

HOW CAN A COMMUNITY SPORT EVENT IMPROVE ATTENDEE SATISFACTION WHEN PARTICIPANTS ARE ALREADY SATISFIED?

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Abstract

The process of continuous improvement is an issue faced by every community sport management practitioner. Consumers and interested third parties (e.g. business organizations and local political leadership) justifiably place an emphasis on sustained value creation and the efficient use of community resources. This is important because successful non-mega sporting events depend almost entirely on local community support. People prefer superior products and will substitute other forms of recreation and entertainment when they believe there are better alternatives.

The form of community support ranges from donations of time and money to the use of space and/or equipment. Why should a community commit resources to an event that might not otherwise be viable? Many arguments are frequently made but among the most common is the potential for beneficial economic impact. Proponents typically rely on economic input-output analysis to make their case. Traditional economic input-output analysis, however, is inappropriate in circumstances where there is little infrastructure or associated employee expense (Rueda-Cantuche & Ramirez-Hurtado 2007).

This is especially true when event participants are from the local area. As a consequence, event organizers must often make a compelling case for community support on some basis other than economic benefit. For example, individuals within a community might value a sport activity as a means to develop and/or maintain personal relationships. A sporting event could help individuals support family and friends, experience a feeling of camaraderie, or participate in a festive community building atmosphere (Kurpis, Bozman and Kahle 2010).

Our study reports on one such sporting event's effort to enhance the overall experience of people in the community. The Lilac Bloomsday Run is an annual spring ritual that is held the first Sunday in May. Runners who finish the race receive a t-shirt and are listed in a souvenir booklet distributed as an insert in the regional paper immediately following the race. The race is sponsored by a nonprofit corporation with few employees, uses a course laid out on public streets for one morning a year, and has participants that are primarily from the local area. We assume these individuals would simply substitute their recreation expenditures for other activities in the absence of the event. The fact remains, however, many residents of the community feel the city is a much better place to live because of the Bloomsday.

Bloomsday enlisted two market research classes from a local university to develop information that led to modified pricing and services for the road race as well as the selection of a long term registration site. The two surveys provided Bloomsday management with information about how consumers perceived and valued the nonprofit organization's product. Satisfaction surveys were administered to people upon the conclusion of two races to assess participant and spectator perceptions. The predictive validity of the findings has practical implications for other sport managers interested in developing or improving events.

Understanding consumer preferences can help managers design sporting events that achieve specific objectives. The first survey resulted in the implementation of an individual radio chip timing device and fee increase. Participation data the following year indicates the proportion of people willing to pay the fee increase corresponds with the estimated proportion of participants by age and gender. The second survey resulted in an endorsement of the race and event registration site adjacent to a large downtown park. The number of race participants increased significantly to 55,000 runners during the next three years.

By understanding participant and spectator motivations, expressed or revealed, sport event organizers can create athletic events that better suit the needs of all constituents in a community (including economic benefits). As an illustration, sports marketers might more effectively communicate with potential spectators from outside of the community by focusing on a themed event and related entertainment. Using satisfaction surveys to make preference distinctions among sporting event attendees is one way sport marketers and managers can better serve the needs of the community through designing superior events and creating more effective promotions (Rohm, Milne, & McDonald 2006).

References

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