

Unit 10

Fan Experience

OVERVIEW

Unit ten discusses the importance of game operations and game entertainment. The fundamental concept of game operations and entertainment is the way “breaks” in an event or game (half-time, time-outs, etc.) are perceived by sports marketers as “opportunities”. The game operations process begins before any of the games are played when sports marketers identify the additional entertainment that will be added to the event to keep the audience involved and entertained.

KEY TERMS

Fan Experience

Game Attractiveness

Game Operations

OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the concept of fan experience
2. Define the term game operations
3. Identify five elements of game entertainment
4. Explain what is meant by “game attractiveness” and how it influences attendance
5. Explain why game operations are important to a sports organization
6. Describe the relationship between game operations and other functions of the organization

LESSONS

LESSON 10.1 [Fan Experience](#)

LESSON 10.2 [Game Operations](#)

LESSON 10.3 [Role of Game Operations in Sports Marketing](#)

Fan Experience

FAN EXPERIENCE

Fan experience, as it relates to live events, refers to the overall impression made on the sports or entertainment consumer. It can determine whether the spectator or fan has a positive or negative experience at the game or event. Those positive or negative associations with the game or event ultimately determine whether the spectator (fan) will become a repeat customer.

How important is fan experience?

If fans are uncomfortable, feel unsafe, have to wait in long lines to get in the venue or for bathrooms, or dislike the food and beverage options at the event, they will be less likely to attend again. This adversely impacts an organization's bottom line, from ticket sales to sponsorship. As a result, it is incumbent upon the organization to create and maintain the best possible experience for fans.

According to sporttechie.com, the Golden State Warriors were more focused on fan experience than dazzling new technologies when designing their new arena (the Golden 1 Center), despite being called the "most technologically advanced and sustainable arena in the world." Said team President and COO, Rick Welts, *"We're trying to focus 100 percent on the fan experience where technology enables that, great. The mission is to provide the best fan experience that's ever been provided before. We want technology to be additive, but it's not the be-all, end-all by any means."*

When does the fan experience begin?

The fan experience begins the moment when a consumer begins thinking about purchasing a ticket to a game or event while the game or event day experience begins as the consumer travels to and arrives at the event.

- If a fan has a difficult time navigating a website trying to purchase tickets to a game or event, the experience has already started on a sour note.
- A negative experience finding parking, paying for parking or dealing with an unfriendly parking lot attendant can sour the consumer on the entire experience, even before setting foot in the stadium or arena

Realizing this, MLB's Atlanta Braves implemented several measures to help alleviate fan frustrations over simply getting to the stadium.¹

- Based on a comprehensive traffic study, the team pushed back the starting time of their 7pm games to 7:30pm, when most of the area traffic has cleared.
- The Braves also increased the number of stadium entry points to 14 (vs the previous 2), built 360-degree parking around the ballpark, added three pedestrian bridges and more overall parking spaces, a bike valet and new ridesharing pick-up and drop-off locations.
- Braves President of Development Mike Plant told the [Atlanta Business Chronicle](http://atlantabusinesschronicle.com): "We recognize that traffic in the Atlanta area is an issue, and certainly has been a key frustration before and after ball games. The combination of tremendous infrastructure improvements, 360-degree access to the ballpark, pre-and post-game activities, and our new start time will make travel to and from SunTrust Park a better experience for our fans."

"We're trying to focus 100 percent on the fan experience where technology enables that, great. The mission is to provide the best fan experience that's ever been provided before. We want technology to be additive, but it's not the be-all, end-all by any means."

**- GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS
PRESIDENT AND COO, RICK
WELTS**

¹ http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2016/08/03/braves-reveal-delayed-game-times-to-ease-traffic.html?ana=RSS%26s=article_search

Factors Influencing the Fan Experience

- Traffic & Parking
- Fan safety
- Food and beverage
- Prices
- Atmosphere
- Comfortability
- Technology

Traffic & Parking

High levels of traffic congestion arriving or leaving the venue could negate an otherwise entirely positive experience at the event, impacting whether the consumer would choose to attend again.

- At an inaugural NASCAR event in Kentucky, traffic began backing up on the only main road into the track nine hours before the start of the race, and by late afternoon there were reportedly backups of as many as 10 miles in either direction. After 100 laps, cars still were exiting the interstate when traffic patterns were reversed. It was estimated that at least 15,000 fans didn't reach the event.²
- To improve the game day experience for fans, the Atlanta Braves bumped back weekday start times to 7:30, dispersed parking options and encouraged more fans to buy tickets and parking in advance.
 - The team also received investments from the city of Atlanta to improve roads, pedestrian bridges and shuttle services.³
- According to a survey published in the Sports Business Journal (conducted by Turnkey Sports), the top three biggest fan complaints about parking at sporting events included:⁴
 - Time required to exit after the event (50%)
 - Cost (31%)
 - Lack of available parking near the stadium/venue (9%)
- To proactively manage their traffic situation, the Brooklyn Nets worked with a traffic engineering expert to identify potential solutions for minimizing congestion on days when the newly minted Barclays Center would be hosting events.
 - The solution was to discourage driving entirely, by cutting the number of parking spaces at the Barclays Center in half.⁵
- The Miami Dolphins partnered with Uber to help ease game day congestion by offering fans a dedicated drop off and pick up spot in the team's parking lot, a private tailgate section (complete with game day supplies), and the ability to book a ride from the team's app.
- According to the [Sports Business Journal](#), executives at Madison Square Garden prioritize the efficiency of getting fans in and out of the building. To help ease congestion, they opened additional entrances on the backside of the arena last season.
- Prior to the pandemic, the New England Patriots announced a solution for helping to ease some of the traffic pressure that has been a common complaint of Patriots fans leaving games at Gillette Stadium.
 - The team [announced](#) the stadium will now feature a "delayed exit lot" that allows fans to park for free. However, vehicles parked in that area will not be allowed to leave until 75 minutes after the game ends.
 - However, traffic to Gillette Stadium for concerts continues to be a problem, with Garth Brooks even delaying a show in 2022 until traffic cleared.
 - Click [here](#) to read "Sold out concerts at Gillette Stadium come with traffic congestion that's hard to beat," at [thesunchronicle.com](#).
- According to [Geek Wire](#), the expansion NHL Seattle Kraken will be investing up to \$7 million in the city's monorail system with a plan to offer free transit rides to ticket holders on game days.



² http://www.usatoday.com/sports/motor/nascar/2011-07-11-kentucky-speedway-traffic_n.htm

³ www.mylajc.com/news/local/commuters...braves.../TOWgGWCPeR1YYrTpTKicBN/

⁴ <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2010/10/20101011/SBJ-In-Depth/Park-It.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/23/nyregion/barclays-center-traffic-plan-cuts-parking-spots.html>

Fan Safety

One of the biggest challenges facing sports and entertainment business professionals when fans are allowed back in stadiums, ballparks and arenas is how to safely keep fans moving and spaced apart given the health concerns associated with the pandemic, beginning with the parking and tailgating experience.

With so much competition for the entertainment dollar, much pressure is on a sports or entertainment organization to create a positive fan experience.

Food and Beverage

Fans today are not satisfied with the hot dogs, peanuts and soda options of the past. The fan experience now includes partnerships with local restaurants and creative twists on old menu classics, offering a wide variety of culinary options on event or game day.

Pricing

The cost of attending an event or game factors significantly in the overall experience. The higher the price point, the more important it becomes to make sure every other aspect of the fan experience is on point.

Atmosphere

Is the stadium loud? Are fans energetic and engaged? Is the environment unfit for a family to attend the game? Atmosphere plays a critical role in the overall fan experience.

Comfort

If the concourse is too narrow so fans feel crowded, the fan experience becomes uncomfortable. The same can be said for lines at the concession stands and bathrooms, and the comfort of the seats. Is there plenty of legroom? Will fans feel cramped in the stadium? When fans spend money to attend an event or game, they expect to be comfortable.

Sports and entertainment business professionals recognize the importance of creating a comfortable atmosphere at events, and take measures to improve venues and facilities to enhance the level of comfort. For example, the University of Tennessee is investing a combined \$433 million to upgrade both its football and baseball stadiums. [According to the University](#), the renovations will include “necessary upgrades to the south side and perimeter of the stadium, including the widening of concourses, construction of expanded gates and entryways and additional restrooms and concessions areas.” It also claimed these components would “dramatically improve fan comfort and safety, reduce wait times and allow for more food and beverage offerings.”

The University of Florida is also investing in upgrades to their football stadium. The [project](#) will feature upgrades to the concourse, entry gates, seating, concessions, and restrooms to improve every aspect of the fan experience. Athletic Director Scott Stricklin told the [Associated Press](#) “It has to be everything from how fans experience when they’re outside the stadium, when they walk through the gate, concourse, concession, restrooms, inside the seating bowl, new premium options, better premium options. But you also want to keep what’s special about it.”

Technology

Things like slow WiFi speeds, dropped calls and poor mobile phone service all detract from the overall fan experience. Alternatively, enhanced technology can vastly improve the fan experience. The newest attraction in the city of Las Vegas, the \$2.2 billion entertainment venue known as the Sphere, has been billed as a first-of-its-kind technological marvel.

- The Sphere boasts [170,000 “ultra-direction”](#) speakers that use wave field synthesis to provide high-end sound to concertgoers, so every fan hears the same quality sound no matter where they are sitting.
- According to [CNN](#), the venue also is equipped with haptic seats that can vibrate to match whatever is happening onscreen – an earthquake, for example – and 4D machines that can create wind, temperature and even scent effects.
- The venue even partnered with NASA so the space agency could test the Sphere’s camera technology.

How do organizations manage, control and enhance the fan experience?

Given the importance of providing the best possible experience on game or event days, organizations must be proactive in effectively managing every aspect of the game day experience. How do they accomplish this?

- **Technology**
- **Proactively controlling environment**
- **Communicating expectations for fan behavior**

Technology

Technology provides a variety of tools that help an organization to create and maintain a positive experience for fans.

- Communication
- Apps
- Biometric technology
- Transportation
- Contactless experiences
- Stadium amenities
- Interactive experiences
- In-seat technologies
- Ticketing technologies
- Fan health and safety

Apps

Apps can help fans get the most out of the fan experience.

- When Las Vegas Motor Speedway did research on the fan experience, parking came back as an area that needed improvement. As a result, LVMS worked with a technology company to create a “fan guide” app that takes consumers into the track and to their seats through information delivered to a smartphone.
 - At a speedway as large as Las Vegas, which seats 140,000 fans, parking in the wrong lot or entering through the wrong gate can lead to long delays entering the stadium and finding seats so the app helps prevent confusion by providing the easiest route to a parking space and to the fan’s seat.⁶
- When it opened its doors to a brand-new football stadium, Baylor University introduced an In-Game App, making it the first college athletics application to provide instant replays from multiple views to fans, right at their seats, at McLane Stadium.⁷
- The New York Red Bulls [integrated](#) Lyft (one of the team’s corporate partners) service into the team’s new mobile app and integrated maps to help fans driving get to Red Bull Arena more efficiently.
 - The app has a regular mode and an “arena mode”, each mode featuring exclusive content, based on where the fan is using their mobile device.

When the Golden State Warriors launched a new app, it featured technology that allows fans to purchase merchandise onsite and have it delivered to their seats or making it available at the team store for pickup after the game. Fans can also choose to have their orders shipped.

Communication

When it comes to security related issues and combating unruly fans, many teams and organizations offer “text” lines in which fans could report obnoxious behavior by sending a text message to team security.

- At the average NFL game, about 3 people are arrested and 25 more are ejected.⁸
 - Every NFL team now offers some form of a text or cell phone hotline to report disruptive fan behavior.
- At most major NCAA college football games, fans can use their mobile devices to send a text message to security with a description of their problem and their location. From there, officials can respond and use security cameras to zoom in on the section in question.⁹

⁶ <http://www.nascar.com/2010/news/business/07/20/lvms.smartphone.app/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/081814aab.html>

⁸ <http://cqresearcherblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/should-nfl-do-more-to-control-crowd.html>

⁹ <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/otl/news/story?id=460317>

Biometric Technology

- Safeco Field and CenturyLink Field in Seattle have [introduced](#) a biometric security system in which fans use their fingerprints to validate their age and purchase alcohol to help monitor purchases and (potentially) manage consumption.
- Organizers of the Tokyo Olympic Games [announced](#) that facial recognition technology would be used at the 2020 Summer Games to help with overall security and the safety of staff, volunteers and athletes braving hot and humid conditions at Olympic venues.
- Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta has experimented with technology that would allow fans to use facial recognition as their ticket, eliminating the need to scan a ticket or tap a phone for event entry.
- Some industry professionals believe facial recognition technology could eventually help sports leagues and its affiliated teams to enforce stadium bans on fans who are no longer allowed to come to games as the result of unruly behavior.
- By 2023, biometric technology has been adopted by a wide variety of sports and entertainment teams, leagues and events; seen less as a novelty and more as the future of the fan experience. A report in [Sports Business Journal](#) recapped some of the ways the technology is being deployed, including:
 - Facial ticketing - Several teams have implemented facial ticketing opportunities, including the MLB's New York Mets, the NFL's Cleveland Browns and Atlanta Falcons, and the Columbus Crew in MLS. Fans who upload a selfie and government-issued ID to their team's mobile app are able to enter the stadium or arena without showing a ticket, significantly reducing the time spent waiting in long lines upon arrival. The technology may also be soon used for parking.
 - Facial payments - More and more venues and events are beginning to offer ways for fans to pay for food and beverages, and the technology will likely soon include merchandise sales.
 - Stadium security - Teams and leagues can use facial recognition surveillance systems to identify fans engaging in unruly behavior and/or fans who have been banned from venues.

Transportation

- Entrepreneur Elon Musk proposed plans to build a high-speed, zero-emissions, underground public transportation system to take fans in Los Angeles to Dodgers stadium from East Hollywood to drastically reduce commute times.
 - Click [here](#) for more on the idea from USA Today.
- France has begun testing "[flying taxis](#)" in preparation for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris to help ease traffic congestion around the city and its venues.

Contactless Experiences

- According to a report from [The Athletic](#), Mercedes-Benz Stadium, home to the Atlanta Falcons and Atlanta United, Tropicana Field (home to the Tampa Bay Rays) and Tottenham FC's new London mega-stadium all went cashless in 2019.
 - The Super Bowl and Wimbledon are already reportedly making plans to go "cashless", a trend likely to gain traction with venues around the world.
- In 2023, Cincinnati's TQL Stadium, home of the MLS club FC Cincinnati, is the first pro stadium in Ohio to offer a food and beverage store using Amazon's Just Walk Out technology, according to [Axios](#). The technology allows customers to enter a special store at the stadium offering things like pizza and soda and walk out with the items without ever interacting with a cashier.

Stadium Amenities

Stadium amenities are designed to improve the overall fan experience.

- Many sports teams have installed High-Definition jumbo screens at stadiums for the best possible viewing of replays and to allow fans in the upper level seating areas to get closer to the action.
 - AT&T stadium, which plays host to the NFL's Dallas Cowboys and an array of other events, boasts one of the most impressive jumbotrons in the world. The two sideline displays measure 160 feet wide and 72 feet tall, measuring from one 20-yard to the other 20-yard line.
 - It would take almost 5,000 52" flat panel TVs to equal the size, it contains 30 million light bulbs, weighs 1.2 million pounds and costs roughly \$40 million.
 - Click [here](#) for other fun stats on the world's largest 1080p video board.

- Sports Business Journal [reports](#) that the Colorado Rockies, in celebration of the team's 25th season as a MLB franchise, installed a new scoreboard that was shaped like a mountain range, 258 percent larger than the previous board and paired with a new sound system.
- Venue upgrades and new construction often focus on viewing angles and improving sightlines to ensure fans can see the action no matter where they are sitting or standing.
 - Last year, TPC Sawgrass (a PGA Tour golf course in Florida) underwent a 6-month \$50 million renovation with a goal of improving the fan experience – enhancements included:
 - A shaded bleacher area with sight lines to multiple holes.
 - Food and dining areas that feature local cuisine.
 - An improved grand entrance-way, highlighting the grandiose main clubhouse.
 - New mounding around a number of holes giving fans an elevated and less obstructed view of the action.
 - Click [here](#) for a brief video from the PGA Tour's website.
- Major League Soccer's St. Louis CITY SC created a [dog-friendly section](#) in the team's new stadium during its inaugural season, sponsored by Purina. The area allows fans to purchase a ticket in the Purina Club, a premium seating area, and bring their dogs to the match.
 - In a press release, a Purina spokesperson said "Since announcing our partnership in March 2021, we've been working together to make CITY SC the most-pet friendly sports club in the world, and that starts with incorporating pets into the fan experience."

Interactive Technologies

- Mobile devices are not allowed at the PGA's U.S. Open, but fans onsite can still utilize social media through onsite CourseLink kiosks that enable visitors to use Twitter, take photos and share personalized messages through Facebook and Foursquare.¹⁰
 - American Express introduced an innovative feature at a PGA Tour event with a program dubbed the "Course Curator," which enables Amex cardholders to customize their experience at the golf tournament by guiding them through the course and helping them to find their favorite golfers. "This has the potential to really change the golf-day experience for fans," said Barry Hyde, the USGA's chief marketing officer in an interview with the Sports Business Journal.¹¹
 - The Minnesota Twins feature a "[Tweet Board](#)" at Target Field, which shares tweets from Twins games via a large video board with the crowd during games.
 - The San Francisco Giants opened a sports "social media" café (called the "[@Cafe](#)") inside AT&T Park behind the centerfield wall where fans can view their own social media content from Twitter and Instagram on six, 55-inch screens, all while enjoying some coffee, recharging a smartphone and following "worldwide social media chatter about the team, players and all things Giants and Major League Baseball."
 - In 2018, the Nashville Predators [introduced](#) an interactive "social green-screen board", allowing fans to pick different backdrops and take photos with friends with the photo being sent directly to their social media accounts.

In-Seat Technology

- Minor league baseball's Round Rock Express offer a service that allows fans to order and pay for food and drinks from their smartphones. When the order is ready, a text message is sent back to the fan. Then, they pick it up at one of four stations at the stadium and skip waiting in line.¹²
 - Taking it one step further, fans attending New York Yankees and Dallas Cowboys games can now order food and drinks in their seats from a mobile app and have it delivered.
- The San Francisco 49ers [launched an app](#) to be used at Levi's Stadium that can steer fans to the bathrooms and concessions with the shortest lines and the fastest routes out of parking lots.

Ticketing Technology

In addition to facial recognition, digital ticketing, and contactless entry, technology can be used to improve the fan experience. For example, the Golden State Warriors now give fans the ability to upgrade their seats during the game using mobile devices, helping them to improve customer service and generating additional revenue while helping to move unsold ticket inventory.¹³

¹⁰ <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/american-express-to-enhance-fan-experience-with-interactive-technology-at-the-2010-us-open-at-pebble-beach-2010-06-08>

¹¹ <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2011/06/20/Marketing-and-Sponsorship/RBS-USGA.aspx?hl=course%20curator&sc=0>

¹² http://weareaustin.com/fulltext?nxd_id=78195

¹³ http://sports-forum.com/news/?article_id=569

Fan Health and Safety and Protecting the Team From Liability

- How might technology impact the fan experience in a post-pandemic world?
- [Sports Business Journal](#) offered a look at how technology might play a role in how sports and entertainment business professionals keep fans healthy and safe at venues throughout the industry.

Security / Liability

- Beginning with the purchase of a ticket on the app, fans would be presented with a liability waiver that assures the team that would release the team from liability should the fan contract any virus at the venue.
- The app would also provide fans with gate and security line assignments, and a range of times to arrive at venue entry points.
- Upon arrival, fans would receive temperature checks and be asked health screening questions prior to having their ticket scanned.
- Fans could then receive a Bluetooth-enabled device that they would be required to wear at all times while they are at the game that would allow stadium staff to track fan movement and help maintain safe social-distancing measures.

Cleaning and Sanitization

- Stadiums could consider the implementation of technology that can detect concealed weapons and crowd disturbances from parking lots to the seating bowl. It can also detect thermal elevated body temperature, lack of social distancing and perform contact tracing, which can help identify those who may have come in contact with an infected person.
- Technology that can help sanitize venues will most certainly play a role in fan safety, along with improved equipment that can improve air quality at venues.
- For example, technology called bipolar ionization that significantly improves air quality at venues, was incorporated into the \$185 million renovation of Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse and is in the Texas Rangers' new ballpark, Globe Life Park.

Proactively Controlling Environment

Monitoring Alcohol Consumption

- Less than 40 of the roughly 120 largest NCAA Division 1 schools allow the sale of alcohol inside their stadiums and many limit sales to luxury suites, lounges or club-seating areas.¹⁴
- Many teams staff members in place dedicated to monitoring tweets and gauging fan behavior on game days to help prevent issues from arising
- Because of the increase in complaints about intoxicated patrons disrupting fellow fans' viewing of the game, the Los Angeles Dodgers took the drastic step of placing a ban on tailgating prior to all home games.¹⁵
 - Organizations can gain a better understanding of fan behavior prior to an event taking place and make adjustments to staffing accordingly. For example, statistically Boston Bruins fans consume 30 percent more alcohol at the Boston Garden than Celtics fans do. As a result, management at the arena may choose to implement measures that can help them to proactively manage a potentially rowdier crowd.¹⁶
- Much to the disappointment of fans who enjoyed a slightly different atmosphere at a PGA sanctioned golf event, the Tour [imposed a ban](#) at the Waste Management Phoenix Open on players throwing things to fans (previously a tournament tradition) as a means for improving both player and fan safety at the event.
- The Buffalo Bills [announced](#) changes in their tailgating policy, requiring fans who arrive on buses with plans to tailgate to purchase a package along with their parking pass.
 - To better manage the experience, the franchise created a "Tailgate Village" which charges around \$15 per person for fans that want to tailgate in the designated area, hoping the addition of the fee will keep unruly fans from the stadium.
 - The team's vice president of operations and guest experience explained the decision to the [Buffalo News](#): "Our No. 1 concern as an organization is fan safety. When you're seeing what was happening in the bus lot the last couple seasons, especially last year, it gets very concerning. It's dangerous behavior, not just negative fan behavior. It's dangerous to security, the sheriffs and staff who are trying to police things."

¹⁴ http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB125271416817105157.html

¹⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paula-duffy/dodgers-tailgating-ban-a_b_539017.html

¹⁶ http://www.boston.com/sports/hockey/bruins/articles/2011/06/05/garden_fans_on_the_money



- Coors Field, home to MLB's Colorado Rockies, became the first venue to [introduce "Amazon One"](#) at ballgames in 2023, allowing fans 21 and over to purchase alcoholic beverages by hovering their palm over an Amazon One device, without having to produce a physical government-issued ID.

Fan Safety

Fan safety is paramount. If fans do not feel safe attending an event, they will not come. No organization can afford to have fans avoiding stadiums because of safety concerns. As a result, sports and entertainment organizations, and facility management professionals responsible for maintaining a safe environment, develop protocols to insure they are keeping fans out of harm's way.

- Understanding the intense rivalry between fans of the Portland Timbers and Seattle Sounders, management for both respective MLS clubs limited the number of tickets available for sale to the opposing team at its home games (seating all opposing fans in a section inaccessible to home fans) in an effort to curtail any potential confrontations during the game.
- This season, the Chicago White Sox became the first MLB team to extend protective netting all the way from one foul pole to the other to better protect fans from the risk of being hit by foul balls.
 - The Washington Nationals also debuted an extended protective netting in 2019, but not covering as much area as the White Sox netting.

Lines And Wait Times

It is incumbent upon an organization to consider factors like parking and lines for bathrooms and concessions as part of the overall fan experience while developing strategies for improving those dynamics at events.

- According to a recent [study](#), sports fans are frustrated with the long wait times for concessions, with 58% saying they would spend even more money on food and beverage if they didn't have to wait in line, and 67% saying in-seat delivery would improve their fan experience.

Lines and wait times are an important fan experience consideration for any venue. For example, Arrowhead Stadium (home to the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs) recently renovated the stadium to expand the concourse to reduce congestion, increase the number of concession stands (and diversify the food offerings), and add more bathrooms, all with the intent of improving the overall fan experience.

Other examples include:

- Recognizing that long lines at concessions areas have a negative impact on the fan experience (and reduces potential for maximizing sales), food providers are now exploring creative advances in technology for self-serve concessions stations and using research data to support the reconfiguration of food stands in stadiums.
- Mercedes-Benz Stadium, home to the NFL Atlanta Falcons, which opened in 2017, features 670 different concessions locations (65% more than what the team had in the Georgia Dome) to help provide easier access for hungry fans.
 - Concessions cost an exact dollar amount, so fans don't have to deal with coins and soda refill stations will be self-serve and separate from ordering lines.
 - Falcons owner Arthur Blank said the aim was to produce a "unique fan experience" that would allow game attendees to focus on the game and not become frustrated with concession inconveniences.
- Last season, the Los Angeles Dodgers [debuted](#) the services of "Flippy", a burger flipping robot, to help the kitchen staff quickly prepare foods ranging from burgers to tater tots and fried chicken.
 - Click [here](#) for a YouTube video of "Flippy" in action.
- The New York Mets [unveiled](#) a new bio-tech enabled self-checkout feature at Citi Field last season, enabling fans to purchase concessions items at kiosks with a single touch.

Atmosphere

Every detail is important, including the gameday sights and sounds that influence the overall fan experience.

- The Seattle Seahawks game day staff includes a combination of engineers, directors, producers, editors and more in a "control room" with the sole responsibility of enhancing the gameday experience.
 - According to [Geekwire](#), the staff is responsible for showing different angles of live action, instant replays, highlights from other games, advertisements, and miscellaneous video content before, during and after the game.
- Managing the game or event day environment is challenging because not all fans want the exact same experience.
 - For example, Notre Dame, who have sold out every home football game dating back to 1973, struggles to find ways to appease a fan base that is conflicted as to whether they should sit or stand throughout the game.
 - Click [here](#) to see how the University trains stadium ushers to handle the situation on game days.

Communicating Expectations for Fan Behavior

- NFL commissioner Roger Goodell issued a “Code of Fan Conduct” policy which prohibits, among other things, “unruly, disruptive, or illegal” behavior; “drunkenness” resulting in “irresponsible” behavior; and “foul or abusive language or obscene gestures.” The code also proscribes “verbal or physical” harassment of opposing teams’ fans.¹⁷
 - The NFL extended the policy even further, requiring any fan who gets kicked out of an NFL stadium for unruly behavior to take a \$75 four-hour online class and pass a [code-of-conduct test](#) before being allowed to attend another NFL game.
- Most sports arenas have the league’s “Fan Code of Conduct” posted in locations throughout the building.
- Most organizations will also post expectations of fan conduct on their websites.
 - Click [here](#) to see the NBA’s fan code of conduct policy.
 - Click [here](#) to see Major League Soccer’s fan code of conduct policy.
 - Click [here](#) to see the Denver Broncos RESPECT: Fan Code of Conduct.
- There have been numerous instances in recent years where fans have been permanently banned from stadiums as a result of egregious behavior at a game or event
 - 2022: Two Washington Nationals fans were issued a [five-year ban](#) from Nationals Park in Washington, D.C. after heckling Chicago Cubs star Wilson Contreras.
 - 2021: A baseball fan was [banned](#) by both the Yankees and Major League Baseball from ever attending any MLB ballpark for life after throwing a baseball from the stands that hit a Red Sox player during the game
 - 2021: A basketball fan in Boston was banned for life for throwing a water bottle at Brooklyn’s Kyrie Irving, an opposing player
 - 2019: The Utah Jazz [banned](#) two basketball fans for life in separate instances in just a three-day period for use of derogatory language directed at opposing players (the team banned three more fans in 2021 for verbally abusing an opposing player’s family in the stands)
 - 2018: The New York Yankees [banned](#) a fan for life for consistently sneaking into premium seating areas and sitting in those seats rather than in the seats that he had paid for

¹⁷ <http://cqresearcherblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/should-nfl-do-more-to-control-crowd.html>

Game Operations

GAME OPERATIONS

The term **game operations** refers to the planning, organization and execution of game production, presentation, entertainment, and promotion. The game operations process begins in the creative minds of sports marketing professionals before any games are played. This process provides a vehicle for an organization to manage, control and enhance the overall fan experience on game or event days.

This process includes the development of a game plan for incorporating all the elements of game entertainment, which includes:

- National Anthem
- Pre-game groups
- Half-time entertainment
- Execution of promotions
- Dance team and stunt team integration
- Mascot coordination
- Managing any additional entertainment such as in-arena blimps

The Green Bay Packers game-day staff is heralded for creating one of the best atmospheres in all of sports, and their strategic game day plan is detailed down to every minute of the game.

- Click [here](#) to see more about how the Packers plan for game days from the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*.

Erik Spanberg of the [Sports Business Journal](#) explains in a post on sportsbusinessdaily.com: “Now more than ever, fans want to be entertained throughout each step of game day. And much of what they want is a place to gather; to see and be seen. A place to sip on custom cocktails and craft beers; to munch on traditional and nontraditional snacks; to listen to a DJ or live music and then glance up at television screens showing highlights and broadcasts of other games in progress. If they can’t have all of that, and comfortably, then they’ll go to a sports bar or stay home and have a party with friends while watching the main event on a 70-inch, high-definition TV.”

The show starts hours before the game when the events that will take place are scripted out and shared with anyone who will be a part of the process, whether it is a mascot skit, a promotion during a break in the action or pre-game announcements read by the public address announcer.

Game entertainment also creates opportunities to generate revenue by adding additional valuable inventory to include as part of sponsorship packages. It also helps generate revenue by helping to sell more tickets.

Game Day Staff

To execute and implement each element of the game operations plan, an organization typically has a game day staff in place. The Boston Red Sox staff features a General Manager of in-game entertainment who is responsible for overseeing a crew that includes a DJ to run the music, seven people to edit the replays and type out the graphics that appear on the video scoreboard, two additional people who control an additional video board and four people running video cameras around the park.¹⁸

Software programs like “Sound Director” and Total Sports Entertainment’s “Game Time Pro” make it easier for teams to manage game operations and entertainment.

Game Attractiveness

Game operations also provide game attractiveness. **Game attractiveness** refers to the customer’s perception of the event. It is a situational factor that varies from game to game or event to event. Game attractiveness can be influenced by a variety of factors.

¹⁸ http://www.boston.com/sports/baseball/redsox/articles/2004/07/27/now_that146si_entertainment



Event variables that contribute to game attractiveness:

- Highly visible star athletes (Bryce Harper, Aaron Rodgers, Sabrina Ionesco, Alex Ovechkin, etc.)
- Team record / opponent record
- Opening day
- Giveaways
- Presence of mascots, dance teams and cheerleaders
- Prominent half time entertainment (Blues Brothers, The Extreme Dunk Team, Quick Change etc.)
- Pre and post-game concerts
- T-shirt cannons
- Fireworks and other entertainment
- Quality/variety of concessions items
- Game or event day traditions

Giveaways

According to a SportsBusiness Journal survey, all but 20 of the 122 teams in the NFL, NBA, NHL and MLB have at least one mascot character, collectively they have a total of 166 characters (racing sausages, pierogies and big-headed retired players) while the 106 affiliated Minor League Baseball clubs that responded reported 192 mascot characters.¹⁹

Mascots

Mascots, in addition to providing a team or event with excellent brand and marketing opportunities, can have a positive impact on the overall fan experience.

Mascot examples:

- The Portland Trail Blazers mascot, Blaze the Trail Cat, first appeared at Blazers games back in 2002. The [story](#) goes that Blaze, who originally hails from the Cascade Mountain Range, was abandoned and later brought to the Oregon Humane Society. Former Blazer Scottie Pippen adopted him, and he has roamed the Moda Center ever since.
 - In 2023, the team [introduced](#) a companion for Blaze by the name of Douglas Fur, a Bigfoot mascot, and the Blazers became the second NBA team with more than one mascot (the Cleveland Cavaliers also have two, [Moondog](#) and [Sir CC](#)).
- After years of planning and plenty of feedback from fans, the NHL's Seattle Kraken [introduced "Buoy"](#) in 2023, a sea troll mascot inspired in part by a famous Seattle-area sculpture. The mascot was described in a NHL news release as a "kid-friendly ambassador" for the franchise.
 - Click [here](#) to read the release and learn more about how Buoy came to life.

Fireworks and other entertainment

Sports and entertainment events often feature different elements to keep fans entertained from start to finish. For example, many teams will use fog or smoke machines and pyrotechnics during player introductions to create a dramatic and energetic entrance. Stadiums will set off fireworks after significant plays, and host a variety of in-game entertainment like fan games and contests to interactive content on the video board like trivia.

"Racing" contests featuring team mascots have become popular in-game entertainment options, like the Milwaukee Brewers' famous "[Racing Sausages](#)", Washington Nationals' "[Racing Presidents](#)", and the Atlanta Braves' "[Beat the Freeze](#)" race.



FUN FACT

Frank Liberto is known as the inventor of ballpark nachos. Mr. Liberto introduced the stadium staple in 1976 at a Texas Rangers baseball game. The novelty snack quickly became a top seller. That year, Arlington Stadium sold \$800,000 worth of nachos, or roughly \$4.1 million in today's dollars when adjusted for inflation!

¹⁹ <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2013/07/22/Franchises/Mascots.aspx>

Quality/Variety Of Concessions Items

Many teams have introduced outlandish concessions items as a way to increase game attractiveness (and generate publicity), including the Washington Nationals (8 pound “[Strasburger](#)”), the Charlotte Motor Speedway ([deep-fried cupcakes](#), funnel cakes topped with chocolate sauce and chopped bacon), the Texas Rangers (“[The Champion](#)”, a \$26 hot dog weighing in at 2 pounds) and several minor league teams like the Camden RiverSharks offering “[Krispy Kreme](#)” burgers.

- The top selling hot dog at Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore comes topped with crab macaroni and cheese.
- The Nationals’ stadium also features a unique concessions stand (called the “Taste of the Majors”) which spotlights items from other MLB cities when opponents roll into town.
 - Items include a Chicago Dog, a St. Louis BBQ platter and a San Diego Fish Taco Platter (click [here](#) for a complete listing).
- MLB’s “London Series” in 2019 between the Yankees and Red sox featured some of the league’s more [notable](#) dishes while offering some items that paid tribute to England’s culinary scene:
 - The Boomstick – A 2-foot-long hot dog covered in braised beef American chili, jalapeno cheese sauce, tomato & chili relish, spring onions, jalapenos.
 - Prime Burger - 100% British beef burger, brioche roll, jalapeno cheese sauce, crispy bacon.
 - Dirty Beets Burger (Vegetarian) - Spinach & kale burger, beetroot bap, baby gem lettuce, beef tomato, jalapeno cheese sauce.
 - Fat Rooster Chicken Burger - Crispy chicken filet, brioche roll, gherkin (pickle) slaw, piri-piri mayo.
- The 2023 edition of the “London Series” game between the St. Louis Cardinals and Chicago Cubs featured a [menu of iconic American ballpark food](#):
 - London Series Boomstick Chilli Nachos - A two-foot-long bed of tortilla chips smothered in nacho cheese and braised beef and topped with bean chili, jalapeno peppers, sour cream, spring onions and tomatoes. Intended to feed up to four guests.
 - St. Louis Dog: Italian sausage topped with relish, grilled onions, grilled peppers, secret sauce, ketchup and mustard. Served on a traditional hot dog bun.
 - Chicago Dog: Dino Hot Dog topped with a pickle wedge, tomatoes, onions, gherkin relish and beer mustard. Served on a poppy seed bun.

Every year, the concession items get a little crazier:

- Among the new items appearing on stadium menus in the last several seasons:
 - Generating more buzz than any perhaps other concession item at MLB ballparks in recent memory was the Seattle Mariners’ introduction of toasted grasshoppers (dusted with a chili-lime seasoning) at Safeco Field.
 - They sold more than 18,000 orders during the first series of the season last year.
 - Click [here](#) for a visually stunning look at the popular Seattle snack from ESPN.
 - MiLB’s Erie Seawolves [hosted](#) a theme night called “Sugar Rush Night,” putting a cotton candy hot dog on the menu (a hot dog, wrapped in a cotton candy bun, and sprinkled with nerds candy on top).
 - Prior to the COVID-19 shutdown, MLB stadiums were set to offer plenty of crazy options in 2020, including such “culinary delights” as the Detroit Tigers’ “Chicken Churro Sandwich” (chicken tender topped with Michigan maple syrup on a churro bun), the Texas Rangers’ “Rattler” (rattlesnake sausage drizzled with “venom sauce”) and the Milwaukee Brewers’ “Greek Fry” (fries topped with gyro meat, tzatziki sauce, feta crumbles and diced tomatoes).
 - Click [here](#) for CBS Sports’ rundown of the best MLB stadium foods in 2019.
 - Click [here](#) for some of the crazy concessions items the Texas Rangers will offer when they open their new stadium.
 - In 2022, the Kansas City Royals introduced a “[BBQ Reese’s Sandwich](#)” at Kauffman Stadium, made with pulled pork, Sweet Baby Ray’s BBQ sauce, topped with bacon bits and crushed Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups.
 - In 2023, a variety of unique menu items were featured around Major League Baseball stadiums, including:
 - Chicago White Sox (Guaranteed Rate Field) - [Elote Corn Dog](#), a classic ballpark corn dog smothered in creamy queso fresco and topped with fresh jalapenos, grilled corn, cilantro, and cotija cheese.
 - New York Mets (Citi Field) - [Donut Milkshake](#), a milkshake topped with a glazed donut, topped with popcorn.
 - Atlanta Braves (Truist Park) - [Cleanup Burger](#), FOUR grilled all-beef patties topped with golden hash brown potato, hickory smoked bacon, cheese & sunny side-up fried egg. Served on a fresh buttermilk Belgian waffle with maple syrup. Serves anywhere from 1 to 4.

Concessions items can provide teams and venues with promotion opportunities:

- The Arizona Cardinals' "Gridiron Burger" consists of five 1/3-pound hamburger patties, eight slices of bacon, eight chicken tenders, five all-beef hot dogs and five bratwursts, twenty slices of American cheese, twelve ounces of fries, shredded lettuce, tomatoes, pickles and sauce and cost \$75.
 - According to [ESPN](#), anyone who finished the seven-pound "burger" in under an hour would win a jersey and his or her photo on the video board inside the stadium.
- The New York Yankees introduced the [99 Burger](#), a burger inspired by the team's star Aaron Judge (who wears uniform number 99), made from two Wagyu beef patties, cheese, pickles, onions, and a secret sauce. The burger costs \$19.99 and only 99 were made at each home game in 2023.

Offering quirky concessions offerings help sports teams at all levels generate publicity for the franchise:

- McCormick Field in North Carolina (home of the [Asheville Tourists](#)) offered a concessions item featuring fried chicken and french fries in a waffle cone, smothered with a choice of maple syrup or nacho cheese.
- As part of their "Halfway to Halloween" promotion, the Fresno Grizzlies served up the "[Frankenslice](#)", a pizza with full hot dogs baked into the crust.
- Each season, the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers host a "Food Fight" competition, asking fans to weigh in on several new recipes (submitted by fans) to determine what new food item would permanently appear on the stadium menu for the upcoming season.
 - In 2023, the fans [voted](#) the "Show Sandwich" (a fried chicken breast topped with melted Wisconsin cheddar cheese and a sweet & savory bacon cherry jam served on grilled sourdough bread) as the best new item.
 - With [28 total entries](#) from fans, the promotion generated a lot of [publicity](#) for the team to help build excitement for the upcoming season.

Broadway shows have caught on to the concession crave – Sweet Hospitality Group works with theaters to offer patrons unique food and drink depending on the show.

- Click [here](#) to read how Sweet Hospitality Group has re-invented theater's concessions sales strategy from inc.com.
- Click [here](#) for an interesting infographic examining the economy of food at sporting events.

Traditions

Traditions are things like the seventh inning stretch or throwing out the first pitch in baseball, college students rushing the court after a big upset in a basketball game, or a gatorade bath at the end of a game for the winning coach.

Unique traditions in sports:

- Detroit Red Wings "octopus toss"
- Kissing the bricks at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway
- "Lambeau Leap" at Green Bay Packer games
- In 2014, the team unveiled a [statue](#) at Lambeau Field, commemorating the tradition.
- Chants at soccer matches
 - Click [here](#) for a brief video highlighting some of the chants performed at Portland Timbers' games by their loyal group of supporters, the Timbers Army.
- Wearing outrageous hats at the Kentucky Derby
 - Click [here](#) for a slideshow.
- The first pitch at baseball games
 - PGA Tour stars Jordan Speith and Zach Johnson threw out the first pitches for the Texas Rangers and Chicago Cubs, respectively, in 2015 and made a \$5,000 [wager](#) on who would throw the best pitch (with the money going to charity). ESPN's SportsCenter was responsible for crowning the champion (Speith).
 - Actors Will Ferrell and Zach Galifianakis ate deep dish pizza on the mound after throwing out the first pitch at a Cubs game (in a great example of cross promotion as they were promoting the film "The Campaign") while they also read starting lineups for each team and included some "little-known facts" about the players.
 - Click [here](#) to see an infographic from the Washington Post analyzing the best and worst first pitches from celebrities over the years.
 - In 2020, the Washington Nationals brought Dr. Anthony Fauci to the ballpark to throw the first pitch to celebrate the start of the new Major League Baseball season in one of the first MLB games without fans.

- Click [here](#) to see the pitch from Yahoo! Sports twitter account.
- “Jump Around” tradition between the third and fourth quarter at Camp Randall Stadium, home of the Wisconsin Badgers football team.

USA Today’s “For the Win” ranked the “weirdest” traditions in sports, including the University of New Hampshire hockey tradition of throwing fish onto the ice after the team scores its first goal.

- Click [here](#) to see the list.

Role of Game Operations in Sports Marketing

WHY ARE GAME OPERATIONS IMPORTANT?

Game operations is an integral activity within the framework of a successful sports marketing organization.

Game operation can assist a business in four key areas:

1. Ticket sales and attendance
2. Sponsorship
3. Publicity
4. Customer service

1. Ticket Sales & Attendance

An effective game operations strategy keeps fans entertained throughout the event, increasing the likelihood that they will return for another game. As technology continues to evolve and the at-home viewing experience improves, sports teams feel more pressure to create an experience that trumps the experience of enjoying a game from the comfort of a fan's own home.

According to the [San Francisco Gate](#), the 49ers built Levi's Stadium with the game day experience in mind, understanding that they have to compete for the attention of fans who could watch from the comfort of their homes, with kitchens, bathrooms and laptops within easy reach.

Game ops can also help to successfully improve game attractiveness, a factor that directly influences game attendance. The level of perceived values increases when the game or event features additional entertainment and promotion.

To add value, game ops professionals might choose to include a variety of promotions within the game or event. For example, a team may host a "Hawaiian Night", offering \$5 off tickets to any fans wearing tropical shirts to the game.

To help boost game attractiveness and enhance the fan experience, the game operations staff may choose to implement:

- An all staff memo or email, encouraging them to dress in tropical attire if they plan to attend the game.
- National anthem performed by a Hawaiian musician or steel drum band.
- Hawaiian lei give-away to the first 500 fans through the gate.
- A limbo contest at a quarter break.
- Hawaiian music or bands on the venue concourse.
- A hammock free throw shooting contest at half time.
- Hawaiian themed food at concessions stands

The inclusion of these added elements would help encourage fans to attend and boost ticket sales for the event.

2. Sponsorship

- Adds value to sponsorship packages
- Creates new inventory available to sell
- Assists in the fulfillment aspect of a client sponsorship package
- For example, a team may sell a sponsorship for their "Hawaiian Night".
- As part of the sponsorship package, game operations may be responsible for fulfilling several elements which could include:
 - PA announcements throughout the game announcing "Hawaiian Night", sponsored by ABC Travel
 - A trip to Hawaii giveaway, presented by ABC Travel
 - Special on court promotions
 - Signage

3. Publicity

A successful event will also help generate community “buzz” surrounding the team. In addition to talking about the outcome of the game, fans may discuss the entertaining half-time act and the free coupon for a burger they won when the team scored 100 points. Publicity can be used to help promote future events.

- The Vancouver Whitecaps (MLS) enjoyed tremendous success with a “dime dog night” event, and later tweeted “10,866 hot dogs consumed tonight for dime dog night! Next one is July 31. #wcaps” to promote a future game.

Special game entertainment promotions are communicated to fans through a variety of channels, including traditional communications channels like press releases and media appearances and across an organization’s digital platforms including social media.

- To generate buzz for a home game, the Minnesota Wild brought in a member of the St. Paul SWAT team to rappel from the ceiling and drop the ceremonial puck.
- Minor League Baseball’s Charlotte StoneCrabs schedule an appearance from Santa Claus to visit the ballpark and entertain fans for their “Christmas in August” promotion. The special appearance was communicated via press releases, the team’s advertising and through their social media channels.²⁰
- Communications professionals are typically responsible for creating a connection between the team and the media, including the facilitation of access to players and coaches for interviews and providing game notes (statistics, information regarding the opponent etc.) for the media.

4. Customer Service

Game operations affords organizations an excellent opportunity to effectively serve customers.

Examples:

- Recognizing long-time season ticket holders on the Jumbotron
- Birthday greetings to season ticket holders over the PA
- Special congratulatory announcements on the scoreboard



FUN FACT

The use of the word “jumbotron” provides an excellent branding example. “Jumbotrons” are actually manufactured by Sony, although the term is synonymous among sports fans as the giant video scoreboard featured prominently at sports and entertainment venues around the world.

The largest video board in the world in a sports stadium is at SoFi Stadium, home to the NFL’s Los Angeles Rams and Los Angeles Chargers. Nicknamed “The Oculus” (and built by Sony’s rival, Samsung), the double-sided structure is bigger than the entire football field. Consisting of more than 70,000 square feet of video boards, it weighs 2.2 million pounds and features a 260-speaker sound system.²¹

The Atlanta Falcons’ video board, named the “Haloboard”, is the second largest video board and is built into the stadium’s roof. It isn’t center-hung but circles the Atlanta venue and is actually built into the roof.

Retention

Ultimately, customer service is about retention and keeping fans coming back for more.

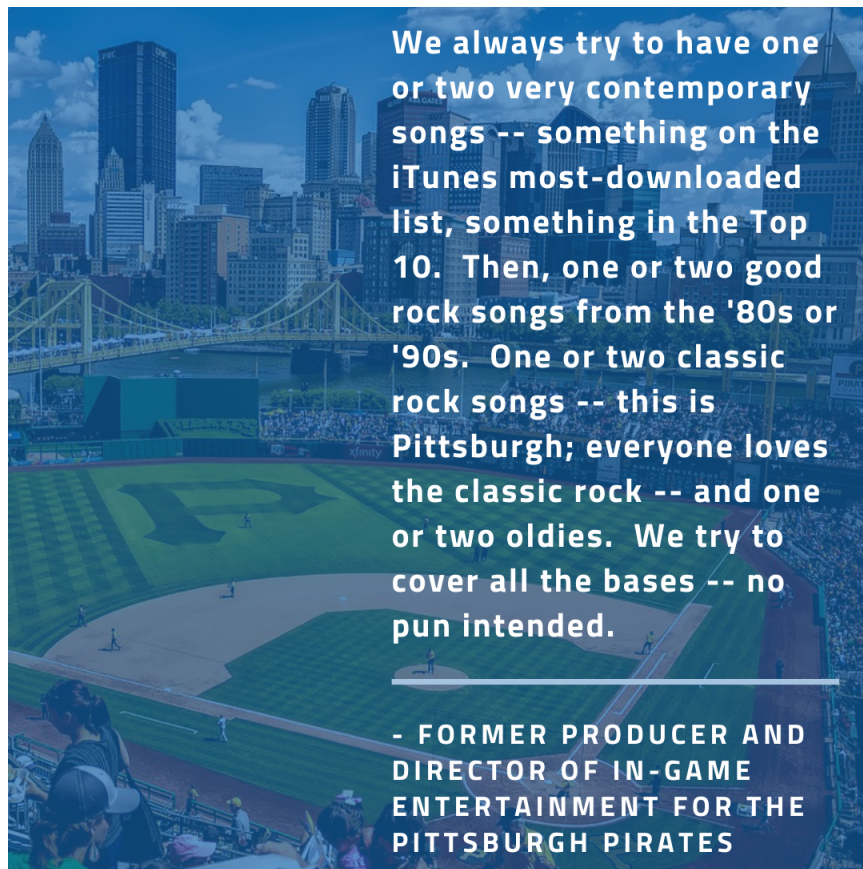
To achieve a high level of retention, game operations and entertainment staff must understand fan tastes and distastes, game situations and the atmosphere of the event as a whole in an effort to help fans to enjoy the game or event experience in its entirety.

The Pittsburgh Pirates’ producer and director of in-game entertainment explains the music selection being played during games at PNC Park: “We always try to have one or two very contemporary songs -- something on the iTunes most-downloaded list, something in the Top 10. Then, one or two good rock songs from the '80s or '90s. One or two classic rock songs -- this is Pittsburgh; everyone loves the classic rock -- and one or two oldies. We try to cover all the bases -- no pun intended.”²²

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/charlottestonecrabs>

²¹ https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/29868399/sofi-stadium-videoboard-eighth-wonder-world-targets-genz

²² <http://old.post-gazette.com/pirates/20010625pnc0625p6.asp>



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- FORMER PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR OF IN-GAME ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE PITTSBURGH PIRATES

UNIT 10: KEY TERMS DEFINED

Fan Experience: the overall impression made on the sports or entertainment consumer.

Game Attractiveness: Game attractiveness refers to the customer's perception of the event as a whole

Game Operations: The planning, organization and execution of game production, presentation, entertainment and promotion