the marketing business.

## **WHAT HAPPENED TO FULL SEASON TICKETS?**

The emphasis in this chapter is FULL MENU MARKETING, but not full season tickets. Don’t feel that I don’t place priority for selling full season tickets. I do. If tomorrow you can start selling out your building on full season tickets, I’ve got a quick recommendation for you. Do it!

However, for most teams, the marketplace isn’t ready to buy all your seats on a full season ticket basis. If the market isn’t ready, *you can’t just dream up the demand*. You will have to *condition* the marketplace to the value of full season tickets through *Full Menu Marketing*. It will take about three years to work up to selling out your building all season long. Unless you’re in the enviable position to acquire a super megastar where they sell out the season immediately, you start selling out by selling out your best attractions.

You need to *get your best attractions off the table*. You do that, of course, by selling them out first. If you sold out the 15 top games through full season tickets, various game plans

and some groups, you've just created a shortage of inventory for your better attractions. Fans can no longer just walk up to your building on the night of a big game and buy tickets. You're basically training your market that if fans want to see the biggest games they'll have to buy *a ticket package in advance*.

The effect of selling out the 15-games is dramatic. Let's look at the numbers. In the chart below, the following are assumed:

1. **Arena size of 18,000.** You're marketing a team that plays in an arena of 18,000 seats.
2. **Somewhat competitive.** The team hasn't done much over the past few years, but they aren't awful either. As a result, you have only 6,000 full season tickets sold. Your staff has worked the market hard and at this time, 6,000 full season tickets is about the maximum you can get.

#### 15-GAME SELLOUT EFFECT ON ENTIRE SEASON

Description	ST Sold	15-G*	Other**	Avg. Att.	Total Att.
Top 15 games	6,000	9,000	3,000	18,000	270,000
Other 26 games	6,000	0	3,000	9,000	234,000
Totals					504,000
Average					12,293
% of seats sold/season				68%	

\* The 15-G indicates a combination of 5-game, 10-game and 15-game plans for your top 15 games. These plans would equal 9,000 seats per game of your top 15 games.

\*\* The "Other" tickets above are group sales in the 15-game packages and groups/walk-up/advance in the remaining 26 games.

In the above scenario, full season tickets represent only 33% of the entire gate. With Full Menu Marketing, the game plans represent 50% of the gate for those 15 games.

By taking your best games and putting them in edible bites for the fans, you were able to sell the *equivalent of 2,927 additional season tickets* (8,000 15-game plans x 15 = 120,000 tickets divided by 41 = 2,927 equivalent season tickets).

*The 2,927 in equivalent full season tickets represents almost a 50% INCREASE in season tickets (equivalent of) in a market that wasn't buying more season tickets!*

Do you think the fans that bought a ticket package had fun when their only experience during the season was going to a sold-out game? You better believe it!

Let's assume that your team had another competitive, yet mediocre season. What is the effect of the various Game Plans?

3. **Full Season tickets increase.** Your season ticket sales *will increase*. After all, *there is nothing like attending a sporting event that is sold out*. Many corporations that purchased a 15-game plan will have had fun at those sellout games. It was *easy* for them to give out their tickets to clients and employees. They will *see the value of a full season*

*ticket* and will want to renew because of the benefits, like better seat locations (Remember? Know your real estate). If just 10% of your Game Plan buyers convert to full season tickets (to get the best seat locations), *you've just gained 900 season ticketholders!* You've gained 900 season ticketholders not by brass-knuckle selling, but by having those fans *want* to upgrade.

4. **Higher percentage of season ticket renewal.** By selling out those 15 games, you've now made your season tickets more valuable.

Fans buy season tickets mainly because they want to see the top games in choice seating locations.

*Fans buy season tickets mainly because they want to see the top games in choice seating locations.*

They don't buy season tickets to see the lesser opponents.

They want to see the big games. They'll tolerate the lesser attractions to see the big games.

When those choice games are sold out, they place even more value on them.

5. **Game Plans increase.** Many of your 5-game and 10-game plan buyers will want to move up to become 15-game buyers or full season ticketholders. After all, they enjoyed themselves at those sold-out games. It's human nature to try and increase the frequency of that enjoyment.

Additionally, fans that were hesitant to purchase these plans are now more likely to step up and buy. After all, they got *shut out* when the Miami Heat and Los Angeles Lakers and Boston Celtics came to town and only scalper tickets could be had.

## **SEATING ZONES CHANGE**

With an increase in full season ticket sales and a higher percentage of renewals, you start *expanding* the seating zones for next year's season tickets.

Remember, ask yourself: *Which areas do I have a reasonable chance of selling out on a season ticket basis?* Because you will be selling more season tickets, that area has to be expanded. Go ahead, expand it.

Would you be treating a Game Plan buyer poorly by relocating their seat location out of the newly expanded Full Season Ticket Zone? I admit that it's delicate, but it isn't unfair.

When you sell a Ticket Package, you will give that fan the same seat for each of his games in the plan. However, unlike season tickets, *you are not guaranteeing that same seat season after season*. The Ticket Package buyers would have to be slightly relocated with the expansion of the full season ticket area. You would, of course, give them first option to stay in the same seat location, but it would require a bigger commitment for tickets. You're now building value into full season tickets with location, location, location.

## **A SMALL STEP WITH GIANT RESULTS**

If you've sold a ton of Game Plans in the first season of Full Menu Marketing, you should seriously consider increasing the number of games in the plan. I'm not asking you to go crazy and try to jump a 5-game buyer to 41 games. A natural and easy extension would be to increase your 5-game ticket package to a 7-game ticket package. This would be increasing the frequency of attendance by a little bit.

All of these games would be your better attractions. No dogs allowed here. If you do increase the 5-game package to a 7-game package I would not raise ticket prices. Remember, you're trying *to sell more tickets*; with more tickets sold higher gate receipts will naturally follow.

You will find that such an increase to a 7-game plan does not have any serious negative effect on renewals. These plans are still your best games and are still affordable by most fans. By increasing the game plans from 5-games to 7-games you have positioned your team to *now sell out 21 games*. These plans, of course, would be your *top 21 games*.

Let's look at the effect at the gate with the 21-game plan and the other Game Plans:

### **21-GAME SELLOUT EFFECT ON ENTIRE SEASON**

<b>Description</b>	<b>ST Sold*</b>	<b>21-G**</b>	<b>Other***</b>	<b>Avg. Att.</b>	<b>Total Att.</b>
Top 21 games	8,000	9,000	1,000	18,000	378,000
Other 20 games	8,000	0	3,000	11,000	220,000
Totals					598,000
Average					14585
% of seats sold/season				81%	

\* Your full season tickets increased to 8,000 because of upgrades and new buyers.

\*\* The 21-G indicates a combination of 7-game, 14-game, and 21-game plans for your top 21 games. These plans would equal 9,000 seats per game in your top 21 games.

\*\*\* The "Other" tickets above are group sales in the 21-game packages and groups/walk-up/advance in the remaining 20 games.

You've now sold 81% of your seats in the arena *concentrating on just your better attractions*. For your poorer attractions, you are still *doing nothing*. No advertising, no promotions. All you and your staff's efforts are directed toward selling out those 21 top games.

By concentrating on those 21 top games, you will be getting very close to the preseason sellout level of 75% you will need to sell out *every game*. Let's look at the number of tickets you've sold before the season started in an 18,000 seat arena for a 41-game season:

**TICKETS SOLD BEFORE THE SECOND SEASON STARTED**

<b>Description</b>	<b>ST Sold</b>	<b>15-G</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Avg. Att.</b>	<b>Total Att.</b>
Top 21 games	8,000	9,000	0	17,000	357,000
Other 20 games	8,000	0	0	8,000	160,000
Totals					517,000
Average					12,610
% of seats sold/season					70%

In the second year of Full Menu Marketing, you would have sold 70% of your seats before the season started! This will give you the springboard to sell out *every game next season*:

When you start selling out 21 games through full season tickets and game plans, *you'll find that attendance will pick up for the 20 other lesser games on your schedule even though you didn't do anything to market those games.*

One of the reasons is that these games are the only games available for the walk-up fan. Also, if you make it easy for them during the season, *over 25% of your game plan buyers will buy tickets to some of those 20 games.*

Once you sell out the building 21 times out of a 41 game home schedule, your next jump is to the full schedule. *This will be the easiest jump.*

**FAMILIAR PATTERN**

When you sell out 21 games because of season tickets and Game Plans, you will probably sell out at least a couple more from the remaining 20 games on your schedule. It's the dynamics of a sold-out building. The more games you sell out, the more people want to come. Even some of the less attractive opponents will start selling out.

As you enter **Year Three** of *Full Menu Marketing*, you've got momentum on your side. Now is the time to sell the building out for every single game. Here are steps for the third year:

1. **Further increase of season tickets:** To maintain the seating location they are in, some of your Game Plan buyers will take that final step to full season tickets. You now could be at the level of 10,000 season tickets.
2. **More Game Plan buyers:** *All the fans will now understand that if they want to see the big-name teams, they will have to buy a Game Plan in advance of the season.*

With the increase in season tickets, your *season ticket zone* expands once again. You still use the same criteria:

*Which areas do I have a reasonable chance of selling out on a season ticket basis?*

However, there is a stopping point.

Let's say your team improved dramatically. That improvement, combined with the development of the package buyers through *Full Menu Marketing*, might put you into the position of selling out your building exclusively on season tickets. STOP!

I would always have a portion of the seats reserved for game plans only. Here's why: When you sell out your building on full season tickets, you will experience lower season ticket renewals in poorer seats locations.

Because your team improved dramatically, the bandwagon effect took place. Let's say you got caught up in all of the excitement and sold out your arena on season tickets. You will find that the "nosebleed" areas will not have a high rate of season ticket renewal. It could easily be less than 40%. The reason why is when they got caught up in the excitement, fans purchased those full season tickets in nosebleed areas. However, when they come to game after game and sit in those areas, they don't enjoy the games as much.

*The quality of the seat location isn't as important to the fan with a 7-game package. Even in the last row in the building they will renew. When it comes to full season tickets, however, the poor seat location will wear on the fan.*

This has happened to several teams that I know. When their teams excited the market, these teams sold out their arenas exclusively on a season ticket basis.

They would experience less than a 40% renewal each year from the poorer seat locations. *No matter*, they thought. *We'll sell those season tickets to new prospects.* For a while they did. And then the teams faltered. Practically the *whole* upper section deserted them as season ticketholders and buyers.

During the 11 seasons that I was with the Portland Trail Blazers, we sold every seat to every game. What made those sellouts weren't the fans in the choice seats between the hoops. *Every* NBA team sold those seats. *What made that string of over 500 consecutive sellouts were the fans up high that purchased game plans.* Their renewal rate was consistently over 95%. And, they were buying the worst seats in the house!

The same reasons that make Full Menu Marketing right for Game Plans when you have a mediocre team still apply when the team is better. Sure, the enthusiasm of the moment may bring a rush of fans to buy full season tickets. But, do you then toss away your Game Plan buyers? No way. The Game Plan buyers have first option to upgrade to better seat locations before the general public can buy.

With a rush for full season tickets, you can now *change the mix of Game Plans*. There is a *major difference* here in constructing the packages. *All home games would be part of the plans, including your lesser attractions.*

Now you could have five 7-game plans and one 6-game plan. No longer are you just marketing your best attractions. You now can package your best attraction with one of your poorer attractions.

Yes, this is a departure. But, because of the 21+ sellout crowds, you are no longer playing in a near-empty barn. Going to the games is fun again! You're not just selling top opponents, *you're selling the experience of cheering on the home team in a sold-out arena.*

Like before, one or more of these packages will sell out long before the other plans. You may have guessed wrong in trying to make each package of equal value. Finally, *the remaining package becomes the best one because it is the only one available.*

## **IS THERE MAGIC IN THE NUMBER 5 OR 7?**

Do all the packages have to be divisible by five or seven? Absolutely not. I used these packages to illustrate a point. Many teams offer a ticket package that they think is catchy: the six pack. I prefer a 5-game or a 7-game over the six pack because of the *Power of Odd Numbers*. I was taught this years ago by an ad guru. He pointed out how most ads have an odd number of the product in the ad. He said there's a balance and symmetry and a lot of other stuff I didn't understand. When I started to create game plans, I found out that the 5-game and 7-game plans would outdraw a 6-game plan. A 9-game and 11-game plan would outdraw a 10-game plan. So, when considering the size of a game plan, I've just naturally gravitated to an odd number. The *Power of Odd Numbers*.

## **FULL MENU MARKETING**

Full Menu Marketing is fan oriented. It's buyer oriented. Because it is, *you benefit by it*. You haven't tried to ram full season tickets down somebody's throat.

You haven't threatened the business community that unless they buy more full season tickets the team might move.

You haven't threatened local leaders that it's their obligation to make this sports team successful. If it's not successful, you haven't threatened there would be a negative ripple effect on the community's image.

You haven't threatened the politicians about anything.

*What you've done is sell tickets to fans in the amount and number that they can afford and which meets their interest levels.*

You've sold those tickets in advance.

What you've done is sell every ticket to every game all season long.

## **RULES OF THUMB**

Here are several Rules of Thumb for using Full Menu Marketing:

1. **Season ticket zones.** Establish seating areas where you feel you have a reasonable chance of selling out as full season tickets. No Game Plans or game-by-game tickets can be sold in these areas. This is like an exclusive club: *SEASON TICKETHOLDERS ONLY*. You cannot deviate from this!
2. **Create Game Plans.** These are your best attractions whether it is opponents or nights of the week. Create several game plans where each plan *seems* to be the best plan. Start with a small ticket package. It's better to err on making it smaller than making it too big.

3. **Expand full season ticket zones next season.** Because a portion of your Game Plan buyers will want to expand into full season tickets, get ready to expand the season ticket zones the next season. You're establishing exclusivity by territory: the best seats in the house go to full season ticketholders.
4. **Slightly increase a 5-game package to a 7-game package.** You won't hurt your renewal rate. By increasing the number of games, you will naturally increase your package buyers frequency of attending games. One word of warning. If you increase the number of games, don't increase the price of the ticket. Remember, these buyers think about the total amount they are spending, not necessarily the price per ticket. If you increase the number of games, you already are increasing their total investment.
5. **Buy some champagne.** In your third season of Full Menu Marketing, you'll be selling out every seat to every game. Go ahead, break out the champagne and celebrate. You've earned it.

## **A SIMPLE TEST YOU CAN TAKE**

1. (*Multiple choice.*) What happens the season after the season you fully use Full Menu Marketing?
  - a. Season tickets increase.
  - b. A high percentage of season tickets renew.
  - c. Game Plan sales increase.
  - d. All of the above.
  
2. (*True or False.*) When you use Full Menu Marketing, your season ticket zone will increase in size the next season.
  
3. (*Multiple choice.*) When you use Full Menu Marketing, you:
  - a. Haven't tried to ram season tickets down anybody's throat.
  - b. You haven't threatened the business community.
  - c. You haven't threatened the politicians about anything.
  - d. All of the above.
  - e. a and c, but not b.

## **ANSWERS**

1. d. All of the above.
2. True.
3. d. All of the above.

If you miss any of these, take six giant steps backward to the beginning of the book. Full Menu Marketing is essential to selling out games. Start re-reading now.