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**Selling the Best Seats in the House:
Content Analysis of Premium Sales
Positions Announcements**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the current state of job announcements relating to sports premium sales' positions in North America. Content analysis was used to examine 118 premium sales job announcements from four sport job Web sites posted over a one-year period. The key job responsibilities, transferrable skills, and prior job experiences were identified, in addition to differences in these three areas between entry-level and non-entry-level positions. Entry-level positions were more likely to involve outbound sales calls and non-entry-level positions were more likely to be involved in developing client relationships. Differences also existed between premium sales job announcements for professional leagues, primarily explained by the variation in number of games played in a season. The results of this study provide new insights into the ways in which sport organizations may not be maximizing their approach to relationship development with premium clients, the ways in which premium sales positions differ from ticket sales and sponsorship sales positions, and the ways in which the Big Four professional sports leagues differ in their approach to premium sales positions. Implications for premium sales job seekers are also addressed.

Selling the Best Seats in the House: Content Analysis of Premium Sales Positions Announcements

Premium seating in sport venues is a critical segment of sport business. Recent research indicates premium seating accounts for \$10 billion (Cohen, 2011; Dorsey, 2010) of the \$20 billion sport ticket marketplace industry (Miller & Washington, 2011). The selling of premium inventory was once considered merely one aspect of ticket sales, but today, an entire career might be dedicated to the sale of this niche product. Luxury suites alone generate an average of \$9.8 million annually per professional team (Lawrence, Contorno, Kutz, Hendrickson, & Dorsey, 2007), with the typical National Basketball Association (NBA) team generating \$20 million from luxury suites and club seating combined (Badenhausen, Ozanian, & Settimi, 2008).

There are varying sales department organizational structures for professional teams and venues depending on ownership, venue purpose, and whether there are multiple professional teams as anchor tenants. In some cases, the premium seating sales staff sells exclusively for the team(s), while in other structures, they sell for all venue events. The premium seating sales department used to be a small component of the overall ticket sales efforts, but it is now often a separate department within the team or venue. This transformation has taken place due to the proliferation of new professional sport venues boasting a large number of premium seating options (Luxe Living, 2008; Rhoda, Wrigley, & Habermas, 2010), as well as venues' and teams' heavy reliance on revenue from premium seating to support their operations (Badenhausen, 2008; Connelly, 2011). In the college sports venue market, 17 of the 20 most valuable teams undertook stadium expansion or renovation projects between 1998 and 2008

("Money Talks," 2008). Newly constructed sport venues now count over 25% of their seats in the premium category (Luxe Living, 2008), including 24,000 to 30,000 luxury suites and 800,000 club seats among the top 75 markets in North America (Cohen, 2011; Dorsey, 2010). These premium seats represent potential revenue of \$10 billion (Dorsey, 2010), accounting for half of the \$20 billion sport ticketing industry (Miller & Washington, 2011).

Between 1988 and 1999, over 130 stadiums were built or renovated in the United States (Burton, 1999) with much of this renovation being a result of threats by professional teams to relocate if their luxury suite inventory was not increased (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Now, this large amount of inventory must be sold in a sluggish economy, and numerous studies indicate that teams and venues are feeling the impact of the recession (McCarthy, 2008; Shropshire & Rosner, 2009; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010, 2011). Increased inventory coupled with a depressed economy requires sales professionals to be more strategic in their approaches and to better understand their customers than ever before (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2011).

Though there has been some research investigating premium seating, there are areas that remain unexamined. Contemporary premium seating research has focused on the landscape of the premium seating industry (Lawrence, Contorno, Kutz, Hendrickson, & Dorsey, 2007; Lawrence & Titlebaum, 2010, 2011), industry sales and service processes (Lawrence & Moberg, 2009), characteristics of the corporate client (Lawrence, Kahler, & Contorno, 2009; Lawrence, Con-

torno, & Steffek, 2012), motivations for purchase and renewal (Lachowetz, McDonald, Sutton, & Henrick, 2003; Titlebaum, DeMange, & Davis, in press; Titlebaum & Lawrence 2009, 2010; Titlebaum, Lawrence, Moberg, & Ramos, 2012), the pricing of luxury suites (Shapiro, DeSchriver, & Rascher, 2012), and best practices in premium seating Web sites (Olson et al., 2012).

Investigation of job responsibilities in sport sales has been limited to sales and marketing positions (Bae & Miller, 2011), ticket sales and service positions exclusive of premium seating (Pierce, Petersen, Clavio, & Meadows, 2012), and sponsorship sales positions (Diamond, Pierce, Johnson, & Ridley, in press). The nature of premium seating sales positions remains largely unexplored. Although some research has addressed aspects of this unique area (Bae & Miller, 2011; Pierce et al., 2012), there is a lack of data regarding the responsibilities, skills, and experiences required by sport organizations. The current study addressed this issue with a content analysis of job postings specifically for premium sales positions. Specifically, this study focused on three research questions:

1. Which job responsibilities, transferrable skills, and previous work experiences are most commonly sought in premium-seat sales positions?
2. What differences, if any, exist between entry-level and non-entry-level premium sales positions vis-a-vis job responsibilities, transferable skills, and prior work experiences?
3. What differences, if any, exist between premium sales positions within the Big Four—National Football League (NFL), NBA, Major League Baseball (MLB), and National Hockey League (NHL)—professional sports leagues in North America regarding job responsibilities, transferrable skills, and prior work experiences?

Additionally, the answers to the research questions posed above will be compared to similar content analysis studies on ticket sales (Pierce et al., 2012) and sponsorship sales (Diamond et al., in press) position announcements in the sport industry in order to draw broader conclusions about sport sales.

Review of Literature

Revenue from premium-seat sales is valuable and significant to the sport industry. The estimated 24,000 to 30,000 luxury suites and 800,000 club seats in the top 75 North American markets (Cohen, 2011; Dorsey, 2010)

yield total potential revenue of \$10 billion (Dorsey, 2010). Badenhausen, et al., (2008) noted that 20% of NFL and 35% of NHL team revenues come from sponsorship and premium seating. Luxury suite revenue is generally not part of league revenue-sharing agreements and the NBA does not have revenue sharing, resulting in an even greater revenue upside to teams (Plunkett, 2012). Forbes found that the typical NBA team generates \$20 million from luxury suites and club seating (Badenhausen, et al., 2008).

Luxury suites are supported by a team and/or venue staff (depending on the organizational structure) consisting of, on average, 3.2 full-time employees, 1.6 part-time employees or interns, and 34 hours per week of administrative support (Lawrence et al., 2007). A typical sport ticket department traditionally has consisted of a vice president of ticket sales and service overseeing other departments such as premium seating, customer service, season ticket sales, group sales, and inside sales (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). Moving down the hierarchy, each director supervises interns and sales/service representatives who are responsible for their specific selling and service area (Mullin et al., 2007).

Lawrence and Moberg (2009) developed the Two-Stage Luxury Suite Team Selling Framework, pointing out that “although the vertical sales department model serves to illustrate a basic functioning sales department, it does not take into account the special characteristics of a key account sale of a luxury suite that should involve multiple individuals” (p. 189). The framework draws from existing sales literature to differentiate the tasks associated in the personal-selling process versus customer-relationship management. This model recommended using different cross-functional teams in the sales and customer relationship management processes to ensure strong relationships and renewals.

Developing strong relationships with premium clients is important for sport organizations, especially as the premium seating industry evolves. Titlebaum and Lawrence (2011) presented evidence that the premium seating industry is in the midst of a reinvention that will require teams and venues to be more active in prospecting, selling, and serving clients. The authors suggested that this competitive environment is resulting in a more sophisticated premium seating client who demands added value for the investment. The combination of market changes, a more educated clientele, and the recent economic recession has made professional sports sales professionals become more strategic in their sales and service efforts for premium

clients (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2011). Sport organizations will need to respond appropriately to these changes to maximize their relationships with premium clients.

The key to developing client relationships is to understand who the clients are. Relevant to this study is the motivation behind premium purchase and renewal for corporate clients. Lachowetz, McDonald, Sutton, and Henrick (2003) explored factors leading to high corporate sponsorship retention in the NBA. Premium seating was included as one aspect of the study. Even though this study was conducted from a sponsorship context, the findings indicated that added value, relationship building, and customer education (eduselling) were vital to retaining sponsors.

Other studies related to client motivation in premium seating have focused on single groups of subjects: sales executives from professional teams (Titlebaum & Lawrence 2009, 2010), corporate purchasers for professional sport (Titlebaum et al., 2012), suite administrators for professional sport (Lawrence & Titlebaum, 2010), and sales executives from college sport (Titlebaum et al., in press). The results have been remarkably consistent across all populations with the common thread being the development and management of the relationship between the sport property and the premium client. Specifically, the authors found that the most important motives for purchasing and retaining luxury suites were to entertain new and existing clients, to create a feeling of exclusivity among their guests, and to be associated with the team's brand (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2009, 2010; Titlebaum et al., 2012; Titlebaum et al., in press).

Despite recent articles investigating premium seating activities, no research has been conducted on the job responsibilities, skills, and experiences required of those individuals who actually sell premium seating. This gap in the literature can be filled through the use of content analysis to examine job announcements in a given field. Content analysis has been used primarily to examine positions in sport marketing and sales (Bae & Miller, 2011; Diamond et al., in press; Pierce et al., 2012). Because job announcements reveal the knowledge, skills, and abilities sought by employers, reviews of job announcements provide an understanding of available jobs and the experiences and skills employers seek (Wong, 2009).

While there is a lack of studies about premium-seat sales positions specifically, three recent studies employed content analysis to examine sports marketing and sports ticket sales position announcements. Bae

and Miller (2011) examined 209 job announcements related to marketing positions in the sport industry over a 6-month period. Pierce, Petersen, Clavio, and Meadows (2012) examined 733 sport sales job announcements over a 6-month period, and Diamond et al. (in press) examined 372 sport sponsorship job announcements from the same time period as the premium sales announcements in this study. Relevant results from these studies will be addressed in the discussion section.

Method

This study utilized content analysis to collect pertinent data from position announcements on four sport job Web sites covering North America: Teamwork Online, JobsInSports, WorkInSports, and the NCAA employment forum. This study was limited to postings in which the sale of premium seating was one of the primary job functions as defined in the title of the position announcement. Following the purchase of subscriptions to view the Web sites, all job listings on each site were copied and digitally saved for one year, from January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011. After duplicate position announcements were removed, a total of 118 unique premium-seat sales position announcements were secured.

Content analysis allows researchers to collect information for scientific inquiry in a systematic, replicable way. Content analysis is nonreactive and unobtrusive, which allows for objective observation of publicly visible content, such as that found in the raw data from the premium sales positions (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Through the development of a codebook and a coding scheme, quantitative variables can be developed for a variety of elements and subsequently analyzed across a variety of variables.

The codebook for this study contained 53 items. Two coders, working independently, carefully read each job listing and indicated whether the listing included or referenced specific elements. These elements included various demographic information (e.g., position title, state, type of organization, venue type, league, education requirements), sales job responsibilities (e.g., outbound sales calls, service, referrals, renewals), transferrable skills (e.g., organizational skills, communication skills, being a team player), and other preferred experiences (e.g., previous sales experience, sport industry experience, customer service experience). The codebook was developed after the postings were collected and reviewed to ensure the codebook was thorough and accurate. Each coder possessed familiarity with both Internet-based job listings and sport industry sales positions. The full coding protocol is available by contacting the authors.

An accepted practice in content analysis is the utilization of intercoder reliability. A representative sample of the data is selected and subsequently coded by all coders involved. The responses are then compared statistically to determine the level of agreement among coders. Provided that agreement meets an appropriate threshold, the coders are allowed to examine the remaining data set separately. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) noted that an intercoder sample of 10% to 20% of the total sample is acceptable. For the purposes of this study, 24 of the 118 listings, or 20%, were randomly selected for intercoder analysis.

Generally, Scott's Pi intercoder reliability coefficient of at least .70 was required for each variable coded. Of the 53 variables subjected to reliability analysis, 42 exceeded the minimum Scott's Pi threshold of 0.70. While the remaining 11 variables did not exceed Scott's Pi of 0.70, each variable exceeded 80% observed agreement. Due to the conservative nature of the Scott's Pi test, it was possible that only one disagreement between coders could produce a Scott's Pi value below the 0.70 threshold. As a result, the level of intercoder agreement was deemed acceptable. Following the successful intercoder assessment stage, the remaining job listings were divided between the two coders.

Descriptive statistics were used to tabulate the job responsibilities, transferrable skills, and previous work experiences that were most commonly sought. Entry-level jobs were classified as those positions at the non-director level requiring less than or equal to two years of experience. Non-entry-level positions were defined as any director position or non-director positions requiring greater than two years of experience. To compare listings between these two categories, chi square tests were calculated to determine the relationship between job responsibilities, transferrable skills, and preferred experiences identified in relevant position announcements. Logistic regression was then used to predict the presence of an entry-level position by holding variables constant. Ten predictor variables were used in the logistic regression to maintain a 10:1 ratio of predictors to sample size (Stevens, 2002). G*Power 3 software validated the use of logistic regression with a sample size of 118 (Buchner, Erdfelder, & Faul, 1997). To compare premium sales positions among the Big Four professional sports leagues, chi square tests were calculated to determine if there were differences in job responsibilities, transferrable skills, and preferred experiences listed in those announcements. Only those variables appearing in at least 30% of the announcements were included to ensure an

appropriate cell size. Finally, previous studies examining position announcements in the areas of sponsorship and ticket sales were compared to the results of this study in order to draw conclusions about sport sales positions.

Results

A total of 118 premium sales position announcements were collected and coded in this study. Five states accounted for over half of the positions, including California, Florida, and Ohio each with 15 positions for a total of 45 in those three states (38.1%), New York with nine, and Texas with eight. Most of the listings (79.7%) were for non-director-level positions. Entry-level positions accounted for 60.2% of the positions. Non-entry-level positions accounted for 39.8% position announcements. The mean years of experience minimally required was 2.67 years (SD = 1.48) and 18.2% of the positions required just one year of experience. Only 3.4% percent of positions were part-time. A bachelor's degree was required in 77.1% of the positions; a graduate degree was required in only one announcement. An associate's degree was indicated in 3.4% of listings; high school degree, 3.4%; and some college, 1.7%. No degree qualifications were specified in 15.3% of the announcements.

Specific teams or facilities posted 80.5% of the positions, with the remaining 19.5% posted by a company in the venue management and/or hospitality industry that is contracted to sell or manage premium seating for a facility or group of facilities (e.g., Anschutz Entertainment Group, Live Nation). Professional major league teams accounted for 71.2% of the announcements. Of those, the NFL accounted for 30.6%; NHL, 27.1%; MLB, 21.2%; NBA, 15.3%; and Major League Soccer, 5.9%. The remaining 28.8% of announcements fell into the following categories: venue selling a variety of events (e.g., sport and entertainment, minor league and major league), 16.9%; intercollegiate athletic departments, 6.8%; and professional minor league organizations, 5.1%. There were no postings for motor sports or outdoor and rotating events. In 19.7% of listings, the position required selling premium seating for non-sporting events (e.g., concerts). Sales of premium seating in arenas accounted for 46.1% of listings, with 44.3% for stadiums, and 9.6% for a variety of facility types. Premium seats at indoor venues accounted for 48.2% of announcements, 43.0% were for outdoor venues, and 8.8% were for both types.

Most of the announcements included broad sales functions: 76.3% asked the applicant to assist with account service, 69.5% asked the applicant to sell, and

42.4% required the applicant to participate in the process of renewing accounts. Nearly half (46.0%) asked the applicant to engage in all three tasks, and 55.6% of the postings sought applicants who could assist and work with other areas within the organization.

A total of 20 job responsibilities related to sales were examined (Table 1). Only four appeared in at least half of the job announcements: developing relationships with prospects and clients was identified in 61.9% of the postings, followed by working game-day events, 54.2%; making outbound sales calls, 53.4%; and making in-person presentations, 52.5%. Additionally, 57.6% of the postings identified achievement of specific sales goals. The protocol examined 10 transferrable skills, of which four were identified in at least half of the postings: communication skills, 83.9%; computer skills, 63.6%; willingness to work long hours, 55.1%; and organization skills, 51.7% (Table 2). Nine preferred experiences were coded and examined (Table 3). Customer service experience, identified in 51.7% of postings, was clearly the most important prior experience sport organizations sought.

Chi square analysis revealed three significant differences among the 20 job responsibility variables. Entry-level premium sales personnel were more likely to make outbound sales calls, [$\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 5.28, p = .017$] and engage in customer relationship management [$\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 3.50, p = .047$] while non-entry-level positions were more likely to seek candidates who could develop relationships with clients and prospects, $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 7.19, p = .006$. Only one significant difference was found among transferrable skills: All 11 positions that identified bilingualism in the posting were for entry-level jobs. No differences were found in prior work experiences.

Logistic regression was utilized to examine the variables that predicted

Table 1

Job Responsibilities Listed for Premium-Seat Sales Positions

Job responsibility	<i>n</i>	Percent of listings
Develop relationships with clients	73	61.9%
Work game day events	64	54.2%
Make outbound sales calls	63	53.4%
Make sales presentations	62	52.5%
Renewals	50	42.4%
Develop sales plans	49	41.5%
Manage suite inventory	47	39.8%
Generate sales reports	47	39.8%
Attend networking events	45	38.1%
Customer relationship management	42	35.6%
Conduct research	29	24.5%
Obtain referrals	28	23.7%
Utilize consultative sales technique	27	22.9%
Sales force management	23	19.5%
Fulfillment	20	16.9%
Upsell	11	9.3%
Give facility tours	7	5.9%
Evaluation (return on objectives)	5	4.2%

Table 2

Types of Transferrable Skills Sought for Premium-Seat Sales Positions

Transferrable skill	<i>n</i>	Percent of listings
Communication skills	99	83.9%
Computer skills	75	63.6%
Willingness to work long hours	65	55.1%
Organizational skills	61	51.7%
Strong work ethic	52	44.1%
Positive attitude	42	35.6%
Team player	40	33.9%
Creativity	37	31.4%
Bilingual	11	9.3%
Personable	8	6.8%

Table 3

Types of Preferred Experience Listed for Premium-Seat Sales Positions

Preferred experience	<i>n</i>	Percent of listings
Customer service	61	51.7%
Any type of sales (general)	44	37.3%
Sport sales	40	33.9%
Sport industry (general)	27	22.9%
Premium seat sales	15	12.7%
Business-to-Business sales	9	7.6%
Sales force management	9	7.6%
Selling in a specific market	9	7.6%
Client account management	7	5.9%

whether the position was entry-level. The inclusion of job responsibility variables improved the ability to predict the presence of an entry-level position ($\chi^2 = 29.79$, $p < .001$; Nagelkerke R Square = .302). The same variables were significant in the logistic regression as in the chi square analysis. Entry-level premium sales personnel were eight times more likely to make outbound sales calls and 2.6 times more likely to engage in customer relationship management. Non-entry-level premium sales personnel were five times more likely to develop relationships with clients and prospects. The summary of the 10 job responsibilities variables' impact upon the regression model are summarized in Table 4. The inclusion of transferrable skills variables and preferred experience variables did not improve the ability to predict the presence of an entry-level position.

Differences among the Big Four professional leagues also were examined, but the results should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size ($n = 80$) across four categories. The NFL accounted for 26 postings; NHL, 23; MLB, 18; and NBA, 13. Five significant differences were found among professional sport leagues. MLB positions were more likely than those in the NBA to manage suite inventory [$\chi^2 (3, N = 80) = 12.1$, $p = .007$]. MLB sales personnel were also more likely than the NFL to develop sales plans [$\chi^2 (3, N = 80) = 13.0$, $p = .005$]. NHL applicants were more likely than those in the NFL to engage in renewals [$\chi^2 (3, N = 80) = 17.1$, $p = .001$]. The NBA was more likely than the NFL to require sales presentations [$\chi^2 (3, N = 80) = 8.5$, $p = .036$]. The NFL was the least likely to expect applicants to develop relationships with clients [$\chi^2 (3, N = 80) = 8.4$, p

Table 4

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Predicting Entry-Level Positions from Job Responsibilities (n = 118)

Job responsibility	B	SE B	Wald	df	Sig	e ^B
Customer relationship mgt.	-.968	.489	3.919	1	.048	.380
Attend networking events	.776	.629	1.522	1	.217	2.173
Generate sales reports	.369	.486	.576	1	.448	1.447
Manage suite inventory	.304	.479	.401	1	.527	1.355
Develop sales plans	.521	.500	1.087	1	.297	1.684
Renewals	-.261	.521	.251	1	.616	.770
Make sales presentations	.595	.494	1.454	1	.228	1.813
Make outbound sales calls	-2.081	.641	10.552	1	.001	.125
Work game day events	.766	.470	2.660	1	.103	2.152
Develop relationship with clients	1.611	.505	10.186	1	.001	5.010
Constant	-1.482	.586	6.402	1	.011	.227
Model χ^2						29.8
Model df						10
Model Nagelkerke R Square						.302

Note: e^B = exponentiated B, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

= .038]. The only significant difference detected was in transferrable skills, with the NBA and NHL more likely than MLB and the NFL to seek an individual with a positive attitude [$\chi^2(3, N = 80) = 22.3, p = .001$]. There were no differences with respect to preferred experiences.

Discussion

The discussion section focuses on the ways in which sport organizations may be falling short in their approach to relationship development with premium clients, the ways in which premium sales positions differ from ticket sales and sponsorship sales positions, and the ways in which the Big Four professional sports leagues differ in their approach to premium sales positions. Implications for premium sales job seekers are also discussed.

Improving Relationship Development in Premium Sales

Previous research has indicated premium clients are interested in developing mutually beneficial relationships with teams and venues (Lachowetz et al., 2003; Titlebaum, DeMange, & Davis, 2012; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2009, 2010; Titlebaum, Lawrence, Moberg, & Ramos, 2012). The premium sales and service industry appears to recognize this, as evidenced by the fact that developing relationships with clients was the most frequently identified job responsibility. One strategy might be for organizations to adopt eduselling as a sales strategy. Sutton, Lachowetz, and Clark (2000) defined eduselling as “an evolutionary form of selling as it combines needs assessment, relationship building, customer education and aftermarketing in a process that originates at the prospect targeting stage and progresses to an on-going partnership agreement (p. 146). Sport organizations may be missing an opportunity to deepen their relationships with clients by not emphasizing the use of eduselling, a job responsibility that was not identified in any of the position announcements in this study. Premium clients interviewed in Titlebaum et al. (2012) often indicated that they would appreciate new ideas from the team regarding how to effectively activate their premium purchase and maximize their investment.

Differences Among Ticket, Sponsorship, and Premium Sales

Several trends emerged when announcements of premium sales positions were compared to those for sponsorship sales and sport ticket sales positions. First, outbound cold calls are the domain of entry-level sales personnel in premium sales and ticket sales. Pierce et al. (2012) found that entry-level salespeople were eight

times more likely to make outbound cold calls; this study found that premium salespeople were four times more likely to make outbound cold calls. There was no significant difference in sponsorship sales positions (Diamond et al., in press). Overall, the amount of outbound sales calling decreases as sales personnel move from ticket sales to premium and sponsorship sales positions. Pierce et al. (2012) found that 67.2% of ticket sales position announcements identified cold-calling, compared to 53.4% in this study and 43.3% in a sponsorship study (Diamond et al. in press.). Similarly, the focus on database or customer relationship management decreases as sales personnel move from ticket sales to premium and sponsorship sales positions. Pierce et al. (2012) found that 55.3% of ticket sales positions announcements identified database management, compared to 35.6% of premium sales positions in this study and 25.2% in Diamond et al. (in press). However, database management was more likely to be a responsibility of non-entry-level sponsorship sales personnel (Diamond et al., in press), while it was more likely to be the responsibility of entry-level employees in premium sales.

While outbound sales calls and database management are more heavily emphasized in ticket sales positions, input and on-the-job creativity appears to increase in premium sales jobs. While Pierce et al. (2012) found that only 20% of ticket sales positions identified the development of sales strategies and creativity in job postings, the premium sales postings in this study listed the development of sales strategies in 41.5% of cases and creativity as a transferrable skill in 31.4% of cases. These findings make sense, given that ticket sales are a common entry point to the industry. The complexity and variety of tasks generally appears to increase as one moves from ticket sales positions focused on outbound sales calls to premium seating and sponsorships, where developing a sophisticated understanding of client needs and using creativity to solve those needs take on significant importance.

The second trend indicates that sponsorship sales positions focus much more heavily on evaluation and fulfillment than premium sales positions. Diamond et al. (in press) found that 67.7% of sponsorship sales postings identified fulfillment compared to 16.9% of premium sales postings in this study. Likewise, sponsorship outstripped premium sales with respect to evaluation, 22.0% to 4.2%. Sport organizations should consider increasing their focus on return on investment for premium clients, especially considering that premium clients have reported that sport organizations could better serve them by evaluating their return on investment or objec-

tives (Titlebaum et al., 2012). Evaluation of the premium investment could be assigned to premium sales employees. Teams that provide this service to their corporate premium clients will likely see a stronger partnership between the team and client, resulting in more renewals.

In the third trend, sale of premium seats appears to intersect with more areas of the organization than do sales of tickets. Pierce et al. (2012) found that only 30.6% of ticket sales position announcements identified working with other functional areas in the organization, compared to 55.6% of premium sales positions. The Two-Stage Luxury Suite Team Selling Framework developed by Lawrence and Moberg (2009) suggests that an outside database firm, food and beverage, corporate sponsorship, marketing, facilities/operations, and customer relationship management might all be involved in the sales and servicing of a suite, along with sales personnel. This lends credence to the structure of a separate premium sales department that operates differently from ticket sales.

Differences among Big Four Professional Sport Leagues

Previous research has found that the motivations for the purchase of luxury suites are similar among professional sport leagues (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010), and this study's results echo those findings—with two main differences. First, the results of this study indicated that MLB premium sales personnel were the most likely to manage suite inventory and develop sales plans. Previous research also found that MLB is significantly more likely than the NBA or NFL to perceive that suite purchases are motivated by employee entertainment and corporate gifts (Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010). One possible explanation for these findings might be that MLB teams have far more home games (81) than teams in other leagues. With a long season and a large number of events, it is logical that the sales staff would provide and value enticements to suite holders, focus on a variety of usages for suites, and have more people managing suite inventory. They might also sell more suites on a game-by-game basis, resulting in a greater need for suite inventory management. Additionally, more unsold inventory also would result in a greater need for sales plans.

The second difference was that the position announcements in the NFL did not emphasize developing relationships with customers. The NFL was the least likely to mention developing relationships with clients, engaging in renewals, making sales presentations, or developing sales plans. With the fewest number of home games compared to other sports, demand for premium seats

is generally greater in the NFL than in other leagues. In fact, many NFL teams have a waiting list for suites (McIntyre, 2012). As a result, it might not be as important for NFL sales professionals to develop relationships with customers because there are other buyers ready to take their place. Similarly, there is no need to focus on sales presentations or renewals if prospecting rarely occurs and renewal rates are high. Although this strategy might serve the league well at the current time, its long-term impact could be felt if a team has a few years of poor performance and demand for premium seating drops.

For the Premium Sales Job Seeker

It is important for premium sales job seekers to recognize that premium sales positions require more experience than general sales positions, but less experience than sponsorship sales positions. Compared to Pierce et al. (2012), who found that 66% of inside sales positions required less than or equal to one year of experience, the current study found only 18.2% of the position announcements required less than or equal to one year of experience. However, the average 2.67 years of experience for premium sales positions was less than the 3.37 years of experience sought for sponsorship sales positions in the same time frame (Diamond et al., in press). This point is underscored by the finding that 79.9% of premium sales positions required at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 94.6% of sponsorship sales postings (Diamond et al., in press) and only 44.0% for inside ticket sales (Pierce et al., 2012).

It is not a stretch to conclude that experience and education are critical to obtaining these jobs, but understanding the type of experience needed to advance is more difficult to assess. With only 12.7% of postings seeking candidates with past experience directly in premium sales, a wide range of career paths and experiences can lead to a job selling premium inventory in the sport industry. For example, customer service (51.7%) was the most frequently mentioned type of experience desired. Prior sales experience (37.3%) also was important, along with sport sales (33.9%), and general experience in the sport industry. A variety of backgrounds are valued for those individuals looking to move from another job arena to premium sales in sports.

Limitations

This study has two methodological limitations. First, the use of content analysis to study position announcements is limited by the detail provided in the announce-

ment by the sport organizations. While some organizations were detailed in their description of the position requirements, other organizations limited the amount of information. The absence of a job responsibility in the position announcement does not necessarily mean the job applicant would not be expected to perform that duty. The researchers were limited in the thoroughness and quality of the position descriptions provided by the sport organizations. Second, while the researchers selected what are believed to be the most heavily used sports job Web sites, it is possible that some position announcements were not included because they were posted on different sites.

Future Research

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the job market that is not affected by short-term economic trends, researchers should examine position announcements over a 5- to 10-year period. Qualitative research also could enhance understanding of job announcements by soliciting the opinions of sales managers about the most important skills needed on the job. Additionally, job announcements in other functional areas in the sport industry (e.g., event management, facility management, box office operations) should be examined to inform sport industry decision makers and sport management academicians.

Conclusion

A review of the premium seating literature and statistical examination from a content analysis of 118 premium sales position announcements posted in 2011 yielded relevant insights into the premium seat industry. First, sport organizations have demonstrated a commitment to developing relationship with premium clients, but still need to make strides in the related areas of educating and evaluation. As the premium seating industry evolves, sport organizations need to be aggressive in helping premium clients activate the features and benefits of their purchase and evaluate its return on investment or objectives. Second, critical examination of the traditional vertical organizational structure employed within the sales department should consider the fact that over half of the positions announcements in this study asked sales personnel to work cross functionally with other departments in the organization. The Two-Stage Luxury Suite Team Selling Framework proposed by Moberg and Lawrence (2009) may provide insights into a more effective organizational structure that leverages the cross-functional relationships that naturally exist in premium sales positions. However, as seen with the differences among the Big Four professional sport leagues based on the number of games in a season, sport orga-

nizations should also consider the nature of the venue, sport, and regional market when examining changes.

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