



by Kell Houston

It's All About the Casino Floor

You have all had your share of poor performers at the box office but when it comes to results, it's time to stop beating yourself up over missing the 100% mark. Time and time again, marketing personnel lament the fact that they haven't sold out a particular concert. Was this because they wanted to look good to upper management or was this based on the real results? Of course there is a lot of instant gratification when the marketing campaign creates so much buzz that box office phones ring off the hook, but what truly matters at the end of the day?

Attracting the Right Customer

Concerts that sell out and success on the gaming floor don't always go hand in hand, which is why casino marketing efforts should focus on attracting the right customers. A sold out show doesn't mean much if the people attending the show have little or no interest in gaming. Instead, the right customer is the one that matches your overall marketing goals, whatever they may be. For example, the customer that matches a target demographic, adds to your existing player pool, expands your regional draw, fills up your hotel, eats at your restaurant, plays golf on your course, uses your spa or increases your mid-week drop.

Your decision-making process when choosing your concert entertainment, or any entertainment for that matter, must include some deliberation about your entertainment philosophy so that your programming supports the overall marketing goals. Time and time again marketing directors and entertainment directors ignore the "not so cool" artists and book what they personally want to see. This is where you need to be very careful. Have a long range strategic plan in place and be very tuned in to your region and your customer. The last thing you need is to bring in a concert that offends or drives away your customer base. Just because you sold out the show and attracted a lot of new faces to your casino, were they the right customers? Imagine the goodwill lost with your regular customers who couldn't find a place to park and were bothered by the kind of people drawn to the show. Booking any type of entertainment is not about booking someone's favorite artist or type of music. It's about booking what your customers and new customers want to see. That takes some research, it takes conversations with your player's club staff, it takes relationships with your radio stations, and it takes community awareness.

Reward Your Best Customers

What else matters when you don't sell out your show? Again, it's the customer. The opportunities to reward your best

players are endless assuming you are taking full advantage of them when it comes to live entertainment. You send out invitations to other events, but how about the big headliner shows featuring stars like Bill Cosby, Tom Jones, Ringo Starr, Jay Leno, BB King, or in smaller markets, stars like Gretchen Wilson, Leann Rimes, Beach Boys, Miranda Lambert? If you have intentionally spent the extra dollars to book an act known to draw high-end gamers, remind your best customers to come to the show.

In addition to sending out traditional invitations and personal invitations, check out the e-mail blasts you can do as well as some of the automated phone message programs that can be used. Once you know your players are attending the show, keep the rewards coming. Use the VIP treatment for reserved seating and add a special pre-show hospitality event, by letting those people in 30-60 minutes early. Provide some simple hors d'oeuvres & beverages. This will allow you to connect up close and personal with your high end players, which is a great opportunity to find out what they like and what gets them motivated.

Your customers like to feel a part of "their casino." When you have them in a captive environment, it is an opportunity to get more information out of them about the kind of entertainment they would like to see. Have them fill out a simple form listing their favorite entertainers. Include some sort of match play coupon or dinner discount they can pick up when their form is filled out. Have them include other information like perhaps menu items that they would like to see or other types of events. Any time you have your best players or VIPs together, you have a lot of opportunity to get important information. Always keep that in mind.

Players Club Sign Up and Retention

If your goal is to attract new players and it was a concert event that brought them to the casino, don't let those new customers slip away. Many customers will pass up the opportunity to sign up for a player's club card before or after the concert because they don't know where to go. As a venue, you always have the opportunity to set up your own booth exclusively for new player's club sign ups. Add a special drawing or prize wheel and match play coupons and watch them flock to your table. Not only have you added new players to your database, you've given yourself the ability to track the new customers gaming activity on a concert night. Assuming your concert venue feeds out into the casino, your customers will naturally flow onto the gaming floor after the concert.

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Current players club members shouldn't be forgotten, so keep them involved. If they are attending the show, invite them to check in at the booth too. Offer them incentives. Small gifts or tokens seem to really make people feel special. Don't give away the store, but keep in mind the ROI. You are always going to come out ahead when you make people feel you care and you keep them involved. Sometimes we spend a lot of time trying to attract new customers to the point our existing customers may feel left out. Remember they were once new customers.

Attracting the right customers, rewarding your best customers and keeping new customers are essential. There are many ways to get up close with those customers, to get them to feel involved, and to make them feel important. The opportunities to exploit your entertainment program are limited only

by your imagination. Don't be afraid to try some new approaches. This is a challenging time economically and retaining your customers/players is crucial to your casino's financial success. As you continue to create and employ new ways for reaching your marketing goals, just remember it's all about the casino floor. When all is said and done, that's what really matters. That's the difference between a successful entertainment program and a floundering entertainment program. Always think about long term cumulative results and try not to get caught up with the challenges of one event, whether it is sold out or not. ♣

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