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SPORT: A LEISURE BUSINESS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the diversity of Sport and Business relationships and how they have changed to become more of an integral part of the leisure movement. It also examines the influences of sport as a cultural element in society.

SPORT: A LEISURE BUSINESS

INTRODUCTION

A nation's past is always rich in culture and certain elements ingrained enough to continue into the future. The cultural mosaic is made of many diverse elements, all of which expand as the nation's leisure time expands.

SPORT is one such thread woven into a blanket of culture. Leisure is a broad concept but sport has become a central component.

A person's cultural heritage tends to dictate his leisure pursuits. In fact, the first leisure/recreation that a person pursues, linked to cultural heritage, may then lead to a related follow-up. For example, heritage of horsemanship may lead a person from horseback riding during leisure to Polo, rodeo, or show-jumping participation.

Environment plays a major role. Do you live in the country or in the city? Are you rich or poor? What do your peers do? Mass media and advertising will also lead you to a leisure/recreational pursuit which may or may not be in line with your cultural heritage.

However, what was true in the past is also true today. What is a leisure/recreation for one person becomes a business for others.

This issue shows the diverse elements of this recreation-business relationship as sport becomes more and more a central component of our culture.

MANUFACTURING/RETAILING

Sport manufacturing has benefited from the leisure/recreation boom as many sports expanded dramatically in both participants and equipment sales. Tennis, bicycling, cross-country skiing, jogging, each sport has had an upsurge in interest. However, this sophisticated age demanded newer and more technically refined equipment than we had seen in the past. For example, a bike was no longer a one-speed, simple, "I can do my own repairs" purchase. Rather, it had to be a three or five-speed bicycle. Well, that was quickly passe' and somehow your environment and advertising led you to a ten-speed and a good one! Kids were not forgotten as they soon wanted that ten-speed or a dirt bike. This has led to an expanded bicycle repair business as kids still do "wheelies" but parents can no longer do repairs.

What about fashion and your sport gear? You can not just wear anything in which to sweat. You must be dressed appropriately! This has led to a variety of new specialty stores for running/hiking/windsurfing, etc., equipment. You are not going to perform any better because your clothes look great but you might feel better psychologically. However, the new jogging shoes are advisable as they will reduce the chance of soreness and/or injury better than if you started exercising using your old tennis shoes.

The specialty store also provides better trained sales personnel who, generally, are participants in that sport. Thus, you should get better help in selecting equipment than you would at a department store.

SPECTATOR/CONSUMER

Another leisure time alternative to participants is spectator sports. For parents, it could be as simple as watching their children play sports or perhaps paying to watch amateur or professional sporting events. The time, discretionary income, and the desire to spectate led to a professional sport explosion through new leagues, new sports, mergers, expansion, etc. Thus, professional sport must consider how to attract the consumer as well as television which can popularize the sport. The television fan will, in time, pay to see a game.

Closely allied to sport franchises are the stadiums. Many municipalities built these facilities with taxpayer dollars and hoped to fill the seats by attracting professional sport franchises. The facility manager must be part traffic engineer, construction engineer, crowd control expert, advertising and marketing person and concessionaire. He/she must make it convenient and enjoyable to watch a game in his facility.

PROMOTION

A new development related to professional sport expansion is the burgeoning interest of women in becoming avid spectators and participants. This is a result of more women in the workplace, more sport opportunities in school and more body consciousness, just to mention a few. Advertising strategies now reach out to women to attend and purchase, and this, in turn, has led to more opportunities for women

athletes to have their own professional leagues, television exposure, endorsements, and increased sponsor's prize money.

Advertising has now expanded greatly its focus from selling soup to leisure related sport and recreation. This has caused advertising agencies and sport promoters, companies, etc., to learn about each other in order to develop effective campaigns. The sport business must learn the demographics of its consumer and advertise accordingly. They should not expect the sport to sell itself.

Further, sport and recreation magazines have also developed to meet the leisure sport enthusiast's interest in learning more about his/her sport and its athletes. These specialty magazines fulfill a need and provide specific advertising vehicles for groups such as equipment manufacturers.

Even the old, professional sport lineup card quickly moved to become first. It moved from a program to a glossy game magazine that even has newstand potential.

Another recreation-business relationship that developed is the licensing and merchandising of sport logos and properties. The spectators buy the merchandise to identify with the league and/or team and, in effect, become walking billboards with advertising potential.

CONCLUSION

This edition will help reveal some of the ways that sport has become a leisure business to further solidify sport as an integral component of culture. The basic theme is helping to understand the role of sport/leisure as a cultural element.
