

Build a Larger and More Connected Fan Base This Football Season

Bring bigger crowds to your stadiums to cheer on your athletes



Professionals trying to arrange football programs and other sports for schools and nonprofits have specific responsibilities and experience unique challenges.

Athletic directors manage many different sports programs, each with their own staffing and budgeting constraints. In many cases, a single director manages schedules, keeps the books, arranges for fundraising and promotion, and looks out for the safety of every student-athlete.

When all of this is happening at once, it becomes difficult to provide all of the detail and attention needed to each one of these very important priorities. That's where an experienced director may talk about "wearing different hats" and how important organizational integrity is for this kind of leadership.

There is also a large demand for these department services — CDC data shows that the majority of high school students played at least one sport in a recent survey.

However, some new technology can help. The below strategies can help athletic programs build a stronger and more connected fan base by making it easier for fans to engage in ways that are meaningful to them, and by communicating with and catering to the needs of your superfans.

Make it Easier for Fans to Participate



1 Sell Tickets in Advance

Let your fanbase know your game schedule in advance so they can plan ahead and reserve tickets.

In some districts, people who want to attend student football games and other events must buy paper tickets on-site at the event. Without a robust online platform, this creates a bottleneck for the event itself. Lines can only move so quickly, and staffing can be an issue as well.

Now think about a system where a school district has an easy-to-use online ticketing system. A lot of these pain points vanish into thin air. First and foremost, you can sell football tickets (and other game tickets) before game day. This strategy helps alleviate those lines at the event and presents the athletic director with business intelligence. For instance, an event nearly sold out proves that you will have a crowd on game day.



2 Take Credit Cards Online: Give Fans More Purchasing Options

Let fans have the choice to purchase their tickets in as many ways as possible to ensure you cater to fans who prefer to buy online and those who want to pay in cash. Having a robust and feature-rich online ticketing system also helps to get more people in the stands and sell more tickets. That way, fans can purchase tickets in whatever way they prefer — online, in-person at the event, using a season ticket and more.

3 Encourage Online Ticketing

Allow people who prefer to reserve their tickets online do so without asking them to stand in a line. An online option also helps move the event entry line a lot faster, cuts down on the wait time for fans to enter the stadium and gets more fans through the door in time for game time.

With an online ticketing system, you can incentivize residents, parents, or anyone else to buy online, charging less for online ticket sales. The monetary incentive gets more people to “sign up upfront” for an upcoming football event, taking much of the guesswork out of game day. Encouraging fans to purchase their tickets online also helps reduce the amount of cash handling at the door and makes reporting that much easier for staff.

4 Offer a Guest Checkout Option

With a ‘guest check out’ option, family and friends can purchase their tickets without any special login or credentials. Grandma and grandpa can easily purchase their own tickets online and reserve their seats at the next game without having to use any special usernames or passwords.

5 Offer Season Tickets

Another way to boost sales is to offer season tickets. Some businesses and other parties like to buy these for themselves or use them for other purposes. Having season ticket holders not only builds a sense of participation but helps you to fill the seats.

6 Take Donations Online and In-Person

Then you can also build a functional place both online and in-person to take donations. Likewise, companies or high-net-worth individuals might be willing to donate to a school sports team, but instead of going to them, you can let them come to you. Make this simple by incorporating into your ticket checkout experience.

7 Offer Sports/Event Merchandise

School and sport swag is a great way for fans to connect with the team and for athletic programs to fundraise.

In a dedicated software portal, a school district can offer fan merchandise and manage fundraising projects right from a website. This automation saves quite a bit of labor and allows more on-ramps for families to connect with the school district in supporting athletic programs. We know that this is what many families want to do. Giving them the tools to do so in an easier way will build participation and engagement.

Communicate and Engage with Fans



8 Bring Offers to Where People Are

There is another primary driver of fundraising and participation in football and other athletic programs online — social media. Parents have created dedicated Facebook groups and other social media channels in many school districts to talk about school district happenings and events.

District's athletic programs can confidently brand themselves on these same social media venues. There is already a captive audience of people who have a stake in how the district performs and want to be notified about what goes on there. Many of them will have students in athletic programs. Others will want to participate, even if they don't.

That vital relevance and brand visibility are key to boosting the success of a school district's athletic program. Directors have seen this work, time and time again, to get more out of their investments in student athletics.

Some athletic directors will also identify best practices for social media that make the most of the strategy. For example, school districts invest in special logos, colors, and iconography that are handy for branding online. When athletic directors and their staff can co-locate these visual designs with the online ticket options, it's often even more engaging for users.

Then there are the long-term goals and objectives as well. Some districts will go as far as to designate a person to create a content calendar for the social media posts to combine with ticket offers and more.

Along with the above-mentioned strategies of pre-selling tickets in very specific ways, this type of outreach molds an athletic program into something that has more cohesive district support.

9 Keep Fans Informed and Announce Updates Quickly

Districts running public programs use various technologies and methods to inform parents, students, faculty, staff, and others about changes to a district calendar.

This can include changes to an athletic program's schedule.

Some districts offer specific push notifications, while others utilize email or a landing page. Any of these strategies will fit with an event planning tool that can help advertise changes such as forfeiture, inclement weather, or other eventualities that people need to know about promptly.

Administrators recognize this is a big part of any kind of program planning. It's useful in the curriculum world and in emergency management, and it's useful in athletics as well. It's worth mentioning that this type of communication capability can also drive participation and engagement when parents and residents are already keyed into a notification system. They tend to be more informed about what's happening and better able to make decisions about their involvement. That's another value when using software tools with online-first and responsive design.

Track What's Working and Become a Revenue Driver for Your District

10 Lean on Your Engaged Fan Base

Many athletic directors are used to bringing cost issues to a school board or administration for review and planning. Some use PowerPoint, and some use handouts. All are informing others about the program's financial health in detail. Most student athletic programs require student athlete insurance, protective gear, gameplay equipment and more, which can be an expensive part of a budget. In the past, many districts and directors managed this with student participation fees. Still, directors are keenly aware that families are only willing to pay so much to sign a child up for a particular program.

With an engaged community that is actively involved in supporting school sporting events, a school district can begin to count on a certain amount of funding coming in from the community each year. Having a better event-driven revenue source alleviates some of the pressure of balancing participation fees with the cost of insurance and equipment.

11 Make a Great Impression

Many athletic directors understand that part of their role is to create an impression of their programs as ambassadors of the district.

Broadly, districts with these kinds of tools show that they are on the vanguard of new technology and savvy enough to create efficiencies and synergies that will help with district budget planning. School districts with this level of capability similarly prove their mettle in athletics administration. Residents tend to pay attention because they know that their property tax bills are tied to district efficiency. Many of them understand that the more the district can do with new technology and efficiency-related resources, the less their taxes will rise over a longer time horizon.

12 Give Fans the Information and Tools They Need

In any kind of business, visibility is important, and that's true with schools and nonprofits, too. In fact, academic and nonprofit administrators often take this to heart and build the right kinds of outreach for fundraising and more proactive participation in a local community.



A certain level of transparency comes with an athletic program with a comprehensive portal for ticket sales. There is generally more buy-in for attendance and more knowledge of an athletic season because people are looking directly at the data through user-friendly platforms instead of having to find it themselves on the web. By contrast, the practice of using an online portal for ticketing untethers the event data from the legacy environment that users had to seek out from.

13 Track Ticket Sales

Sell tickets in advance of game day, and track sales. The value of this type of business intelligence is difficult to overstate. Knowing the trends and the activity will help athletic directors and their staff go through and fine-tune athletic programs in many ways. That might involve game scheduling and how to get tickets to attendees. It might also involve allocating resources to a particular program with its own resources.

Having a measure of the enthusiasm and participation for a given season is a big plus for a school district and the people who work to optimize those athletic programs. This metric will often be evident in people's discussions about budgeting on a fiscal basis. The athletic program can become one of the stars of budget-friendly departments within the district.

In general, any time administrators can create a larger window for sign-ups and registrations, they are increasing engagement. If people can only buy tickets at the door, some won't buy them. If there is a broader window, such as a three-week timeframe for ticket purchases online, higher sales are likely. Administrators can also see how many people take advantage of this convenient option, providing valuable insight. Then they build that back into a smarter athletic program and event management plan.

Again, this planning becomes helpful in reporting situations, as in public presentations to the board. This is one of the key areas where these types of planning synergies are evident to a wider audience. Athletic directors help move the ball forward with detailed presentations of what they have learned from trend reporting and better knowledge of community involvement.

See How an Online Ticketing Solution Can Help Your District

Athletic programs can use online ticketing solutions to allow for purchase prior to game day.

They can do business intelligence work through these systems, too. All of that supports a better result for a robust sports program and stronger, more connected community.

Vanco Events provides athletic directors and their partners with excellent choices for improving each game day and the overall athletic program. It's a game-changing way to approach student athletics and will likely become a go-to for directors and staff as they grow a department.

Take a look at these types of next-generation solutions when you want to learn about online ticketing solutions and how to accept credit cards at your next big game or event.



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