

TABLET TECHNOLOGY: THE NEW **WOW** FACTOR

In recent months, stories of marketers, sponsorship departments, and even players and coaches using the suddenly trendy devices to improve performance and modernize business practices have begun to make the rounds. And not surprisingly, for premium seating sales and service, it all starts in Silicon Valley.

By Emily Miller Huddell, SVP of Client Sales & Service, Turnkey Sports

Many of today's professional sports teams view tablet technology as an asset with organization-wide benefits. To gauge this technology's potential impact on premium seating, we turned to Silicon Valley and the San Francisco 49ers. Our aim was simple: to learn more from an organization whose club seat sales and service teams have already adapted to a world in which flat touchscreen devices are the new tools of the trade.

NEW FACILITY, NEW APPROACH

From a premium standpoint, the 49ers are a prime example of a club leveraging tablet technology to create a superior customer experience and take premium seat marketing to the next level.

We wanted to be able to take our exact preview center presentation out on the road. It's better than selling on paper, [and] it helps with the budget.

—Greg Kish, Legends Premium Sales

Currently on schedule to open a new stadium in Santa Clara in 2015, the Niners are slated to kickoff their initial club seat sales campaign in early 2012. In advance of that campaign, their staff (including a consulting team from Legends Premium Sales) made the decision to allocate a portion of their marketing budget to the development of a customized, interactive premium sales tablet application.

For this, they turned to Channel 1 Media Solutions, a digital marketing agency with extensive experience in sports and entertainment.

Evan Karasick, President of Channel 1, was by no means an early adopter of tablet technology. "Initially, I did not believe that tablets were anything more than a gimmick, as a lot of people may have," he says. However, the simplicity of Apple's

ubiquitous iPad tablet eventually won him over, and with the 49ers assistance, his group was able to create a program that merges Apple's hardware and Channel 1's technology to showcase the new facility's club seat inventory in a dynamic, visually appealing environment.

The program they've developed is sleek and simple to manipulate and contains everything from parking maps and travel time estimates to a "transformation gallery" highlighting key features of the new facility. It also features an interactive calculator that helps potential club seat buyers estimate financing costs and figures in real-time, taking seat location into consideration.

After six weeks of testing the platform with current premium seat holders, the 49ers are thrilled with the results. "It adds a 'wow' factor to the presentation," says Greg Kish, 49ers New Stadium Sales Manager. "Every single person we've presented this to has said 'wow.' It's the one word out of everybody's mouth."

Kish and his colleagues are confident that that very 'wow' factor, combined with the application's intuitive design, will entice customers and result directly in on-the-spot sales when the club's outbound marketing campaign begins. "Because of the way the application flows," he says, "it's very easy to 'get to yes' without missing a beat."

The 49ers are also pleased with the level of efficiency their new approach brings to the sales process. Since the Channel 1 presentation can be presented on both tablets and traditional computers, it can be accessed from anywhere and distributed digitally. This in turn frees sales reps from having to mail brochures to the best leads, enabling them to cast a wider net (at a significantly lower cost). "We're not naïve enough to think that every season ticket holder is going to be able to come to our preview center, so we wanted to be able to take our exact preview center presentation out on the road," says Kish. "It's better than selling on paper, [and] it helps with the budget."

Additionally, the presentation is easy to self-navigate, lessening the need to extensively train sales reps and enabling the team's initial points-of-contact to re-present the presentation to other decision-makers in their group (spouses, colleagues,

etc.), either by accessing it online or utilizing a flash drive given to them by a member of the 49ers staff. Says Dustin Vicari, Sales Manager at Legends Premium Sales, this method is “probably the closest you can get” to having a salesperson personally follow up with every single decision-maker involved in approving a single seat purchase.

If a customer is ready to purchase a club seat after seeing the Niners presentation, the application can begin the purchase process on the spot by generating a contract. To execute, the customer simply enters his/her credit card data and electronic signature in the application; then, he or she receives a copy of the executed paperwork via email.

The team readily admits that being in the San Francisco market hasn't hindered the platform's appeal. Vicari notes that locals are already accustomed to using tablets to order food in restaurants and make other transactions, conceding that “this market is very different than some of the other markets around the country.” However, both he and Kish think the successful use of tablets in the sports business shouldn't be limited to just the Silicon Valley. Says Kish, “I think any market, regardless of how tech-savvy the market is, can absolutely utilize and benefit from [this technology].”

OK, BUT... WILL IT WORK FOR ME?

Assuming your customers don't all live in the Bay Area, the following are a few of the biggest universal benefits of tablet technology that hold true no matter what you (or your customers') degree of technological know-how happens to be.

DESIGN

Thanks to Steve Jobs' obsession with design, the iPad has something going for it that most other hardware lacks – it's incredibly intuitive and easy to use (case and point: Kish's two-year-old daughter can already use his iPad). As all developers and sales teams know, the easier something is to use, the more likely it is to be adopted. As such, this trait is one of the most obvious benefits for teams using iPads and other tablet technology to showcase products: consumers actually enjoy interfacing with the devices' applications, and, by extension, are more receptive to whatever is being 'pitched.'

FRESHNESS & PORTABILITY

Another significant plus of tablet technology is its ability to be updated and enhanced quickly and easily. Paper collateral



The Wow Factor: Greg Kish explains the response thus far to their tablet presentations: “Every single person we've presented this to has said 'wow.' It's the one word out of everybody's mouth.”



Where Do I Sign?: The 49ers are confident their tablet presentations will result in on-the-spot sales when they begin their outbound club seat sales campaign in early 2012.

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In Vogue: The psychological perception that tablets are fashionable at the moment entices fans to want to fill out team surveys on the devices. In the process, teams are adding valuable customer information to their databases.



Will It Work For Me?: Greg Kish believes tablet presentations will work anywhere: "I think any market, regardless of how tech-savvy the market is, can absolutely utilize and benefit from [this technology]."

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and team- or league-run websites take time to update, but tablet technology can be tweaked at a moment's notice. This enables teams to continually upgrade and improve their tablet applications, and reduces the likelihood that they'll get stuck with boxes of obsolete brochures or DVDs when their sales goals change. "We've made weekly tweaks to [our] presentation over the past month or so," confirms Vicari, adding that such changes would take weeks or months in a 'hard' format like print.

Additionally, the units are light and portable, which reduces transport and shipping hassles and allows for cleaner on-site presentations. "[Customers] aren't sitting across from you with a bunch of scattered papers," says Kish; rather "they're really interacting with you."

DATA COLLECTION CAPABILITY

Tablets provide their owners many opportunities to collect data easily and painlessly from leads, both overtly and on the back end.

On the customer-facing side, tablets can gather form data and survey responses from leads through fun, interactive programs. This data can then be imported directly into the team's database, lessening the need for collection of paper 'enter to win' slips and other 'hard' forms.

From a payment standpoint, small credit card swipe devices (such as the Square Card Reader) can be attached to most tablets as well, allowing teams to actually process transactions on the spot if desired.

On the back end, teams have the ability to collect analytic data indicating how long visitors stay on certain pages, thereby informing themselves with hard data about what content customers find especially compelling.

THE "HIP" FACTOR

Tablets (especially iPads) are currently perceived as being extremely cool. If you've been to an Apple Store recently, you know what we're talking about. The store's design is clean and appealing (much like the iPad), and the vibe is undeniably hip – so much so, in fact, that *Cosmopolitan* magazine actually featured the Apple Store by name in an article detailing the best places to meet Cosmo-approved men.

The takeaway here is simple: cool people use iPads. Do teams' fans want to be cool? Absolutely, which makes motivating them to interface with iPads (and submit valuable personal data when doing so) an incredibly easy task.

SOUNDS GREAT – WHERE DO I SIGN?

Umm... not so fast. Though tablets are chock-full of benefits and neat features, here are a few hurdles teams might encounter when evaluating this technology for their organization.

COST

The majority of teams agree that digital technology will play a significant role in the future of sales. However, the current economy and resulting strain on teams' budgets can make finding the capital to purchase units and develop/commission the creation of custom applications challenging.

TECHNOLOGICAL BURNOUT

Many sports organizations have recently devoted significant time and resources to implementing costly and complex CRM systems and other programs. The difficulties inherent in these implementation processes have left some team personnel hesitant to adopt additional technology. They're frustrated and wary of investing in a new system or piece of hardware until it's been tested and proven in the market.

FLASH

A third hurdle, or perhaps more accurately, question mark, specifically concerns iPads and their inability to support Flash technology. Many websites are programmed using Flash. However, Apple products do not accommodate the platform, resulting in headaches for iPad users.

It's currently unclear how this issue will resolve itself. It's possible that developers' increasing use of Flash will push Apple to reconsider their stance on the platform, but the alternative could also occur (i.e., developers move away from Flash and create using systems supported by Apple). In the meantime, the current situation may begin to push tablet purchasers to devices other than iPads. However, the extent to which that may occur remains to be seen.

WHERE IS THE SPORTS INDUSTRY HEADED?

The potential for tablet technology is truly limitless, both within the premium seating vertical and beyond.

In the future, expect to see the ease of integrating tablet programs with other systems (CRM, ticketing platforms, etc.) increase significantly. Simpler integration processes will motivate teams to link multiple platforms, which will in turn enable real-time communication and transactions across systems.

On the premium seating side, this should allow teams to customize their applications to show inventory available in real-time and sell specific seat locations and suites on the spot. "Eventually, you have to believe that this industry can get live inventory on the iPad," says Vicari, adding that such a system would be vastly preferable to "calling back to the office and saying 'hey, are the seats that I saw before I left still available? If they are, grab them!'"

"We want this to be the be-all, end-all piece," confirms Kish. "We have a lot of systems in play here, and we hope that at one point, they can all be able to talk to each other."

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– Dustin Vicari, Legends Premium Sales

In addition, look for tablet programs to offer an increased array of interactive, customer-facing features. For example, the 49ers application currently includes the aforementioned calculator that lets potential premium seat buyers compare financing and payment options based on seat location. Future functionality along these lines could include an application that helps customers estimate and tally other costs (parking, concessions, etc.), real-time weather projections for upcoming game days, the ability to create and view a custom-built nameplate on the seat(s)/suite being considered, or actual game footage from the point of view of a team's available inventory.

Teams may also consider offering customers access to a portal within a tablet application, through which they could communicate with current season ticket holders in real-time or access an e-commerce page where they could add merchandise purchases to their seat order. Another possibility may be to present leads with a list of sponsor offers custom-generated to match a potential buyer's profile.

To infinity... and beyond! #

Is your team considering an investment in tablet technology?

Write to Emily at emilyhuddell@turnkeyse.com.

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