

## IN THIS ISSUE

- Table of Contents
- This Week's News
- Media
- Labor & Agents
- Facilities
- From The Field Of
- SBJ In-Depth
- Opinion
- Readers deserve better
- Explaining digital tiers
- This Week's Cartoon
- Many can benefit from Citi Field deal
- Coast to Coast
- Careers/People
- Faces & Places
- What I Like

## Opinion

### Put yourself in the fan's seat – line and parking lot, too

Published May 09, 2005 : Page 25

Print This Story



**BILL SUTTON**

One of the most common complaints I hear from fans attending sporting events is that sports executives are out of touch with their clientele.

Sure, the ticket-plan holders receive surveys, and anyone can go to the guest-relations booth if he has a problem. But do the organizations really understand the fan experience, including everything that happens driveway-to-driveway?

This open letter to CMOs offers a step-by-step plan for gaining a better appreciation for the fan experience.

Dear Chief Marketing Officer:

As fans are our most important assets (and research has shown that the cost of finding a new fan compared with retaining one can be as high as 15:1), I offer a blueprint for understanding the fan experience. The hope is that you will have a better perspective when decisions are made that affect those fans.

■ Step 1: About three hours before game time, leave your office (and leave behind the suit, tie and the credentials and passes that let you escape the complexities of the fan experience) and drive to one of the ZIP codes that your research has identified as the home of a significant number of your team's fans.

Once you have reached this destination, drive back to the ballpark/stadium/arena. This should provide you with a firsthand familiarity with traffic flow and travel time to the game site.

■ Step 2: At the venue, park in one of the site's lots. It will be a longer walk from car to gate than you are accustomed to, but you will be able to appreciate the practice of dodging cars and avoiding panhandlers and hucksters.

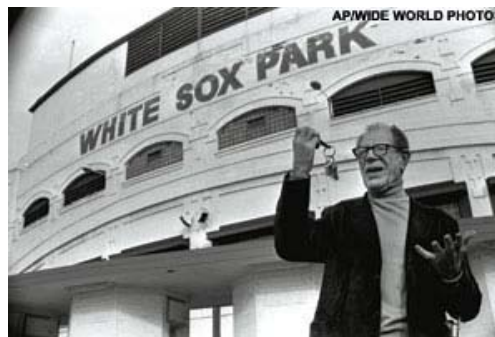
Sample some semi-official team merchandise or food from a sidewalk vendor and compare its price and value with what awaits the fan within.

■ Step 3: Walk up to the ticket window and purchase a ticket. (Note: This portion of the experience can be varied by leaving tickets at will call and waiting in that line.) Ask the ticket seller for the best available location for the best value. Are there readable color-coded seating charts for the fan to consider before he approaches the window?

Feel free to buy a ticket in the upper bowl, upper deck or the bleachers (but don't be shocked to see alcohol that somehow found its way into the venue). Pay with a credit card to lengthen your experience at the window. Enjoy the view from above and hope that (a) you can see the scoreboard and (b) the scoreboard doesn't obstruct your view.

■ Step 4: Visit the concession stands. Wait in line to make your purchases, but be observant.

Do you offer smaller-sized portions for children or a children's menu? Do you have a Family Meal deal? Do you offer vegetarian, low-calorie or low-carb options? If the answer to these questions is no, ask yourself if you are truly trying to be inclusive so that fans of any age or dietary consideration



Sports entrepreneur **Bill** Veeck understood that having fun was the key to the fan experience.



*"There's a largely untapped online marketplace for guys like us, and thanks to BAT, I'm part of it."*

**Brooks Robinson**  
Baseball Hall of Fame member



**Resource Guide to Fact Book 2009**

Order your 2009 Edition now!

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

feel welcome and would consider coming back.

■ Step 5: Scavenger hunt. In this order, find the following:

- An usher to evict the person sitting in your seat without a ticket.
- A cash machine you can access and complete a transaction within 20 minutes.
- A clean rest room with toilet paper after one hour of the sporting event has been completed.
- A condiment area that has not been compromised by having condiments merged.
- A ladies' rest room without a line long enough for a lady to consider using the men's room.
- A men's room that doesn't require waders after the seventh-inning stretch.

■ Step 6: Observe a group of children between the ages of 8 and 12. After about 15 minutes, you may conclude that while they are enjoying themselves, their fun may or may not have anything to do with the game being played by the professional athletes.

Children of all ages are looking for some way to interact with the game experience. Their video games provide a forum for interaction; so, too, must your venue. Interactive games play areas, exhibits and postgame opportunities to shoot free throws or run the bases are essential if you want to create memorable experiences and repeat business.

■ Step 7: Visit the souvenir stand for a tangible memory of your visit. The site's inventory should reflect an all-inclusive approach, something for every budget in a good variety of colors and sizes with an eye to today's fashion.

Give fans a catalog with every purchase or an offer sheet with a special discount code when they visit the team cyber store.

■ Step 8: Exit the venue immediately after the game so you can experience the joys of maneuvering out of your parking space and merging with at least three other would-be lanes of traffic.

You may drive directly home, but you do need to answer one question: How much longer did it take to drive home than your normal experience?

**Bill** Veeck was the sports entrepreneur who best understood the fan's point of view and the importance of making the fan experience as pleasurable and worry-free as possible. Cleanliness, comfort and courtesy were his trademarks, and his implementations included free rain slickers, day-care centers in the stadium, picnic areas and fireworks.

Why? Veeck understood that the experience was more than the game. He realized that his livelihood depended upon satisfied customers (not all of whom were necessarily baseball fans) coming back and bringing new fans with them.

Did I mention that he set attendance records in every market where he operated a team?

■ Step 9: Read "Veeck As in Wreck" and improve your fan experience and your bottom line.

**Bill Sutton** ([wsutton@bus.ucf.edu](mailto:wsutton@bus.ucf.edu)) is a professor at the DeVos Sports Business program at the University of Central Florida.

#### Reader Comments

Do you have a comment on this story?

Name

Company

