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When it comes to brand loyalty, sports fans can’t be beat. They paint their faces, adorn their houses with logos, and create family traditions around a single team.

But loyalty can only take sports teams so far. Lots of fan love doesn’t guarantee a full stadium. It doesn’t mean that a team knows how to find the most impactful sponsors. And it certainly doesn’t mean that a fan will choose coming to the stadium over the comfort of their couch.

And that’s where data comes in.

Sports organizations already have access to rich stores of fan data—from who’s buying season tickets (and who’s not) to where fans’ brand loyalties lie. Collected in a multitude of ways from a wealth of sources, this data can be invaluable in helping boost revenue from ticket sales and sponsorships.

So instead of just sitting on a stash of fan data that could ultimately make or break your season, read on to find out:

- All the sources of fan data that can be used to market more effectively to fans and sponsors
- How unifying fan data from multiple sources enables a fuller, more meaningful view—and a greater return on data investments
- Real-life examples of data-driven marketing successes achieved by some of the top sports organizations in the world

Most sports organizations are looking at an embarrassment of riches when it comes to fan data, and this guide is meant to help them make the most of it.
6 Important Sources to Collect Fan Data

Sports fans are some of the most willing participants when it comes to sharing information about themselves. They follow you on Facebook, they post about games, they buy merchandise, and they attend games. When they’re at games, they log into wi-fi, they purchase food and beverages, and they bring their family and friends. They’re painting a pretty clear picture of who they are and what they like—you just need to make sure you’re paying attention. This information is invaluable for creating the kind of rich fan profiles that makes it possible to sell more tickets and attract more sponsors. You’ll read more about that later in this guide—but for now, let’s look at some of the main sources of fan data.

Ticket Purchases

Ticketing systems like Ticketmaster make it easy to collect data about ticket buyers—not just basic data such as name, email, and the data and type of event attended, but also information about how often someone buys a ticket, in what quantity, and other data points that can be useful for targeting fans for promotions and other activities. And today, more and more sports organizations are using innovative new ways to optimize data collection around ticketing. For example, Circuit of the Americas (COTA), the Formula 1 racing facility near Austin, Texas, created a first-class responsive activation app that offered a minimalist Facebook login to collect first-party data from ticket-buying COTA fans. Within a week, they were able to capture enough statistically relevant interest and behavioral data from these ticket purchasers, giving them deep insight into their audience. They were able to identify their premium audiences and run campaigns against segments that were most likely to convert. In 2013, they had 6x ROI on ad spend. The following year, they had 16x ROI on ad spend.
In-Stadium Apps

In order to stay competitive, teams are redefining the fan experience by building in-stadium apps that allow fans to order food and beverages from their seats, watch high-def replay videos, or find the bathroom with the shortest line. Fans who enjoy interacting with a sports team’s mobile app represent a great opportunity for the team to collect a variety of data about their preferences.

For example, Spanish football team Real Madrid launched an initiative to leverage Microsoft’s cloud platform to cultivate its fan base through the team’s mobile app. The team is engaging fans through the mobile app and learning more about their wants and needs—and then using that data to engage them even more—including with relevant and personalized content like instant replays, exclusive content, and the ability to purchase merchandise.

The Real Madrid official app was downloaded over a million times in the first three days in the app store.
6 Important Sources to Collect Fan Data

Social Posts
It’s tough to top social media as a source of data about what fans are thinking, feeling, and saying about their teams at any given second. By putting formal processes in place to track this data, sports organizations can capture valuable information to help keep marketing and other efforts on track. For example, NASCAR has teamed up with HP to create the Fan and Media Engagement Center, which captures all the information NASCAR fans post publicly, applies analytics to it, and distributes the results to the appropriate teams throughout the organization.

Wi-Fi Activation
A Cisco report revealed that the Internet is as important as air, water, food, and shelter to one in three college students and young professionals. In order to attract a new wave of sports fans, stadiums have to ensure that their tech is as good as their hot dogs and beer.

Wi-Fi-equipped stadiums and arenas today provide Wi-Fi access to fans in exchange for permission to collect their data. That’s how The Barclays Center, home of the Brooklyn Nets basketball team and one of the most connected stadiums in the world, gets info about how and where fans are logging in, and what services they’re using. This in turn enables the arena to identify communication opportunities as well as potential in-stadium marketing offers. It’s a growing trend, with organizations like the Florida Panthers hockey team and others setting up and gating Wi-Fi routers in their venues.

“Stadiums and arenas today provide Wi-Fi access to fans in exchange for permission to collect their data.”
Unique Data Opportunities

In addition to asking fans for their information in exchange for Wi-Fi access, sports organizations can explore other ways for fans to trade data for value. This can be something as simple and obvious as collecting information from e-commerce sites that sell fan merchandise. It can also be something as creative as what the Indiana Pacers did when they sponsored a contest to fill spots on the Pacemates dance team—and gave fans a vote in the outcome (yep, you guessed it: in exchange for their data). By setting new activation offers, the Pacers could uncover different fan segments and build personas around them to support content and marketing strategies.

The Pacers had over 5,000 people use social and email Audience Engagements to vote for who should be the next Pacemate. They were able to use this data when seeking a sponsor to headline their dance team.

Other Sources of Data

Ticketmaster and other ticket vendors can provide teams with rich data on who’s coming to which games, how often they buy tickets, where they sit, and many other data points. That’s just one example; sources of data on sports fans are limited only by teams’ imagination. Case in point: The Brooklyn Nets sponsored a health challenge in which fans signed up to feed data to the Nets app from Fitbit, RunKeeper, Twitter, and others. Fans who signed up earned points they could redeem for team merchandise.
Other Sources of Data (cont.)

What needs to happen to make the most of all the data at your disposal?

To realize maximum return on investment for data collection, sports organizations need a first-party data management platform (DMP) that’s designed to bring all that valuable information together in one place. A unified DMP delivers a single view across all data collected and makes it easier to access and manage data from multiple sources.

Umbel's platform combines the most important sources of fan data to create the greatest marketing impact.

More About Umbel For Sports >
Unifying Data to Optimize Insights

It’s great to have data that shows who’s buying tickets to games, how fans are engaging at the stadium, what they’re posting on social media, etc.—but it’s even better to be able to unify all that data in one place, view it as a whole, and learn things you could never know otherwise. Here’s how you can start getting to know your fans.

A Richer View of Fans

No one source of data can tell you everything you want to know about fans, but you can come pretty close. By combining first-party opt-in data collected through your team apps with data from second and third-party sources like ticket vendors, in-stadium technology (routers and beacons), and merchandise POS systems, a far richer view of fans develops than any single source could possibly provide.

A Better Way to Segment and Target Fans

Segmentation is vital to making sense of unified data and then taking action on it. With a data management platform that’s architected to easily organize, index and query the data in it, it’s easy to quickly look at the data based on a multitude of attributes—including demographics, brand affinities, behaviors and customer lifetime value—and create highly specific segments. Unlike traditional segmentation based on a single attribute (like “who bought a ticket to a particular game?”), unified data can answer what content did ticket-buyers consume on the website, what they purchased at a game, and what brands they love on social media.
Unifying Data to Optimize Insights

Umbel Success Story

Indiana Pacers

Data Sources:
Ticketmaster, Facebook, LinkedIn, MobileApp, Wi-Fi Routers, Acxiom & More

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Umbel Solution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need more data about fans</td>
<td>Collected fan data on 139k+ fans (10% population of Indianapolis metro) via the Umbel Platform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Existing data in disparate silos</td>
<td>Customer data is now unified across multiple sources including Ticketmaster, Facebook &amp; Wi-Fi routers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase marketing ROI</td>
<td>Fan insights &amp; demographic data now drives ticket and merchandise sales, as well as new sponsorships</td>
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Read More Success Stories >
In 1998, 54% of sports fans reported that they’d rather attend a game than watch it at home; by 2011, that dropped by almost half, to 29%. Today, fans have more ways than ever to watch their favorite teams—from live streaming to cable to their local bar—making it much tougher to fill seats at stadiums.

So what’s the key to selling more tickets?

Say it with us: Data.

Data makes possible more effective marketing campaigns that get butts in seats, but it also enables a richer, more satisfying fan experience once they’re there. The following are some of the ways teams are using data to bring fans back to live sports—and keep them coming back.

**Pinpointing Fans With Personalized Offers**

Whether you’re talking about college or pro sports, more and more teams are realizing the value of personalization to boost ticket sales. They’re able to take the insights obtained by collecting data from all their sources and use it to create targeted ads and ticket offers that appeal precisely to fans based on their demographics, ticket buying history, online behaviors, and other factors.

For example, Mississippi State University created audience profiles and segments of more than 500,000 fans during their 2014 season, when the MSU Bulldogs shot up the rankings to number one faster than any team in history. That work led to a **1300% return on the university’s digital media spend** for the ticket packages they were promoting.
Pinpointing Fans With Personalized Offers (cont.)

Our experience at Umbel backs this up; we’ve seen targeted offers drive 5x-40x ROI. The Indiana Pacers basketball team is a great case in point. The Pacers use data sources ranging from ticketing to social media to Wi-Fi access systems to build fan personas and target them with social campaigns. In one case, they identified student-age fans likely to attend future Pacers-Knicks games, tweeted a ticket discount for them, and got returns up to 5X return on ad spend (ROAS) for single-ticket sales.

Delivering a Better Live Experience

Football, baseball, soccer, hockey, auto racing: Whatever the sport, teams and venues are upping their game when it comes to making sure fans have such a great experience they’ll want to keep coming back to the stadium, ballpark, arena or track for more—instead of just watching from home. Powerful wireless networks in sports venues play a big role in delivering experiences that keep fans coming back.

Sports fans love to share content, and that makes Wi-Fi an important wireless capability for spectator sports. Wi-Fi lets them view and share team content including replays and close-ups. And it enables easy interaction with experience-enhancing mobile apps that help fans find parking spots, get seat upgrades, order refreshments without leaving their seats and even find the shortest restroom lines. (And in the process, teams are able to collect data that fans share in exchange for Wi-Fi access, as well as data from the third-party applications fans use.)

Teams are upping their game when it comes to making sure fans keep coming back—instead of just watching from home.
Delivering a Better Live Experience (cont.)

Wireless data networks also enable other game-enhancing capabilities like touch-screen kiosks for buying merchandise and placing food orders; live streaming on giant HD video screens; GoPro video streaming for showing fans new and different perspectives of the action; and augmented reality experiences.

Drawing on Other Genres to Grow the Fan Base

Selling more tickets to existing fans is one thing; attracting new fans to sports events is tougher. One data-driven strategy for bringing in new people that has recently emerged is to look across genres to find similarities between a team’s known fans and fans of another sport or even fans of an artist who’s performing in the same venue. This cross-genre take on ticket sales requires a big database, with enough data to provide sufficient information to apply analytics successfully. It also requires the right data, including social, ticket history, email preferences, etc.

For venues where teams play, cross-genre marketing can also be a useful tool for booking entertainment on days when the home team doesn’t have a game. For example, the Indiana Pacers found demographic similarities between a subset of fans who’d bought tickets to see the Pacers play at Bankers Life Fieldhouse and fans of the country singer Luke Bryan—resulting in the facility booking Bryan for a future date.
The days when sports sponsorship was as simple as attaching a brand logo to a uniform are over. Instead, it’s about what Stanford Business School calls a “triangle of association between team, sponsor and fan”—where, for example, fans follow a brand on social media because it’s associated with a team, and a certain percentage ultimately purchase the brand because of that association. Teams need data both to both drive this definition of sponsorship (because it relies on knowledge of fans and their behavior) and to demonstrate its value to sponsors (because it enables quantifiable measures of the brand impact.

**Show Sponsors Who They’re Reaching**

Fan data coming from a multitude of sources provides a robust view into the fans – a view that shows brands exactly the people they’re reaching with their sponsorships. A team can share with a sponsor highly granular data about the people that make up their brand audience within the fan base, from income levels to spending habits and anything else they’ve shared with you that’s valuable for the sponsor to know. That knowledge can also help sponsors design experiences those fans specifically want, which can in turn positively impact brand enthusiasm and loyalty among people who are fans of both the team and the brand.

“Help sponsors design experiences those fans specifically want”
Increase Your Digital Sponsorship Opportunities

Teams are now using trivia, digital scratch-off contests, user-generated content (UGC) like meme generators, and more to engage fans and learn more about them with social logins. But **engagement campaigns** are more than an opportunity to collect data.

One issue that teams and venues have is showing value to their sponsors, but the other is limits to their sponsorship inventory. Digital engagement campaigns can substantially expand that inventory before, after, and during games and events with sponsored engagement campaigns like “pick your favorite player” rankings. That inventory can also include some of the data sources discussed earlier, including mobile apps and wi-fi logins.

Teams with UGC average **over 1,000** branded and shareable engagements upon deployment.
Measure the ROI Impact of a Sponsorship

Data makes it possible to both identify good sponsorship opportunities for brands before they invest in a team and to demonstrate to brands exactly the return on their investment. The data company SponsorPitch.com, for example, uses data analytics to define the criteria for desirable sponsorship opportunities and then matches those to brands, making recommendations to its clients accordingly.

And what about after brands invest in sponsorship? Data tells them exactly what they need to know then, too. If, say, a beverage brand sponsors a section of a team’s stadium or arena, data will show over time the increase in affinity for the brand among fans who sit in that section. Those are the kind of clear metrics the Florida Panthers have used not only to sign up sponsors, but to upsell them based on demographics and brand affinities.

Game day has an undeniable magic: A stadium that was empty just a few hours earlier starts to crackle with energy and excitement as fans stream in, then roars to life when the teams take the field. Everyone and everything that goes into creating that buzz also creates a data stream that tells a detailed and personal story about the fans—not just who’s buying tickets, but why. What they love about the game. What they love (or find frustrating) about the venue, the team, the sponsors, even the parking. Collecting and unifying that data provides insights that keep loyal fans coming back, buying more tickets, and bringing new fans with them.
About Umbel

Umbel helps the most admired companies in sports and entertainment deliver the ultimate fan experience. The leading first-party data management platform, Umbel empowers you to grow your fan base with engaging data collection campaigns, know your audience with a unified view from any source, and drive revenue with hyper-targeted advertising. Our goal isn’t for you to just collect data—it’s to make data the most valuable asset you own. Founded in 2010, Umbel is headquartered in Austin, Texas.