

Roundtable: How AudienceView Unlimited College Athletics Ticketing Leaders are Increasing Fan Engagement

10 MIN READ



Curious how your peers are increasing fan engagement and revenue in college athletics?

We've enlisted expert tips and opinions from ticketing leaders at several AudienceView Unlimited clients.

Here, they share what they're doing to achieve success and reveal the technology trends they see impacting our industry, now and in the future.

What are you doing to get fans back into stadiums and engage them while they are there?

As we know all too well, attendance is an issue these days. Illustrating this, [FBS average attendance in 2018 was 41,856](#), the lowest since 1996.

So, what can you do to counteract this downward trend? Our gurus have some answers.

Drew Boykin, Assistant Director of Ticket Operations at Liberty University, focuses on **clear communication** and making sure fans have all the information they need.

Liberty achieves this with pre-game emails, a gameday specific web page and by ensuring that fans have all their questions answered, as well as easy access to information. Streamlining the gameday experience in this fashion helps fan enjoy themselves more at the event.

"Our job as a ticket operations team is to communicate to those who have purchased tickets to ensure that their gameday experience is hassle free," says Boykin.

Dartmouth College uses **push notifications** to get more people out to games – and they can be used to share other helpful information too.

Sarah Swanson, Athletics Ticket Manager at Dartmouth College, says, "Through the Apple Wallet, we now have fans receiving push notifications that the game is coming up – [it's] a big hit!"

At George Washington University, Assistant Director of Ticket Sales and Operations Anjuwon Spence uses AudienceView Unlimited to offer add-ons such as t-shirts as well as to **highlight group experiences** like the "High Five Tunnel" and mascot meet and greets, which make visits more memorable.

“Being able to use AudienceView to streamline this process makes the customer experience from point of sale to gameday seamless,” he says.

Nick Mello, Ticket Operations Associate at Harvard University, uses **thank you notes to retarget fans for future games**. As an example, Harvard sent an email message of thanks to everyone who bought tickets to a recent football game against Cornell and offered them discounted tickets to their football game against Dartmouth.

At Troy, Executive Associate Athletic Director Kyle George notes that **“text to wins”** for big prizes are popular – and they allow the athletics department to **better capture data** from fans in the stadium. Troy also uses food trucks and pre-game concerts to enhance the gameday atmosphere and create a better overall fan experience.

How do you use technology to enhance the fan experience?

Gameday is about more than just the game. You are creating a memorable experience and need innovative ways to engage your fans. Considering the prevalence of smartphones and technological advances in recent years, there are many ways to enhance the fan experience through technology.

For instance, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) has experimented with **VR booths** at their hockey arena.

“At the booth, a fan could put on a VR headset and hang out in the locker room pre-game, walk out onto the ice for warmups, or meet the coaches and players,” says Andrew Keller, RIT’s Assistant Director for Ticketing Sales and Brand Advancement.

Liberty’s marketing team is integrating technology to create more in-game engagements and touchpoints.

“Technology provides an awesome opportunity to allow fans to interact with the event. Whether this is voting on a poll to pick a song, sharing an Instagram post that gets put on the video board, or using a light show app, we want to leverage everything we can to create a unique experience for the fan,” says Boykin.

Dartmouth likes to move the less glamorous parts of ticketing to the digital world. This helps **give fans more control of their experience** and reduces the amount of time that Dartmouth’s staff spends helping fans with logistics.

“Allowing them access to information, [plus the ability to] purchase [tickets] and enter the venue on their own makes them confident they are in control of their purchases and allows them ownership and convenience,” says Swanson, who explains that **Dartmouth has scanners where people can scan their own tickets** and a staff member is on hand to verify.

GWU uses technology in other ways too, like streamlining the purchase process and creating flexible multi-ticket packages that allow fans to log in 48 hours before gameday to claim their seats.

Additionally, GWU partners with [ZipWhip](#), a business SMS service, to allow students and fans to text photos and messages to a computer which GWU can then broadcast on the jumbotron during the game.

Harvard has implemented **online concession ordering** to cut down on wait times at concession stands. Fans can now order food and drinks right from their seats to pick up instead of waiting in line at their football, hockey and basketball games.

How are you driving engagement with younger fans?

Engaging younger fans is essential to the success of your organization. By doing so, you [create lifelong fans](#) who will keep coming back.

Two key age groups to focus on here are children and Millennials. By focusing on children, you can create family-friendly experiences that parents will want to share with their young ones. With Millennials, you can engage young alumni who may eventually become season ticket holders and donors.

Let's start with the kids. RIT for instance, offers benefits such as "Tunnel Buddies", where young fans can cheer hockey players on as they go from the locker room to the ice during intermissions and get post-game autographs. This gives young fans the opportunity to engage with student athletes and get close to the action, an awesome experience for a kid!

Similarly, Liberty has a kid's club program for fans aged 12 and younger. It offers unique opportunities to interact with Liberty Athletics like sprinting onto the field with a soccer player, running the bases at the baseball stadium and participating in a hi-5 tunnel for a basketball game. Young fans can interact and pose for photos with mascot Sparky, too. This has helped Liberty Athletics increase engagement with young families. If the kids are having a good time, so are the parents!

Dartmouth focuses on engaging student fans by making the digital component easier. Since this demographic is more tech-savvy, they want the most up-to-date digital options, so Dartmouth ensures that **they can load their tickets to their Apple Wallet. Dartmouth Athletics has also integrated ticketing with Shibboleth** so employees and students can use their campus credentials to access AudienceView and their benefits.

Troy drives engagement with younger fans primarily through social media. They use social channels to allow younger fans to engage with their brand and cultivate relationships. For example, Troy conducts **social media fan polls** to pick uniforms for its games.

GWU has some other strategies to focus on young alumni. These include utilizing AudienceView's Cybba integration for social media advertising and to retarget young alumni fans. They also create targeted specials, offers and events for young alumni to incentivize them to come to more games.

Harvard tailors its experiences to be attractive for students. One way they do this is by running a case study program around their games, involving students from local colleges as 'marketing consultants'. The students come to the game with their classes, review the athletic department's efforts for the games and work with the department to provide marketing feedback and insights. For a brainy school like Harvard, this kind of experience is quite enticing for students.

What new strategies has your team implemented in the past few years to increase revenue?

RIT recently started offering Men's Hockey Flex Packs, which cater to fans who don't want to commit to a full season but do want to attend more than a few games. The flex pack offers 10 tickets that fans can use whenever they want, in any combination, based on seat availability. This has helped RIT capture additional revenue.

Dartmouth has changed its fee structure to benefit people who buy online and penalize those who buy at the last minute. They hope this will encourage more fans to buy tickets online so that they can reduce the stress on the box office. In practice though, this has actually resulted in higher revenue for their organization.

GWU has implemented several strategies to drive incremental revenue. These include selling ticket refund protection with Booking Protect, conducting retargeting with Cybba to help increase ticket sales and making it easier for fans to share experiences with [Fevo](#). Booking Protect and Cybba both integrate directly with the AudienceView Unlimited platform.

Harvard increased revenue by eliminating youth and student pricing for men's basketball and hockey.

In these sports, they noticed that there were few youth student/ticket buyers and that they sold out many of these games. As a trial run a few years ago, Harvard eliminated youth/student pricing and saw the same number of sellouts, with very few customer service complaints. This strategy led to increased revenue while allowing Harvard to offer steep discounts to youth/student groups for lower-selling games.

What is the biggest change you've seen in the industry recently and how did this impact your organization's strategy?

The importance of **mobile ticketing and ease of purchase** has moved to the forefront in recent years.

Mello notes that Harvard "used to do about 80% of our sales in physical tickets, and now it's about 80% e-tickets."

Regardless of whether your fans want to buy in person, over the phone or online, Boykin says it's critical to create a smooth purchase experience.

"We make our products easy to purchase from many different methods," he says.

Dartmouth's Swanson echoes this sentiment.

"There are so many changes in how we communicate with fans and how they access the venue. We prioritize offering digital tickets, group promotional codes online and online purchases even after the game has already begun," he says.

The role of secondary markets has also changed and increased.

"When I started in ticketing just six years ago, Stubhub, Vivid Seats and similar outlets were viewed as shady and we openly shunned them," says Keller. "Resellers typically just led to ripped off fans and long customer service lines on an event day. But now, seeing teams and leagues actively partner with these secondary marketplace sellers has completely changed the perception around secondary outlets and even fans are turning to these sites with more trust."

What future trends do you anticipate will impact the fan experience in college sports?

The rise of e-sports is a trend that will have a huge impact on the fan experience, says RIT's Keller, who notes that many of their students are taking an interest.

"Live sporting events will have to be more interactive and engaging than before to not only retain current loyal fans but also win back potential fans that may have either switched over to gaming or are starting to trend in that direction," he says.

Liberty's Boykin points to the proliferation of **5G technology** as something that will greatly impact the fan experience.

"One of the knocks on spending a Saturday going to the football game is that you miss everything else going on across the country," he says. "5G speed opens up the door to allow fans to keep an eye on other games around the country in real time, without having to rely on spotty WiFi."

Harvard's Mello notes that venues will have to **offer more than just a game to engage fans**. These types of experiences could include catering, cash bars and exclusive fan perks such as kids' clubs.

Being an innovator in college athletics requires you to go above and beyond in terms of your fan experience. Technology plays a huge role, so it's important to leverage every opportunity to engage your fans and enhance their experiences.

Using a fully configurable ticketing platform like AudienceView Unlimited, with game-changing automation and the means to achieve the most in less time, can facilitate this.