

Customer Relationship Management In Finnish Elite Ice Hockey Clubs

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Aim

Professional sports organizations operate in a fragmented market environment where customers' preferences, needs and wants change very rapidly and unexpectedly. The importance of reliable customer data and data management as success factors in business are widely acknowledged. In Finland, elite ice hockey clubs organize the most popular spectator sports entertainment and are thereby supposedly the forerunners in adapting modern customer management strategies and practices. In B-to-C context in general, customer analytics and data based customer relationship management have been utilized for years but sport organizations in Finland are not known to manage their business with systematically collected customer data. The aim of this study was to examine the current state of customer relation management in Finnish elite ice hockey league organizations and reflect their ability to utilize CRM and business intelligence solutions in decision-making processes.

Theoretical background

Theoretical background of the study consisted of customer relationship management methodologies applied in sports. According to Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2006), the conceptual model for CRM in the football sector takes into account the special nature of football as a form of sport business. This framework describes the consumer as *fan* and the segmentation aims to optimize fan profitability and supporter loyalty. The developed concept and implemented framework named 'fan relationship management' (FRM) learns from the successes and failures of more conventional customer relationship management (CRM) but considers the special nature of football.

The other framework referred recognizes the importance of Customer Relationship Management as business philosophy. According to Mumcu (2017), the most successful sport organizations fully understand the benefits of CRM and apply it effectively. Here the strategic planning and operative customer management benefit one another through the management of valid and up-to-date data. In order to succeed, the data processes should be a natural part of the organization and the data should be used to benefit both the organization and customers. The Business Intelligence, in the present data collecting and Big Data analysis is the tool of the future for interactive, data based decision-making (Preimesberger, 2014).

As business intelligence is referred as a tool for effective data management and strategic planning, the concept of Sport Business Intelligence is referred as one part of the framework of this study. Sport Business Intelligence is defined as continuous development of sport events and organizations using advanced and sophisticated data collection and analysis. (Rasku, Puronaho & Turco, 2015)

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The aim and purpose of the research was introduced to the club managers on November 2016, and the data was collected between November 2016 and January 2017. The respondents of the research were representatives of the fifteen elite ice hockey clubs playing in the Finnish top league. A quantitative survey questionnaire was sent to the marketing managers of all the clubs and all respondents were able to invite two other persons in their organization to fill in the questionnaire. Data was collected and analyzed with Webropol online survey and analysis software.

In total 18 respondents returned the survey and 15 were accepted for analysis. All 15 different teams were represented in the sample and the study can be considered representative as the results can be generalized to the population studied. The results give a comprehensive view of the situation in Finnish elite ice hockey organizations.

Results, implications and discussion

Primary results of this study indicate that most of the Finnish elite ice hockey organizations are fully aware of the specific features of sport event industry and recognize the concept of customer relationship management as an important asset for their business management. However, currently only very few of the organizations have an ability to operate with customer focused business philosophy or even applying a fan centric strategy. Results show that more than half of the respondents identify a systematic customer relationship management system applied but less respondents state that the organizations are able to collect,

analyze and utilize customer data on their own. The basic requirements and readiness, e.g. in the form of existing software or databases, for customer-centric decision-making process appear to exist, but the ability to fully utilize this potential in fan-centric customer relationship management is still mostly undefined. More detailed analysis of the results will be available upon the presentation of this study.

References

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