

# Driving Scalable Personalized Communication in College Athletics

7 MIN READ



Most college sports fans say there's no better place to experience a big game than surrounded by thousands of your closest friends cheering on their team as one. There is electricity in the air and there are fight songs to sing, traditions to uphold and rivalries to banter.

Yet today, with the advent of incredible, affordable home theaters as well as online offerings gaining traction, some fans are tailgating in the backyard, then catching the game from the couch. This means a drop in attendance for some collegiate sports, leaving college athletics administrators scrambling to find new ways to get fans out to the games.

Schools with less demand have to fight mightily to keep season ticket holders and sell single seats, and they were among the first to feel the pressure of this new reality. Many colleges had the foresight to recruit ticket sales and marketing experts into their new world of challenges. However, college athletics departments don't make the same investment in resources as the pros – and this extends across staffing, technology and advertising right down to your budget to travel with the team.

With limited time and resources, what can you do to broaden fan engagement and get them out to the stadium?

Enter marketing automation. With integrated CRM, it can help your team deliver the right messages at the right time to the right fans while also managing and qualifying your sales prospects.

To score a touchdown with every fan interaction, you'll need to deploy numerous touchpoints, which is best achieved with an integrated system. Some of these features include:

**? Email marketing.** Segment your fans and schedule relevant messages such as gameday info, season ticket renewals, special promotions, offers for low-demand inventory, concert announcements at your stadium, value-added partner offers and automatically say "sorry we missed you" to those who had seats but didn't come, while thanking those who did. Also, consider building those compelling, graphic-rich emails in advance so you're ready to hit send when a bowl game or a post-season tournament is announced.

Applying customer engagement strategies to your business goals and marketing plans can also help you boost sales via behavior-based emails. This is accomplished by identifying your most loyal customers, who are also your most lucrative, and presenting them with the right offer at the right time. How do you determine who is the right fan? Read on!

**? Dynamic queries.** The right CRM can store a wealth of information that can be combined – like geographic location, past purchase behavior and/or any other qualifier – to create targeted fan lists for your campaigns. Think people who live within 30 miles of your venue that already have tickets to four games. Fans who bought tickets last season but have yet to secure any seats this season. Customers who make a purchase at least once every three months or attend at least two events a month. Even kids club members who have come to games as part of a larger group. Understanding these types of behaviors makes it possible to target your fans with incredible accuracy and offers they won't be able to resist.

**? Customizable pURLs and microsites.** Content management is extremely effective when it's integrated – and the ability to build unlimited, customer-facing microsite means that possibilities are limited only by your imagination. Email personalized URLs with your season ticket renewals and leverage variable content. Engage fans by including a photo with their name on a jersey or cap and use a bold call-to-action button to renew. Microsites are also great for special events and segmenting audiences. Invite recent graduates to a young alumni tailgate or entice kids club members to meet the mascot before the game. Fans also appreciate a single sign-on and singular shopping cart experience.

**? Retargeting,** shopping cart abandonment and search marketing. If a fan looks at a jersey on your website, you can ensure he is reminded of that desire to buy. Display targeting as he browses different sites will show ads for the jersey wherever he goes, whether he is searching on Google or browsing websites. If he puts that same jersey in his cart but doesn't complete the transaction, a scheduled email for all abandoned carts can capture the sale. This same concept can apply to tickets when a fan is browsing, but not buying. Having these features integrated seamlessly into your e-commerce site provides an immediate impact.

**? Integrated social media.** Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are not just for your youngest fans anymore. While certain platforms are more popular with Millennials, social media now reaches across generations and customers are comfortable completing transactions on their phones. Incorporating purchase opportunities seamlessly into the engagement process is good for business. Imagine showing fans the biggest moments of a game on Facebook or YouTube, then allowing them to immediately buy a new t-shirt celebrating that big play or win. There are endless scenarios where this can apply if you make the experience easy and intuitive for the customer.

**? Intelligent calls to action.** Introducing your fans to new, additional, better or complementary products while they have their credit card ready to make a purchase is good for business. Think better seats, a flex pack, season tickets, parking, concessions vouchers, team gear and more. These are all great ways to encourage fans to attend more games, spend more money and improve the overall gameday experience.

**? Informative analytics.** Data is powerful when it's used to learn more about customer purchase habits. By using link names and referrer codes to tie revenues to specific marketing campaigns, you'll know the most effective ways to reach your customers, convert an offer to a sale and get them out to the game.

So, get creative and put integrated marketing automation to work for your school. Insist on features that are core to your platform, make it easy for fans to engage and buy, and show them why there is really nothing like being there, in person, at the big game.