

AN INVESTIGATION OF E-CRM APPLICATION IN THE SPORT SECTOR: EVIDENCE FROM THE BASKETBALL CLUBS

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Abstract keywords

e-CRM, sport sector, basketball clubs, internet, web

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

In recent times Professional basketball clubs which have become not only increasingly commercial but also modern business units that interested to satisfy their customers extended needs utilize the Internet as a marketing medium through which clubs can communicate with their supporters, establish relationships with them and sell products and services. Furthermore, web-based CRM uses the internet to integrate and simplify the customer business processes and reduce costs of the customer facing operations.

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of how the Internet is used as a strategic tool in e-CRM in the sport sector, and particularly in the top European basketball clubs that participate in Euroleague basketball 2012-2013. Two primary research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How can the online environment be described?
2. How are the customers/consumers served in this online environment?

The first research question provides an overview of the online environment and the second research question describes the services offered in this online environment.

Theoretical background or literature review*

Internet technology plays an important role in many businesses nowadays. With the emergence of the Internet and continued advances in technology, today many organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of managing customer relations on the internet. An important internet-related technology is the electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) which encompasses all the processes needed to acquire, build and maintain customer relationship through e-business operations (Khalifa & Shen 2005). Empirical research on electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) has been conducted within the sport sector, and more particular in football clubs (Kriemadis, Kotsovos & Kartakoullis, 2009; Argan et al., 2012; Terzoudis, Kriemadis, & Papaioannou 2007). However, research regarding electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) in the basketball clubs is still limited.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A qualitative method was used for the purpose of this study, combining two data collection methods, web sites observation and documentation. Primary data collected through an observation checklist (consisted of 48-items & 11-sub-scales) in which the observers concentrated their records and secondary data through documents from different published sources to verify the collected data. We addressed the research to all 24 top European basketball clubs that participate in Euroleague basketball 2012-2013. Conclusions were drawn based on the similarities and differences, which were found according to the observation checklist adapted from the literature (Khan & Shahzad, 2005).

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

Page-loading speed was fast, with simple design, but only one of them provided "text only" choice. Furthermore, 62.5% of the web sites used a satisfactory security level and all of them protect their copyrights. Regarding to business content the particular websites were clear with concise text, describing company business and services. They also had simple background, providing free services and simple registration forms. However, many of the web sites (40%) did not provide a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, and most of them had not contact information on each page (75%).

In relation to navigation efficiency, most of the web sites did not provide a site map (67%), while almost 42% of them did not have an effective search engine. Moreover, the majority of the web sites were customer oriented, but they did not use an auto responder to give feedback to the customers' email. Furthermore, the one third of the web sites did not give the English choice or write the web site in English.

The majority of the websites had a number of ordering methods and payment options to facilitate their customers in buying their services, but the option for the customers to buy now and pay later was not available. In accordance with shipping information, sales, tax and surcharges information were available on the majority of the websites. Regarding return policy, almost 71% of the websites did not provide money back guarantee, convenient returning information and return methods. Moreover, regarding interactive services the majority of the websites integrate social media, but a large number of them did not provide a toll-free number and interactive chat function. In addition, only 58% of the websites provide shopping help site. Eventually, in relation to web policy, most of the websites provided privacy and security policy, as well as information about the club such us: facilities, statistical services, historical data of club's performance, historical information about the club, past events of the club, club news, players' profile and match reports for the current year.

However, the e-CRM in the sports sector needs further consideration by collecting data through interviews with CRM managers and sports customers. Furthermore, future research can extend this study under different conditions. Every country

has multiple variables that affecting the strategy of the sports clubs and the needs and perspectives of customers are changing over time.

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