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Profitable Target Marketing: 6 Lessons from Major League Baseball

By Bobette Kyle

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Does your business struggle with profitable online marketing? If so, you are not alone. Attracting the right customers to a site and keeping them coming back – while also turning a profit – can be a challenge. Consequently, I'm always on the lookout for ways to demonstrate profitable online strategies.

Last night, as I watched the Baseball All Star Home Run Derby and visited Major League Baseball's Web site, it struck me. The league is doing many things to effectively find and attract targeted Web customers, while simultaneously generating revenue.

In fact, I noticed numerous lessons from Major League Baseball you can consider to profitably target your own customers. Here are six of them:

Think Through Your Business Models

Free information and activities are present, but well thought out, revenue generating business models are also evident.

Lesson 1: Make your profit generators stand out.

MLB.com has a separate, prominent navigation menu for profit producing activities – MLB Shop, Tickets, Auctions, Subscriptions – which appears in the upper right on all pages, where potential paying customers cannot miss it.

Importantly, each corresponding area of the site is narrowly focused on the visitors' interests. For example, the shop sells baseball – and only baseball – items. This is readily apparent from the slogan "For all things baseball".

Lesson 2: Sell subscriptions.

The league generates revenue from a variety of event subscriptions – live video broadcasts, live audio broadcasts, archived clips, and fantasy games. This also help open the door for repeat purchases and add-ons.

Lesson 3: Include advertisements.

Pop-ups and other online advertising are a fact of life on free-to-user sites. Major League Baseball demonstrates taste and intelligent implementation with their pop-under, limiting each visitor to a single impression. Banner advertisements and sponsorships are also apparent.

Develop Profit Pulling Marketing Techniques

Lesson 4: Segment your visitors.

The league uses a "hub and spoke" system, which allows visitors to choose their own interests. There is one general site (MLB.com), with links to several specialty sites (stlouis.cardinals.mlb.com, etc.).

This portal approach helps segment visitors into specific interest groups. It is a win-win strategy. Visitors find what they are looking for and the league can more easily target its marketing activities.

Lesson 5: Target locally.

Each "spoke" off the MLB hub contains local content, which segments visitors regionally. The league targets products and services accordingly.

For example, the Cardinals team site includes detailed information for Cardinals baseball events, ticket purchasing for Busch stadium games, and auctions for St. Louis related baseball memorabilia.

Lesson 6: Offer tiered products.

MLB offers subscription services at many levels. By packaging fantasy games into progressively larger bundles, they encourage trial as well as repeat visits. The offering also target customers according to interest level and budget.

There you have it – five lessons in profitable target marketing from Major League Baseball.

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Minor League Baseball Is A Great Family Value

By Kadence Buchanan

More families are opting out of the great American pastime of attending major league baseball games than ever before. Some are staying home and watching the games on television, but growing numbers of families are flocking to minor league ballparks. Minor league baseball attendance has grown every year, reaching a record high 39 million during the 2005 season. Major league attendance has continued to decline in many markets.

Although many explanations have been offered by Major League Baseball including changing demographics and competition from other sports and entertainment venues, cost is an undeniable factor in lagging attendance. The average cost for a family of four to attend a major league baseball game in 2005 topped \$170.00 for tickets, refreshments and souvenirs but not including parking. The cost for that same family to attend a minor league baseball game in 2005 was \$80.00, less than half the cost of attending a major league game.

For that price, minor league fans are treated to performances by up-and-coming young stars who may be tomorrow's Barry Bonds or Alex Rodriguez. Minor league baseball follows the same rules as major league, and most minor league teams are associated with a major league team. Because of this association, minor league fans may occasionally be treated to an appearance by a major league star rehabbing from an injury in the minor leagues. Additionally, in some parts of the country, minor league stadiums play host to major league teams during spring training. Thomas J. White stadium in Port St. Lucie, Florida is the home of the Single A St. Lucie Mets during the regular season, but in the spring it's the New York Mets training facility.

Fans often sit right along the baselines with nothing separating them from players but a railing. Players frequently sign autographs before and after the games. Because of the growing popularity of minor league baseball, teams have been able to build increasingly attractive stadiums with amenities that rival their major league counterparts. Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, Florida was built with the same architecture and amenities as larger stadiums like Baltimore's Camden Yards and Turner Field in Atlanta but offers fans an intimate experience that is not available at the larger parks.

For more casual fans, minor league teams offer entertainment like performances by local music artists, fireworks and special promotions like disco night or Christian night. Some parks, like Hammons Field in Springfield, Missouri, have children's play areas near the bullpens and on-field activities for children including running the bases, games and contests.

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