

## Chapter 5: Research Your Fans

Without customer information an organization cannot be customer oriented. A market-oriented organization, you will recall, generates, disseminates and responds to customer information. If you have no information, you cannot disseminate or respond to it.

Although the best sports organizations regularly conduct market research to determine fans' characteristics, needs, preferences and wants, many have no systematic approach to conducting fan research. Decisions are made on the basis of intuition, experience or observation rather than quantifiable, definitive information.

### The Value of Market Research

Sports marketers are faced with a myriad of marketing mix decisions that could benefit from fan input (see box below). Gathering information requires time and money and must be balanced against the relative benefit of gaining that information. A baseball team may have 20,000 season ticket holders who, on average, use their tickets to only half of the team's 82 home games. Although the team already has the revenue from these ticket sales, they could conceivably gain the opportunity to resell 10,000 prime seats for each game. The problem is that management does not know what will motivate season ticket holders to either use their seats (and thereby contributing to concessions revenues) or make their seats available to others. Obviously, this is worth a substantial investment in research.

Marketing Mix Decision	Research Questions
Product Assortment	What are fans' perceptions of our licensed apparel and merchandise? What are fans' perceptions of our teams' logo?
Ticket Prices	How willing are season ticket holders to participate in a program to exchange unused tickets?
Facility Management	How do fans perceive the information provided on the scoreboards? The signage? The comfort and physical condition of seats?
Promotions	How do fans value our promotions? Which do they prefer? Which influence them to attend (early)?

Conversely, sports organizations often wonder if they are starting their games at times most convenient for fans. Finding out whether fans prefer games to start at 6:00, 6:30, 7:00 or some other evening time is not likely to determine much in the way of revenue streams. So, although this isn't a bad question to add on to a more important research project, you wouldn't be likely to design a major research project to determine fans' time preferences.

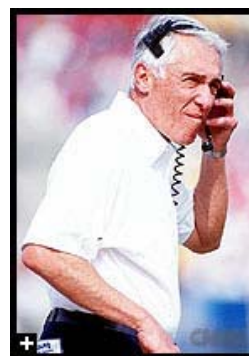
To better understand the importance and value of conducting market research, consider marketing mistakes that could have been prevented if the sports organization had gathered appropriate customer information.

You can probably think of few sports marketing blunders you have seen. Just in case you can't, here are two that could have easily been prevented with a little prior research. As a fan and as a manager, you have to ask yourself, "Why didn't they just ask?"

<p><b>The Tough Actin' Tinactin AFL Tug of War:</b> In the late 1990s, the Arena Football League sold a sponsorship to popular athlete's foot spray producer Tinactin. As part of this mandated halftime, the teams had to hold a tug of war on the field. The teams had to ask the fans on one side of the arena to yell "Tough Actin" and the other side to cheer "Tinactin". Fan reaction was not enthusiastic. <b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.gameops.com">www.gameops.com</a></p>	<p><b>The Boring Bobble-Heads of Buffalo</b> During the 2001 season, the Buffalo Bills sought to build individual ticket sales to otherwise slow-selling games by offering the ubiquitous Bobble-head promotion. These promotions required fans to buy their tickets at a local grocery store ticket outlet (along with the additional \$2.50 service fee) and featured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jim Kelly (Seattle, November 18)</li><li>• Marv Levy (Carolina, December 9) and</li><li>• Fred Smerlas (New England, December 16).</li></ul> <p>The results? Jim Kelly led the way with a couple of thousand additional tickets sold, followed by the next two measuring in the hundreds.</p> <p>Source: <a href="http://buffalo.bizjournals.com">http://buffalo.bizjournals.com</a>, "Bills fans want wins, not more bobbleheads." Rick Maloney, November 19, 2001.</p>
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What research would you have recommended in each case? The Tinactin case points to the ease with which one could use focus groups to evaluate promotion ideas and concepts. Obviously the folks that thought up this promotion believed it would go over great.<sup>1</sup> The point is that sports marketers wouldn't run such promotions if they thought they would bomb, although we must admit to seeing some halftime shows and other promotions that someone must have known were bad before ever scheduling them. As we were saying, the point is that management would not run the promotions if they thought they were bad. This suggests that third-party opinions are invaluable as a tool to guard or check against poor managerial judgment. In the Arena Football Leagues' case, selecting a focus group of AFL fans to review each of the scheduled promotions for the season would likely have caught this blunder.

The bobble-head case points to two important issues. First, just because a marketing plan or promotion worked elsewhere does not mean that it is guaranteed to work for you. Cultural, environmental and situational factors that make an Allen Iverson (eBay value = \$217.51) or Antonio McDyess (eBay value = \$61.00) bobble-head a valuable giveaway may not translate well for a Fred Smerlas bobble-head. We don't even want to contemplate what a Mark Levy bobble-head looks like.



<sup>1</sup> And, obviously, these folks have fungus for brains.

Second, a survey of fans would be easy to conduct. Fans could be asked which players and coaches (former or current) would be most valuable in the form of bobble-head giveaway. Further, the team could also determine via surveys how likely fans would be to purchase a ticket to a game if their favorite player were available as a bobble-head giveaway, through what outlets, and for which games. Since bobble-head productions are not inexpensive ventures, the team and the promotion sponsor can each benefit from this research.

Sports marketing research is not just important for promotion planning. In addition to understanding target markets (see Chapter 3), sports organizations can gauge fan reactions to other facets of the marketing mix, such as new pricing schemes, changes in facilities, quality of employee service, and the like. An increasingly important aspect of sports marketing research has to do with the effectiveness of the sponsorships provided to the sports organization.

### **Market Research: What do you mean?**

In this chapter the focus is on **market research** that involves collecting primary data from individual fans or members of organizations. We are particularly interested in how sports marketers can conduct market research for specific marketing problems, as opposed to ongoing information system needs (e.g., such as ticket sales). The objective is to expose you to the many types of market research needs of sports organizations and to give you a means to measure important attitudes and perceptions that sports marketers use in developing and adjusting their marketing plans.

The objective of this chapter is not to provide a review of your marketing research class, but rather to integrate what you have learned about marketing research within the field of sports marketing. However, it is useful to recall the basic format of any research project. While many market research books have as many as a dozen steps in the research process, the process boils down to the five steps in the scientific method that you learned in your high school science class:

1. Define the problem
2. Develop hypotheses.
3. Collect data.
4. Analyze data.
5. Derive conclusions.

Sports marketers can think of a thousand questions they would like to slap down on a questionnaire. You, however, being the rigorously trained research methodologist that you are, must maintain focus on what problem is being solved. You must center on what management needs to know so that they can make a better decision. Sometimes the problem can be solved by searching through relevant background information (e.g., search the web, library or syndicated sources of information) for the answer. Failing that, you proceed to develop hypotheses, collect data, analyze the data and solve the problem.



Your high school science teacher

## Types of Sports Marketing Research

Marketing researchers design exploratory, descriptive and causal research projects. **Exploratory** research, as the name implies, *explores* the marketing problem further through primarily informal, qualitative (rather than quantitative) means, such as personal interviews, observation, or focus groups. For example, the Memphis Grizzlies selected a panel of fans to visit other NBA arenas (via *observation*) to provide input (via *interviews and focus groups*) as to what they would like to see in the Grizzlies new arena when it is constructed.

**Descriptive** research, interestingly, is most often used to *describe* a particular state of affairs in quantitative terms. Every sporting event or organization conducts research to describe their typical customer in demographic terms. Other descriptive research might include describing the average fan's opinion about service quality or some other facet of the sporting event.

**Causal** research seeks to understand factors (cognitive, affective, or behavioral) that *cause*, explain, or predict other perceptions, feelings, or behaviors. In a strict sense, researchers design experiments to isolate causal factors. On a practical basis, researchers build predictive models to help understand factors that theoretically and pragmatically influence variables of concern. Sports marketers are often interested in determining what factors related to fans and the event lead to attendance. Our model of identification presented in Chapter 2 is an example of a causal model. In general, the form of a causal model is patterned after attitudinal structure:



Researchers are sometimes interested in just one or two aspects of attitude. For example, you might be interested in finding out how individual perceptions of event quality (food & beverage quality, employee service quality, facility quality) influence fans' *overall* perceptions of event quality. Alternately, you might be interested in finding out how fans' feelings regarding one aspect of the event (e.g., satisfaction with team performance) influence their behavior (e.g., attendance). The methods described in this chapter are geared particularly toward descriptive and causal research projects.

## SPORTS MARKETING RESEARCH: CURRENT ISSUES & MEASUREMENT

Sports marketers face a variety of different sports marketing problems. Most research problems in sports can be classified in terms of marketing mix variables that need to be evaluated from the fans' point of view. That is, sports marketers are often interested in finding out what fans *think* or *feel* about the product and service provided, ticket prices, promotion schedules, and facility quality in order to adjust plans to increase *attendance* for the upcoming year. What fans think about service quality and the like are virtually all post-purchase evaluations (See Table 3.3: **Hierarchy of Effects: Spectator Metrics**). We examine five prevalent market research issues, providing survey measures and managerial implications for conducting each type of research. We begin our discussion with brand equity, followed by perceptions of service quality, perceived value of tickets and entertainment, perceived value of promotions, and fan's identification of sponsors.

## Perceived Brand Equity

A sports organization's brand equity is related to the organization's perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand associations, and brand awareness (c.f., Aaker 1991). For example, the St. Louis Rams have high brand equity due to:

- fans' perceptions of its high quality team, coaching staff, front office, and stadium
- high fan loyalty,
- strong associations with the Rams name (such as Kurt Warner and his fairy tale story from grocery clerk to All-Pro quarterback), and
- high brand awareness across the United States, where even people who don't care about football are aware of the Rams, their players, and their achievements.

Why is brand equity so important? Research confirms at least six reasons that sports organizations should be concerned about brand equity.

- **Profits.** Brand equity predicts earnings and financial market value (Aaker and Jacobson 2001).
- **Product.** Since no tangible product exists for a team or sporting event, the image of the team or sports venue is the driving force behind market success (Berry 2000). The brand is represented by the licensed logo (e.g., Rams) that sells merchandise.
- **Promotion.** Brand equity is diluted by price promotions and strengthened by deeper image advertising and promotions (Jedidi, Mela and Gupta, 1999; Yoo, Donthu, and Sungho, 2000).
- **Planning.** Brand equity considerations drive strategic planning processes to build and leverage brand equity over the long run (Varadarajan and Jayachandran 1999). Decisions are made with the long term effects on brand equity in view.
- **Perceived performance.** Particularly on the amateur level (NCAA and lower), teams with high brand equity are perceived to perform at high levels even when they are not (viz., inflated national rankings; see Seggar, McBride and Cannon 1985).
- **Participation of sponsors.** More and better sponsors want to associate with teams with high brand equity to leverage and build their own company's brand equity (Cornwell, Roy and Steinard 2001). Poor brand equity means the sales staff is scrambling for sponsors, any sponsors. High brand equity means that the sales staff can focus on obtaining sponsors that best fit the desired image of the organization.



Sports marketers should monitor shifts in its perceived brand equity from year to year and across key segments and groups (e.g., season ticket holders). Table 5.1 contains measures for the constructs related to brand equity.

<b>Table 5.1</b>	<b>Measuring Brand Equity</b>
<b>Brand Equity</b> (Adapted from Yoo & Donthu 2001)	<b>Loyalty</b> I am loyal to the <i>team</i> . The <i>team</i> is my favorite team. I would rather see this team play than any other team in the league.
	<b>Perceived Quality</b> The likely quality of play for this <i>team</i> is extremely high. The likelihood that this <i>team</i> will play well is very high.
	<b>Brand Awareness &amp; Associations</b> Some positive characteristics of this <i>team</i> come quickly to mind. I can quickly recall what the <i>team</i> logo looks like. I have difficulty imagining the <i>team</i> logo in my mind.*
	<b>Overall Brand Equity of Licensed Logo Apparel &amp; Merchandise</b> It makes sense to buy <i>team</i> logo merchandise instead of any other teams, even if all else about the merchandise is the same. Even if other apparel has the same features, I would prefer to buy apparel with the <i>team</i> logo on it. Even if there is another team as good or better than this <i>team</i> , I still prefer to buy this team's apparel.

**Perceived Service Quality**

Service quality is probably the most researched subject in services in general, and sporting events, in particular. The service provided on the field in the form of the sporting event is the core service provided fans. The service in the stands is a secondary service provided fans, but is vital to keeping fans once they come to see the game.

Why is service quality so important? For those fans who attend the game for reasons apart from the sporting event itself (e.g., social reasons, business reasons, family obligations, etc.), the service in the stands may be the most important aspect in determining their satisfaction with the event. For those highly identified fans who attend for their love of the team and the game, the service provided in the stands will determine (see Wakefield, Sloan and Blodgett 1995; Wakefield and Blodgett 1994, 1996):

- How long they will spend at the stadium, arriving late and leaving early if dissatisfied,
- How much they will spend while at the stadium, given how long they are there, and
- How many games they attend throughout the season.

Most service quality surveys are variations of an instrument known as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988, see Table 5.2). This instrument reliably measures four key **intangible** characteristics of employee service (empathy, assurance, responsiveness, and reliability) and less reliably measures **tangible** aspects of the service (viz., the facility or stadium quality). The tangible elements of the service delivery will be addressed in a moment.

## Intangibles

Service quality research to date has proven to be unreliable due to two reasons. First, SERVQUAL was developed primarily for relatively pure services (e.g., home telephone service) and does not account for the multiple sequences of service scenarios within more complex service deliveries such as sporting events. Consider the different groups of employees you encounter as you attend a sporting event:

Parking/Security personnel→Ticket office→Ticket takers→Ushers→Vendors→Concessions

To be reliable, one would need to specify the employee group when administering SERVQUAL surveys. Otherwise, management does not know if fans are thinking of the good (bad) service they received from the ushers or the concessions employees. Consequently, if the survey indicates that the employees are not very reliable, management needs to know which employee group is causing the negative perceptions among fans so that they can remedy the situation.

Second, the four employee dimensions most often used in SERVQUAL administrations are actually derived from a larger set of dimensions that may be more applicable in some settings than in others. Using only these variables may exclude other important service aspects within sports settings. Table 5.3 offers a complete set of attributes that can be used in service quality surveys. Fans can rate the attributes relative to a given employee group such as concessions workers, referring to the definitions as needed.

Table 5.2 SERVQUAL Employee Service Dimensions (Adapted from PZB 1991)

### **EMPATHY**

#### **Employees:**

Show a sincere interest in solving your problems when you have one.

Give you individual attention.

Have your best interests at heart.

Understand your specific needs.

Care about their customers.

### **RELIABILITY**

Perform the service right the first time.

Start everything on time.

Make sure that everything in the place is ready before customers arrive.

Insist on having everything in the place in perfect working order.

Have office [operating] hours convenient to all its customers.

### **RESPONSIVENESS**

Give you prompt service.

Are always willing to help you.

Are never too busy to respond to your requests.

Tell you exactly when services will be performed.

Are always concerned with giving fast service.

Do everything they can to make sure waiting lines go smoothly.

### **ASSURANCE**

Are consistently courteous with you.

Have the knowledge to answer your questions.  
 Make you feel safe in your transactions with XYZ.  
 Behavior instills confidence in customers.  
 Make you feel comfortable when you talk with them.

**Table 5.3 Service Quality Attributes (Adapted from Driver and Johnson 2001)**

<b>Access</b>	The physical approach to the food service area, including finding your way to the food you want and the clarity of in/out lines.
<b>Aesthetics</b>	The appearance & ambience of the food service area, including the appearance of the facilities, food & drink, and service staff.
<b>Attentiveness-helpfulness</b>	How well service employees help, including the impression you get of their wanting or willingness to help you.
<b>Availability</b>	The availability of service employees and the availability (stock) of food & drinks; includes the employee/customer ratio and the amount of time each employee has to spend with each customer.
<b>Care</b>	The concern, consideration, sympathy, and patience shown the customer, including how well the employees make you feel at ease and emotionally (rather than physically) comfortable.
<b>Cleanliness/tidiness</b>	The cleanliness and neatness of the food service area, including the service environment, facilities, equipment, serving areas, and employees.
<b>Commitment</b>	Employee's apparent commitment to their work, including the price & satisfaction they apparently take in their job; their diligence and thoroughness.
<b>Communication</b>	How well employees communicate in a way that you understand, including the clarity, completeness and accuracy of information communicated AND the ability of employees to listen and understand you.
<b>Competence</b>	The skill, expertise, and professionalism with which the service is performed, including the carrying out of correct procedures, correct execution of customer instructions, degree of product/service knowledge shown by employees, AND the general ability to do a good job.
<b>Courtesy</b>	Politeness, respect and propriety shown by employees; including the ability of employees to be unobtrusive and not interfering when appropriate.
<b>Flexibility</b>	The willingness & ability of employees to amend or alter the nature of the service or product to meet the needs of customers.
<b>Friendliness</b>	The warmth & personal approachability of employees, including cheerful attitude and ability to make you feel welcome.
<b>Integrity</b>	The honesty, justice, fairness and trust in the way employees treat you.
<b>Product quality</b>	The taste, freshness and quality of the food & drink, including the appropriateness of the food & drink temperature (hot/cold).
<b>Reliability</b>	The reliability & consistency of service, including punctual service delivery and keeping agreements made with you (doing what they said they will do).
<b>Responsiveness</b>	The speed and timeliness of service delivery, including the speed & ability to respond promptly to requests with minimal waiting and queuing time.
<b>Security/safety</b>	The personal and financial safety you have in completing transactions with employees; includes the way you feel about the employees when you exchange money for food & drinks.

### Tangibles

As you have already learned, the quality of the physical environment in terms of the stadium, arena, or facility can make or break sports organizations. Organizations that have brand new facilities will need to monitor fans' perceptions of the facility as it ages. Those with older facilities must know how fans perceive the current facilities in order to know what and when to renovate or to build new facilities.

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**Table 5.4 Facility Quality** (adapted from Wakefield and Blodgett 1994, 1996)

<i>Rate this stadium in terms of its:</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>A</i>
Attractiveness of interior color schemes					
Attractiveness of wall/facade decorations					
Attractiveness of playing field					
Clarity of signs in helping me know where I am going					
Clarity of signs showing where things are located					
Entertainment provided on video scoreboard					
Completeness of information provided on scoreboards					
Scoreboards provision of interesting statistics					
Attractiveness of kids games area					
Quality of kids games available					
Amount of knee room in the seats					
Amount of elbow room in the seats					
Comfort of seats in the Park					
Availability of concession areas to handle the crowds					
Availability of restrooms to handle the crowds					
Walkways/aisles wide enough to handle the crowds					
Restroom cleanliness					
Food service areas cleanliness					
Seating area cleanliness					
<b>Overall Inside Quality of the Stadium</b>					

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### Perceived Value of Tickets & Entertainment

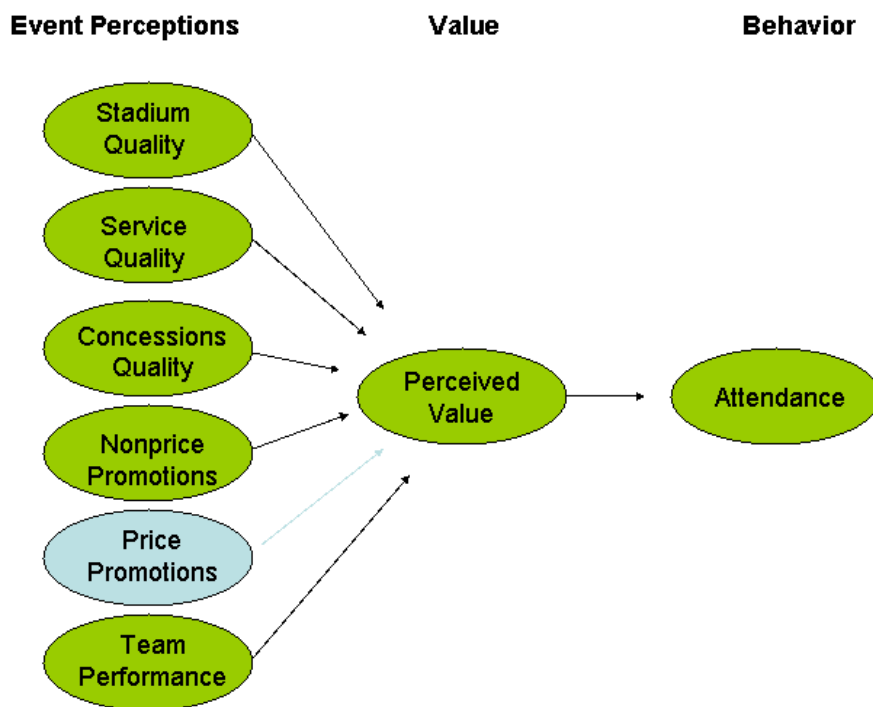
The **perceived value** of the ticket or the entertainment received at a sporting event is based upon what a fan thinks s/he gets for what s/he gives. Sports marketers are not so much interested in what fans think about prices. If you ask fans about prices, they inevitably will report that they would like them to be lower or that they are too high. Fans' perception of the value of the ticket or the event, however, gives you a better understanding of what they are willing to give up to attend the game or event.

Why is perceived value so important? If fans perceive a ticket to have high value, they will pay more money for it and be willing to give up additional time and effort to obtain that ticket. What

is the perceived value of a Super Bowl Ticket? Is it the face value? Generally not<sup>2</sup>. What would you be willing to do to get tickets to next year's Super Bowl if your favorite team was playing and your favorite singing group was performing at half-time? Clearly, the perceived value of a ticket may exceed, meet or fall short of the face value of the ticket dependent upon the bundle of benefits one receives in exchange for purchasing the ticket.

Sports organizations may wish to measure other aspects of the sporting event that are likely to contribute to fans' perceptions of value. The perceived value of a sporting event is a function of all that one receives when attending a sporting event. Perceived value, in turn, influences fans' willingness to attend future games. A causal model of perceived value could take the form of Figure 5.1. We have already discussed measurement of perceived quality related to stadium quality and service quality. The following section discusses promotion (price and nonprice) value.

**Figure 5.1 Causal Model of Perceived Value**



Price promotions have a negative effect on perceived value. All others have a positive effect on perceived value.

<sup>2</sup> Tickets are normally sold at prices above face value, with the exception of the 2002 Super Bowl in New Orleans, where scalpers were unable to sell all of their tickets even at face value.

Perceived value of a ticket, entertainment, or virtually any other aspect of sporting events can be measured by adapting the following three items.

**Perceived Value** (Wakefield and Barnes 1996)

Generally speaking, the regular prices [to games here] are:

A bad buy—A good buy

Not worth the money—Worth the money

Too high for what I get—Not too high for what I get

**Perceived Value of Promotions**

In some people’s minds, sports marketing is all about developing clever sales promotions to manipulate fans’ behavior to attend games. Sales promotions are a single component in the organization’s promotion mix, along with public relations, advertising, and publicity. Notwithstanding, the nature of sports marketing over the past two decades has led to an undue interest in sales promotions as a way to counter negative publicity generated by poor performance or other weak aspects of the team’s marketing mix (i.e., product, price, and place).

Sports organizations have also been driven to offer a wide variety of promotions due to the growth in sponsorships. Sponsors who want to get the most out of their sponsorship investment are likely to seek a complete sponsorship package that produces multiple exposures to fans and involves them on an interactive level. Sponsored sales promotions provide that means. The fan who receives a Chris Pronger bobble-head sponsored by Pepsi (eBay price = \$51.00) and displays it on his or her desk will be reminded of Pepsi each time s/he sits at the desk.



Why is promotion value so important? The goal of most sports promotions is to induce immediate response in the form of ticket purchases and early arrival at the event. Secondary or alternate goals may include enhancing team loyalty. As illustrated by the Buffalo Bills experience in using boring bobble-heads to promote game attendance, research is important to ensure that the team and the sponsor are effectively spending their time and effort in a way that will result in meeting promotional objectives. If the promotional item is discarded or otherwise disregarded, the team will not draw more fans and the sponsor will not benefit from repeated exposure.

Exploratory research in the form of focus groups are useful in screening the value of promotions. Descriptive research that seeks to determine the relative value of individual promotions can be measured with one or more of the items below. Previous research (Wakefield and Barnes 1996; Wakefield and Bush 1998) indicates that price promotions have value for infrequent, low-income, price-conscious customers who are not loyal fans. Nonprice promotions have value for

frequent fans who are highly involved with the sport and the team. Table 5.5 depicts the results from one such study involving a minor league baseball teams promotions.

<p><b>Promotion Value</b>          [This promotion]:          Has no value to me—Has high value for me          Adds no value to the ticket price—Adds great value to the ticket price          Isn't worth arriving early at the game—Is definitely worth arriving early at the game</p>
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**Table 5.5**  
**Price and Nonprice Sales Promotions at a Minor League Baseball Stadium**

<b>SALES PROMOTION</b>	<b>CUSTOMERS WITH POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD DEAL</b>
Fireworks	77%
<b>Bat night</b>	77%
Proof of Purchase <sup>a</sup>	74%
<b>Cap day</b>	71%
Coupon Books <sup>b</sup>	70%
<b>Seat cushion</b>	69%
<b>Baseball night</b>	69%
<b>Pennant night</b>	68%
<b>Helmet night</b>	67%
Monday All-Faiths <sup>c</sup>	66%
Fill 'er up Cup	65%
<b>Team t-shirt</b>	64%
2-for-Tuesday <sup>d</sup>	64%
Ladies Night <sup>e</sup>	64%
Mapco/Pepsi Discounts <sup>f</sup>	64%
Squeeze bottles	62%
Concert in the park	62%
Silver Bullets	62%
Field of Dreams charity night	61%
Lunch bags	58%
<b>Baseball Collector's Cups</b>	<b>57%</b>
Chamber of Commerce night	53%
Wild & Crazy Nickelodean Kids	53%
Power Ranger show tickets	51%
Seniors Night <sup>e</sup>	51%

**Bold-faced print denotes organization-related nonprice promotions.**

**Description of price promotions**

- <sup>a</sup> Discounts based upon collecting cereal box tops.
- <sup>b</sup> Discount coupons bought as part of entertainment coupon book.
- <sup>c</sup> Discounts received when customer brings church bulletin.
- <sup>d</sup> Discounts (2-for-1) received when customer brings Nestle wrappers.
- <sup>e</sup> Discounts (1/2 off) received on Wednesday (seniors) or Thursday (ladies) nights.
- <sup>f</sup> Discounts received by patronizing Mapco gas stations.

## Sponsorship Identification

Despite the fact that corporations annually spend billions of dollars on sports sponsorships, how fans process and recall sports sponsorship information is not well understood. Research conducted by Joyce Julius (see [www.joycejulius.com](http://www.joycejulius.com)) assumes that mere exposure is important. Certainly the amount of exposure a sponsor receives in view of fans is important. Exposure to a sponsor's logo blazing around an oval at 200 mph, however, does not necessarily translate into fan recall and identification of the sponsor.

Fans' identification of sponsors is important because the association of the sponsor with the event (team, driver, etc.) allows the sponsor to leverage the positive association with the event to build its brand equity (Cornwell, Roy and Steinard 2001). The sponsor frequently develops a complete advertising and sponsorship campaign that is designed to enhance the image of the brand. In order for the "lever" to be pushed, fans must make the association between the sponsor and the event.

Fans tend to recall those sponsors that are *prominent* (well-known, familiar) and *related* in some way to the event or participants in the event (Johar and Pham 1999). The prominence of a company like McDonald's or Coca-Cola aids fans' recall of the sponsorship because the brand names are instantly recognizable and easy to retrieve from memory. Nestle's Crunch is



memorable as a sponsor of NBA *Crunch Time* because of its relatedness. Because of this phenomenon, measuring fans' sponsor identification is more difficult than most other market research projects discussed thus far. Prominent and related sponsors will be recalled more so than those less prominent and unrelated to the event. Of course, this also implies that smaller firms sponsoring events unrelated to its brand in some way are very likely wasting their money.

One way to measure sponsorship identification is to ask fans to identify sponsors from a list of companies, some of which are not sponsors. In this list, one can develop a list containing an equal number of non-sponsoring companies who are:

- a. prominent and related
- b. nonprominent and related
- c. prominent and unrelated
- d. nonprominent and unrelated

Randomly mixing these company names with the event's actual sponsors helps control for some of the guessing that fans will do, compared to if you just asked them to recall sponsors from a list consisting only of actual sponsors.

The recall data generated from this research, when favorable, can be used to report to sponsors. When recall data suggests that fans are not effectively recalling sponsors, this should suggest the need to improve the quality of their sponsorship. While little can be done to make a less prominent sponsor more prominent in the short run, sports marketers can develop sponsorship packages that better integrate the sponsor into the event. For instance, NASCAR or NASCAR driving teams could assist the United States Navy by integrating the Navy's "Accelerate Your Life" ad campaign into an effective sponsorship opportunity.

Other important sponsorship research is related to determining fan loyalty to those who sponsor an event. Descriptive research that examines fans' purchase behavior of sponsors' products, as well as their intentions to purchase sponsors' products, can be useful in attracting and retaining sponsors.