

## Valuing Fan Experience Spaces

**D**eciding how to assign value to certain spaces in a sports venue can be difficult. At Dimensional Innovations, we believe the first step must be establishing the competitive advantages of our client's "product" – the live sporting event experience.

The key differentiators between a sporting event and competing entertainment options are team, passion, and community. We all know winning matters, but even more important than championships and titles, teams represent our communities and tribes. They give us bragging rights. Fans want to be an extended member of the team.

Sports fans are incredibly passionate. There are very few places in our lives where screaming, crying, shouting, hugging strangers, or obnoxious high-fives are completely acceptable. We want to accentuate and build upon that passion so fans continue to come back for more.

Above all else, fans want to feel they are a part of something bigger. They want to belong. Even more so, they want to belong to sub-groups within the larger fan base. In a sea of 80,000 people, or even 5,000 people, fans only have the capacity to connect directly with a few hundred. We need to help them make those connections to find their passionate sub-tribes.

By understanding the need to create these spaces for fans to connect, we can then frame our solutions accordingly, and determine how to value spaces. In other words, everything we do must enhance the key differentiators, and therefore, the overall experience.

### MEASURE EXPERIENCE OVER REVENUE

Certain segments of the retail industry have started to move away from measuring spaces in revenue per square foot, and instead have begun to measure in experience per square foot. This ideal system for measuring sporting and entertainment venues tracks our core differentiators. In sporting venues, there is not always a direct correlation between a given space and generating revenue. Instead, it is the



**Bring to Life:** The Hy-Vee Hot Zone inside Arrowhead Stadium transforms "dead space" beneath pedestrian circulation into an area for brand activation and pregame concerts.

sum of its parts.

Think of it this way: a lobby or entryway is not typically a place where fans spend money, but it does immediately set the emotional tone for the experience they can expect, the community they are a part of, and the passion they feel.

To understand the idea of measuring experience, consider the current trend of internet or mobile device connectivity in stadiums and arenas. Our belief is that connectivity can add great value to a facility and be worth an investment, if it brings fans closer to the team, makes fans more passionate in some way, or helps to enhance the sense of community among fans.

The connectivity must be better or as good as the service a fan can get outside of the venue. If it is less functional, then it detracts from the event. That's to say, a team would be better served to provide no connectivity at all and be transparent about it than to provide a lesser connectivity option that does not help accomplish their goals.

Here are three concepts and solutions that have helped to enhance the three core differ-

entiators, and therefore, increased the experience per square foot of our client's venues.

### INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Direct interaction with players is perhaps the greatest way to connect fans to the team, but that is not always a realistic option. We helped develop a unique and highly effective alternative for the Chicago Blackhawks.

The experience allows fans to take photos with their favorite players using augmented reality. Fans can also select various United Center locations, including in the locker room and on the ice. Fans can then share these images with their friends and family through social media.

The augmented reality experience brings retail shopping to a new level by integrating cutting-edge technology and making it easy for fans to connect and share with other fans via their own social outlets. The solution increases the experience per square foot of any given space and even increases revenue potential if clients want to charge for images. Dimensional Innovations partnered with GeoMedia, the Blackhawks design team, and

# DESIGNER'S DESK BY DREW BERST



**Top:** Using augmented reality, Chicago Blackhawks fans have their photos taken with their favorite players on the ice.  
**Bottom:** Tailgating experiences will continue to elevate with gathering destinations built over premium parking locations.



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Blue Marble to create this interactive fan experience.

## **RE-INVENTING OVERLOOKED SPACES**

Enhancing the passion among a fan base can be challenging, but often an effective solution can be as simple as providing them a unique space to gather. There are numerous overlooked areas throughout facilities that can be leveraged to increase the experience and revenue per square foot of the venue.

One great example is our collaborative effort with sports architect Populous, the Kansas City Chiefs, and retailer Hy-Vee to create the Hy-Vee Hot Zone inside Arrowhead Stadium.

In addition to being a great brand activation, the Hy-Vee Hot Zone is located in

what was “dead space” beneath pedestrian circulation, which has been transformed into the place to be for pregame concerts and gathering, as well as postgame interviews.

Premium fees or memberships can also be charged for access, and the space even provides heat for fans during cold games. The experience is capped with a custom Airstream trailer for four fans to use each game.

## **CUSTOMIZABLE TAILGATING EXPERIENCES**

Sports have proven to strengthen the sense of community among a fan base. On both the collegiate and professional levels, this connection fans continue to crave is proven in the steady growth of sports-related revenue. However, a large percentage of the time spent gathering and building that community occurs organically and just outside the sports venue, particularly through tailgating.

Many attempts have been made to tap into the tailgating experience, and even enhance it. Some attempts have been more effective than others.

We have elevated the entertainment experience by designing a custom platform that essentially sits over the prime parking spaces and gives fans a closer, covered space to interact before and after games. The design also reduces congestion around the arena or stadium and lessens the need for large trailers and RVs.

The platforms have the bonus of allowing users to feel like VIPs, by being above everyone else, and units can be arranged to create broader social settings like an amphitheater or outdoor arena. Finally, the platforms maximize experience per square foot and create a unique and recognizable branding opportunity.

Overall, we’ve found that keeping an improved fan experience at the center of what we do is critical. As fans continue to get more sophisticated in their expectations, the teams and stadiums quickly adapting and being proactive will see the benefits.

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