

And Now a Word from Your Customers

Question: If you want to know what your customers really think, what is the best way to find out?

Answer: Talk to the man whose livelihood depends upon pleasing those customers.



John Wallace,
General Manager of SuiteAgent

That's exactly what *SEAT* does this issue. John Wallace is PrimeSport's Vice President and the General Manager of SuiteAgent and the company's TicketOS ticket management platform. We asked him how PrimeSport's customers presently view the premium seat marketplace during these trying economic times.

Wallace should know. PrimeSport's TicketOS division manages approximately 600,000 season tickets and suites across nearly every venue in the country. Under Wallace's guidance, TicketOS has grown its ticket inventory software client list by 500% since he took the reins in May of 2008.

Wallace's experience with selling to the corporate customer is impressive. Prior to PrimeSport, Wallace served as VP of Digital Sales for Iron Mountain where he was responsible for \$150 million in annual sales. During his tenure there, Wallace grew the business to 100,000 small business customers. Customers during his tenure there read like a suite salesperson's dream list and include: Coca Cola, Bank of America, Cisco, Intel, eBay, Adobe, and Boeing.

The following is Wallace's view of the premium seat business, and how his customers presently view the marketplace.

Q: *Corporations are changing their spending habits and spending patterns for premium seating. If you could offer a piece of advice to the teams, how would you position their pitches to corporations? Is there something they are not doing that you would do in reaching them properly?*

A: I recently brought together five Fortune 500 clients and asked them one question. When was the last time a representative from a team visited you at your office? One person raised their hand and claimed one team (a Northern California team) visited their office three months ago. Other than that, the room was silent. I was shocked to say the least. The point is simple. Spend face-to-face time with your largest premium seat and suite holders. Build relationships with decision makers and understand their corporate marketing plans. Share as many success stories from companies who have successfully built ROI programs from your products and services.

Q: *About 8,000 clients presently control the 12,000 suites in the four major leagues. As someone in the corporate world, do you believe there are clients out there who could purchase suites on a per-event basis? Do you believe the teams should change their marketing focus?*

A: There is no doubt in my mind there are thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of potential per-event customers. Birthdays, anniversaries, holiday parties, employee recognition, poker night, executive interviews, etc. are just a few ideas I've heard recently. A month ago, I connected a good friend with a per-event suite at the LA Kings. How? I knew he was a hockey fanatic and was planning his 40th birthday party for 20 close friends. Parents of young soccer players are another great target for the simple fact there are more kids playing soccer in the US than any other sport. In addition, small to medium size businesses all over the US are

looking for ways to entertain clients, but they don't have the budget to lease a suite or purchase premium seats. Non-headquarter locations of Fortune 2000 companies are great targets as well.

Q: *Some corporations claim they are not using their suites and/or tickets at a high enough utilization rate. Are there too many games? Have ticket prices become too high?*

A: A couple of thoughts- League by league, the problem is different. The NFL has high corporate utilization rates based on the 10 home games. On the other hand, MLB has 81 home games. Furthermore, most NBA and NHL venues offer the 41 home games plus extra events. This adds up to more events than a corporation can attend. Not to mention corporations prefer to entertain clients during the week rather than weekends. I would encourage venues and teams to consider allowing corporations to sell a small portion of their suites to enhance the financial relationship with the team/venue. I realize this is not optimal, but I guarantee if executed properly would go a long way to building a long standing partnership.

Q: *How are corporations adjusting to the new economic reality many are in? Is flat the new up? How are their budgets being squeezed?*

A: I'm far from an economic expert, but the equation seems simple. Consumers are not spending as aggressively as we once did, and this equates to change. Corporations are adjusting by not spending as aggressively, finding alternative revenue opportunities, and finding customers via new media platforms. Social media has taken off, and the wave isn't stopping anytime soon. If you're not pushing the envelope to develop new marketing strategies and new customer acquisition avenues then you are living in the 90's.

Q: *Are there new technologies available that teams should adapt to?*

A: There are new technologies showing up every day in the ticketing space. Most seem to be underwhelming, but there are a few good ones out there. Technology should be used to help fix a problem, and this is why TicketOS and SuiteAgent were developed. TicketOS helps a corporation identify, track, report and utilize their expensive ticket assets. SuiteAgent was developed with the team in mind so we could help move dark suites to companies that can't afford the annual commitment.

Q: *You have a lot of major clients at PrimeSport: For example, Bank of America, Capital One, and Panasonic who represent nearly 400,000 seats and suites on an annual basis. How do the truly national clients position themselves differently that say, the local customer? Do they have different objectives?*

A: Many of the national clients think and act locally. This means national clients have decision makers in the local markets that act the same as a smaller client. In addition, each national client works from a business development plan that involves the local markets. For example, I work with a Fortune 500 company that has business development activities in the Washington, Dallas, and New York markets. They are dependent on the local relationships in 20+ venues and act just like a single market suite holder.

Q: *What do you believe teams should do for their truly national companies that they don't offer now? Is there a different way to treat a suite owner who has multiple suites in multiple venues, versus the local or smaller regional company?*

A: I don't believe there is a need to treat the national companies differently, but as I mentioned earlier, I know there is a need for the teams to partner closer with the large companies. Understand the company's marketing plans, future spend, utilization rates for the suite, etc. Relationships drive corporate business plain and simple, so get ahead of the curve.