

Cheer for the Home Team ... to go Green! An Exploratory Examination of Fans' and Facility Executives' Attitudes toward Environmentally Friendly Sports and Entertainment Venues

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Keywords: Sports and Society, Recycling, "Going Green"

Abstract

Introduction

With hybrid cars, wind power and all kinds of products made from recycled materials, "green" is here to stay. Today's firms have learned that being a good corporate citizen by being environmentally friendly is imperative to compete in the global marketplace. Recently a number of sports and entertainment firms have realized the importance of creating and operating green venues. Last year, the United States Environmental Protection Agency awarded the city of Chicago a grant to study how to implement recycling at U.S. Cellular Field [1]. Similarly, worldwide concessionaire and services firm, Aramark, is challenging its client properties to compete in RecycleMania 2008, which pits college campuses against each other to see who can recycle the most [2]. Furthermore, the 2008 Beijing Olympics is being billed as the "Green Olympics in order to demonstrate China's commitment to clean, renewable energy and a green [world]" [3]. Thus, the aim of this research is to measure how important "going green" is to sports and entertainment executives. To what extent do these executives believe in being environmentally conscious? More importantly, how much do they practice being "green." As far as the fans, do they care if their favorite venues recycle waste, use recycled products, etc.? Are they willing to help out (e.g., by paying more)? These are the critical issues that will be explored in this unique research study.

Theoretical Background

A number of academic researchers have recently begun to explore the impact of "green" marketing. For instance, D'Souza, Taghian and Khosla (2007) found that different clusters of customers had different strengths of intent to purchase green products [4]. Similar to that study, Hartmann and Ibanez (2006) discovered that those consumers who buy "green" products have a real emotional attachment to these products [5]. However, D'Souza, Taghian, Lamb and Peretiatkos (2006) concluded that consumers want to buy "green" products, but not at the expense of quality [6]. Thus, firms must look at the long-term benefits of being a good corporate citizen. According to Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller and Meza (2006), firms that use societal marketing can create a differential advantage and brand loyalty over the competitors [7].

Methodology

Sample:

This research is being sponsored in part by the International Association of Assembly Managers (www.iaam.org), the world's leading trade organization for stadiums, arenas, amphitheaters, performing arts centers, convention centers and complexes. In doing so, the IAAM is providing access to their one thousand member facilities worldwide. With regard to the fans surveyed, a convenience sample of two thousand fans located in a large city in the southwest United States will be used. Only those individuals who visit a sports venue at least twice a year will be included in the final sample. Respondents will be incentivised via a prize drawing.

Instrument:

Both the sports facility executive and fan samples will receive a survey via email. Each group will be asked, "How important is it for a sports facility to be environmentally friendly or "green?" In addition, the importance of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, Green Audits, using green products/vendors, sustainable energy and recycling waste will be explored.

For the facility executive sample, additional questions will assess the facility type (i.e., arena, stadium, etc.), facility age and seating capacity of each venue. For the fan sample, demographics such as age, gender and household income will be measured. In addition, fans will be asked how much more they are willing to pay (e.g., per ticket, per concession item, etc.) to "make their local sports venue more 'green' than its current situation."

Implications

"Going Green" has become a popular phrase the last few years. Almost every firm claims to care about the environment. Similarly, few customers would indicate that they do not believe in being "green." Yet, are the public places where thousands of citizens assemble each week to watch their favorite team following suit, Are they truly "green?" While "green" issues have been studied in a number of academic environments and outlets, few, if any, researchers have addressed the "greenness" of sports venues. Therefore, we believe that this research will be instrumental in developing dialogue and future research amongst sports and entertainment practitioners and academics worldwide.

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