Content Analysis of Entry-Level Sport Ticket Sales and Service Job Announcements

David Pierce, Ball State University
Jeffrey Petersen, Baylor University
Galen Clavio, Indiana University

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The sale of sport tickets and other products is considered the lifeblood of the sport industry. The financial scope of the sport industry in the United States was recently estimated at $185 billion for 2009 (R.K. Miller & Associates, 2009), and paid regular season attendance in the four major professional sports in the 2009-10 seasons topped 133 million spectators (Sports Business Journal Turnstile Tracker, 2010). The employees of the sales force within sport organizations form a vital component to spur the growth of this industry.

Ticket sales have been noted as a common mode of entry level employment into the sport industry (Washo, 2004). As such, research into the methods and techniques of teaching sport sales have been increasing within the field of sport management. From the initial development of the Pentagon of Sport Sales Training as a pedagogical model (Irwin, Southhall, & Sutton, 2007), many studies have now called for the integration of experiential learning and sales experiences that connect students directly with industry practitioners (McKelvey & Southall, 2008; Pauline & Pauline, 2008; Pierce & Petersen, 2010). However, no study has examined the job requirements and qualifications via position announcements. The purpose of this study was to examine the current state of entry-level sport ticket sales position announcements.

Position announcements provide a recruitment vehicle for employees, and they reveal the nature of the skills required within the industry (Todd, McKeen & Galupe, 1995). They also provide a written record of the job openings that can be connected to geographic distribution of jobs, job task and duties, and date related to the compensation and benefits associated with the jobs. Analyses of job advertisements serve to provide an indication of employers’ preferences for new hires and expectations of their future needs (Park, Lu, & Marion, 2009). According to Wong (2009), reviews of job announcements provide a better understanding of available jobs and the specific experiences and skills employers seek in their prospective employees.

This study utilized a content analysis methodology to collect the pertinent data from position announcements on two sport job web sites, Teamwork Online and Jobs In Sports. These two sites were selected due to their prominence in the sport job listing industry (Wong, 2009). Following the purchase of website access, sport sales job listings on each web site were copied and digitally saved, over a period of time lasting six months, from September 1, 2009 to March 1, 2010. This collection process yielded a total of 733 unique sport sales position announcements. An online codebook was designed on the website SurveyMonkey that allowed for coding in different geographical locations to enter their coding responses into a centralized data collector.

Following the prescriptions of Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) for examining intercoder reliability, 84 of the 733 listings, or 11.5%, were randomly selected for intercoder analysis. Generally, an intercoder reliability coefficient of at least .70 is required for each variable coded. The results of the intercoder analysis for this study showed acceptable levels of agreement for each variable, and ranged from .82 for "Consultative Skills" to 1.00 for several manifest variables such as "Hourly Wage" and "Minimum Age Requirement.”

Eight states accounted for over half of all position announcements, including 93 announcements in California; 68 positions in New York; 53 openings in Florida and Texas; 34 openings in Pennsylvania; and 32 positions each in Illinois, New Jersey, and Ohio. There were twelve major areas that the coders noted in their coding of the announcements with regard to the type of sales position. Nearly one-third (237) of the 733 announcements were for inside sales positions where account executives were responsible for selling season, partial, or group ticket plans. Positions in sponsorship sales accounted for 13% of the announcements, advertising for media (12%), box office (9%), full menu marketing (9%), sporting goods (6%), premium seating (4%), customer service (4%), executive level position with oversight of sales (3%), retail operations (3%), event bookings (3%), and memberships (2%).

In specifically examining ticket sales and service positions, which includes inside sales, full menu marketing, and customer service positions, there were 335 position announcements, 27.5% of which were for a director or manager position with supervisory responsibilities. Professional sport organizations accounted for 58% of the ticket sales and service announcements, and minor league sport organizations accounted for 33%. In terms of the required educational level of the job applicant, 50% of the announcements did not list a minimum education degree requirement. A bachelor's degree was required in 42% of the announcements, high school degree (4%), associate’s degree (2%), some college (2%), and a graduate degree (2%). In terms of
sales experience, 66% of the positions required less than one year of experience, 32% required between two and five years of experience, and only 2% required more than five years of experience.

There were 19 job responsibilities and 9 transferrable skills coded for the 335 ticket sales and service positions. The top two job responsibilities for ticket sales and service positions were cold calling and customer service, which were identified in 67% of all position announcements, followed closely by prospecting (64%). Database management (55%), game day duties (53%), and face-to-face presentations (50%) were identified in over half of the position announcements. Communication skills (78%) were the most often identified transferrable skill, followed by computer skills (67%), work ethic (65%), and working the hours required in the sport industry (58%).

The chi square statistic was utilized to examine differences between director and non-director positions. Position announcements seeking a director were more likely than non-director positions to ask job applicants to do the following ($p < .05$ for all significant results): assist other functional areas, perform financial management, motivate account executives, develop sales strategies, negotiate contracts, develop sales goals, and supervise account executives. Non-director positions were more likely than director positions to do the following: cold call, prospect, present face-to-face, manage databases, provide customer service, meet or exceed sales goals, give facility tours, perform duties on game day, receive inbound calls, and upsell current clients. In terms of transferrable skills, director positions were more likely to require consultative sales skills. Non-director positions were more likely to solicit sales personnel who can work the hours required in the sport industry, have communication skills, and have a strong work ethic.

This study is important as current literature is scant regarding entry level employment opportunities within the sport management field as a whole and within sport sales specifically. The initial quest to understand the qualifications and skills desired by sport organizations for ticket sales and service employees also informs academicians in the development of curricula and learning experiences that will develop these skills. As a growing number of graduates from sport management students are graduating and seeking entry-level employment, it is important that they are aware of the general nature of these sales positions. It is additionally vital that these students, as sport management program graduates, develop and enhance these employable skills via the academic and experiential learning aspects of their sport management degree.