

Nashville Predators Student Rush Night Marketing Plan

SPORT MARKETING
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I. Executive Summary

Competition is what makes sports so compelling. So turning a sports promotion into a competition will at least increase interest and it would be expected that participation would increase as well. That is exactly what we want to do with Student Rush Nights for the Nashville Predators; we want to make it a competition. If there is one thing that marketers have learned about students it is that they have school pride. Invoking that school pride through a competition against other local schools (many of which are rivals), is a great way to increase participation.

The competition among schools would have many layers with the first one being number of attendees. The college and high school with the most attendees would be recognized with a banner in the arena until the next Student Rush Night, as well as discounted tickets to non-Student Rush Night games until the next Student Rush Night. The way we would count the students is by simply asking them if they are a student when they walk in, then having them come to a booth and show their school ID to be counted.

The next layer of the competition would be the in-game promotions on Student Rush Nights, particularly the music during intermissions. All the artists that perform on Student Rush Nights will be students who must audition to be chosen, and the school of the performer that night will receive special prizes and discounts. Auditions will be held at each school and will allow students to vote on who they would like to see perform at the games as a way for the team to further connect with each school. On top of that, every promotional game played during the game breaks will have a student participant. As previously mentioned, every part of Student Rush night should involve students.

The last layer of the competition would be through social media. Whichever school (or district for high schools) hashtag was used the most during the game, that school would receive a free skate night at the Ford Ice Center to be held during their open skate nights. This would be no additional cost to the building as they will already be staffing open skate night and will be a great way to promote the new facility. The posts would also be shown periodically throughout the game on the jumbo tron to connect with the students and make them feel a part of the game.

All layers of the competition have value, but each one is different. The first layer simply is profit, get more tickets sold. The main goal of Student Rush Nights for the Predators is to get tickets sold, not to get college students to be life-long fans. What better way to sell tickets than to make it a competition and give rewards if you win.

The second layer is fun. If you want the students to come back to the next Student Rush Night, or you want them to come back for the rest of the time they are in school then you have to make it fun. Having kids be the promotions and having the game be all about them will do that. The adult fans mainly come to the games for the hockey itself, but students are way more worried about the atmosphere and having fun.

The last layer is about buzz. If you can get people talking about your product then that is free advertising. If you make it a competition then like ticket sales, it should only increase participation.

Only a few of these promotions would add any increase to your budget. First, you need to add one CSC staff member at the main entrance and one at the south entrance to work the booths for students to check in. Next, since you are giving a few more prizes than normal the cost would increase slightly but if you partnered with companies for to sponsor the promotions then this could cancel out the cost if not give you a profit. These responsibilities for Student Rush nights would be dispersed among current staff members. Those currently involved with the game night promotions and ticket sales will become representatives for the universities and high school districts and their responsibilities will involve attending at least one major event per school/district each year as well as holding auditions for performers. Further, the game night staff will need to buy-in to include students in the promotions, however, no additional staff members would need to be added.

Although there are some minor costs related to CSC staffing and prizes (which could be a gain depending on sponsorships), we know that revamping Student Nights would only increase its return on investment. We have researched and created a plan that will benefit the team and increase Student Night ticket sales and attendance.

II. Introduction

Since 1998 when the Nashville Predators were founded, they have been providing quality entertainment to the Nashville community at Bridgestone Arena. The organization's mission states: "Bridgestone Arena is the #1 sports and entertainment venue in the United States and its centerpiece is the Stanley Cup champion Nashville Predators hockey team." Although they have not yet won a championship in the NHL, this mission remains at their core and guides all decision making and entertainment that they provide.

Despite the Predators having made the playoffs three out of the past five years, Student Rush nights have gradually been decreasing in popularity despite continued efforts by the staff. The goal of this marketing plan is to offer valuable solutions that will change this trend and increase Student Rush night ticket sales and general game ticket sales as well. These changes include taking promotions already in place and altering them to fit in conjunction with Student Rush nights and creating new promotions involving school partnerships and new sponsors that reach the target population.

III. Value Proposition

The Nashville Predators offer an exciting team and atmosphere in a highly populated and growing city. Although there are eight major universities in middle Tennessee, with over 78,500 students and a number of high school students in Nashville Metro Public schools and the surrounding school districts, this is not representative of current Student Rush night sales.

For hockey games, the arena has a capacity of just over 17,000 fans and although there is such a large surrounding college and high school population, it does not sell out on Student Rush nights. While the Predators may be viewed as a mediocre professional team which has never won a Stanley Cup, they are the only NHL team in the state of Tennessee and the near proximity of surrounding states. Not only are they the only NHL team, but they are one of only two professional sports teams in the state next to the Tennessee Titans. In comparison to the Tennessee Titans, they play (and win) many more games.

We will market new Student Rush night promotions to the eight major universities in middle Tennessee including Austin Peay, Belmont, Lipscomb, Middle Tennessee State, Tennessee State, Tennessee Technological, Trevecca and Vanderbilt. This marketing plan will not be as successful without partnerships with each of these institutions. College students do not have as much disposable income as the rest of the consumer population and seek affordable entertainment which the Predators can offer. We plan to use these partnerships to increase contact with these student populations through e-mail, university websites and on-campus advertisements.

Similar to our goals with our college population, we plan to reach out to the high school districts in our marketing efforts as well. Again, this population does not have much disposable income of their own, and most will likely come from their parents so affordability is key. Through e-mail and newsletters with parents and on-campus advertisements for students, we plan to reach this target population.

IV. Situational Analysis

With the increasing city population and the highest sales tax in the US, Nashville is a popular and frankly, expensive area which is not ideal for college students, many of which do not have much disposable income. Further, in the current economic climate, fans are questioning attending sporting events versus the luxury of watching these events from their homes with high definition televisions and more affordable food and beverage options. The Predators must overcome these challenges and meet the demands of college and high school students.

In reviewing current NHL demographics, 60% of fans are males and 40% of fans are females. While our primary focus for the college night program is males, we recognize that more females are attending college today than males. Therefore, we will not discount our marketing efforts towards the college female population.

In revamping the Student Rush night program, we will be utilizing current technological trends to reach out to our target populations. These trends will include the use of major social media outlets including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We will also utilize text messaging and e-mails to complement our new programming efforts.

SWOT Analysis

The Nashville Predators are unique in the industry and offer an entertainment piece unlike many NHL teams. They have a great opportunity to utilize past marketing efforts for Student Nights in combination with some new efforts to revamp the promotions. We wanted to conduct a SWOT analysis on the organization and their competitors, to give a clear picture of how the surrounding area views them. By identifying areas of strength as well as those of weaknesses, they can capitalize on their opportunities and work to combat their weaknesses. By recognizing those of their competitors, they are able to provide a value proposition that will separate them from others.

Strengths-

- Professional sports team in one of the major four sports leagues
- High entertainment value
- High brand recognition in community
- Reputation for positive work in the community

Weaknesses-

- Weak national presence and college students in Nashville represent a variety of regions across the country
- Ticket prices are continuing to rise each season
- Product- team has not made the playoffs in the last two seasons

Opportunities-

- High volume of college students in the local area
- Nashville as tourist destination
- Playing in a venue that is consistently in the top 5 in the U.S.
- College population has the potential to impact sales following graduation

Threats-

- Competition with other three major sports during season
- Economic challenge of Nashville on college students
- Comfort of watching sporting events from home
- New Music City Center taking away business from the arena

Competitor Analysis

We view the Tennessee Titans as a major competitor of the Nashville Predators in this market. Although they are in different leagues, they are both selling sport and entertainment to the same population. While the NFL does dominate the U.S. in popularity, the Titans do not currently have any college night promotions, which the Predators can view as an advantage.

As mentioned previously, college students are looking for value in entertainment. The Predators will reach this population by emphasizing their value. This value will be demonstrated through our new college night promotions. The NHL also has unique features that the NFL

cannot offer such as the fast paced excitement of the sport and two intermissions as opportunities for entertainment. We believe that the Titans are not likely to mimic the college night promotions based on their lack of ticket promotions in the past.

Competitor SWOT Analysis- Tennessee Titans

Strengths-

- Member of the biggest league in the U.S.
- Brand recognition of the NFL

Weaknesses-

- High ticket prices
- Product- team has not made the playoffs in the last five seasons
- No college promotions

Opportunities-

- Largest radio network in NFL
- Nashville as tourist destination

Threats-

- Competition with other three major sports during season
- Economic challenge of Nashville on college students
- Comfort of watching sporting events from home

V. Analysis of Target Markets

College students are the ultimate bandwagon fan, and that is even more pronounced in a city like Nashville with teams that are inconsistent. In any given year there could be less than 25% of the middle Tennessee college population that is from the local area and/or grew up a Predators fan. High school students however are the exact opposite. An extremely high percentage of them will have grown up in the area and spent their whole lives at least seeing and hearing about the Predators if not being a fan. So with that said, the Predators need to understand both these markets better to try and enhance their student nights.

College students may be bandwagon fans but one thing is for sure, they will rally behind their school. School pride is a big deal and anything the Predators can do to tap into student's school spirit rather than just Predators spirit would be a plus. One other thing about college students is they love FREE or if not free at least really cheap. One of the most typical experiences at college is getting free t-shirts. Kids love it because every school does it, and not just with shirts. College students are lulled into the habit of waiting for ridiculous deals because they always get them. If the deal is not good enough then they won't do it because they know they can just wait and get a better one. What the Predators need to understand is what a good enough deal is for college students.

In order to help the Predators determine what deals college students would be willing to pay for, we have created a survey that will be sent to a sample population of college students. The results will be provided to the organization

Survey

1. Have you heard of the Student Rush night promotions with the Nashville Predators?

Jack in the Box sponsored Student Rush night allows any individual with a valid student ID to purchase a \$35 lower bowl ticket with a student rush t-shirt and a voucher for a Jack in the Box burrito or a \$15 upper bowl ticket and a voucher for a Jack in the Box burrito.

2. Based on the above description, would you purchase any of the below options? (Select all that apply)
 - a. \$35 lower bowl ticket
 - b. \$15 upper bowl ticket
 - c. Both
 - d. Neither
3. What would motivate you to attend a Preds game? (Select all that apply)
 - a. Cheaper tickets
 - b. Cheaper concessions (in conjunction with already half priced drinks)
 - c. Better promotions
 - d. Other (type)
4. What would you be willing to pay to go to a Preds game?
 - a. \$10-14
 - b. \$15-20
 - c. \$20-25
 - d. \$25-30
 - e. \$30-35
 - f. Above \$35
5. Which restaurant would you prefer a voucher for?
 - a. Jack in the Box
 - b. Chick Fil A
 - c. Wendy's
 - d. Taco Bell
 - e. Other (please specify)

The main issue with high school students is their income. For the most part they are still relying on their parents financially, especially for recreational spending. So not only do you have to get the high school students interest, but you have to gain the parents interest as well. The main difference from the college population is high school students won't care about how good the deal is. If their parents are the ones buying the tickets then price is not an issue to them. They will just want to have fun and enjoy the games. If you give out something free that is a plus but it will not be the main motivation for attending. In the same way that the Predators need to learn what a good deal is for college students, they also need to learn what a good deal is for parents of these high school students.

VI. Marketing Objectives

We need different objectives for each target population. Some will be similar but we need to always keep in mind the differences between the two when thinking about our marketing.

College Students:

- Partner with every college in the middle Tennessee area before next school year
- Attend at least one event per semester at each of the partner colleges
- Have a band/singer from every partner college perform on student night next year
- Count attendance at each student night in order to know which school had the highest attendance
- Partner with a brand or product that caters more to the student population for your promotions next year (ex. Office Depot for school supplies)

High School Students:

- Partner with every school district in the middle Tennessee area before next school year
- Attend at least one event per semester at a school in each district
- Count attendance at each student night in order to know which school had the highest attendance
- Partner with a brand that caters more to the student population for your promotion
- Create an in-game promotion where every high school student in attendance can participate

VII. Marketing Strategies

To partner with each college and school district would not be a difficult process. All of them would happily accept a professional sports team as a partner/sponsor. The process to go about obtaining the sponsorship is simple, just contact those in charge and work out the details. No money has to change hands because it can be beneficial for both sides. The schools can simply advertise for the Predators while the Predators will agree to a certain number of events per year. If the students are seeing Predators advertisements on their website and bulletin boards at no cost, and they are getting their face out in the community with different events then it is a no brainer to create these partnerships.

The Predators already have local singers/bands perform as part of their Tuesday night promotion. It would be very easy to convert what is already in place for that promotion and do it in conjunction with student night. Auditions would be held for participants and the winner's school would receive some type of promotion; a limited number of free tickets, even more discounted tickets, lower prices at concessions, etc.

Jack in the Box is the current partner for the student night promotion. Having a restaurant as a partner immediately limits the potential reach because everyone does not like the same food. Every student however does need school supplies, so why not partner with a business like Office Max, Staples or Best Buy. The promotion could be 10% off your next purchase, or whatever the retailer chooses, however it would better fit the demographic. If the Predators

would like to stick with a food sponsor, they should reach out to a food location that is more popular among the student populations such as Chick Fil A, Wendy's, Taco Bell or Sweet Cece's.

High school students are more likely to come to the game because of the atmosphere or the fun they will have. So give them that fun with something that is exclusive to them. A simple brainstorm session with the marketing team would come up with many ideas. An easy way to keep them engaged would be to allow them to be part of the on ice promotions during intermissions. If you give them something exclusive that they will enjoy then that is how you will appeal to them.

It is important to keep in mind with each of these promotions that the Student Rush Night games need to appeal to our target population. Each artist on stage and each promotion during intermission should only involve high school and college students during these games.

VIII. Implementation and control

In order to successfully implement all of the strategies in this marketing plan, the Predators must employ a number of tasks first at the senior administration level, and then with each department taking part in the plan.

For the first layer of the plan to work, the Predators will need to keep track of the students that attend the Student Rush night from each school. Upon entering the building, CSC staff will remind patrons that if they are students, they should head to the Student Rush booth located in front of the main escalators to check in. At the booth, there will be a CSC staff member with an iPad which will put a tally for each school as students come to the booth and show their ID. The app on the iPad will automatically calculate school totals, and the winner of attendance will be announced during the second intermission. The banners, which will be hung in the arena until the next Student Rush Night, will be presented during the first intermission of the next home game, which will generate discussion amongst the crowd and generate interest in Student Rush Night.

Further, for the second layer of the plan, the Predators will need to revamp their student ambassador and team representative system to assist with general outreach and auditions. There should be one main contact on the college campuses that is a Business/Sport Administration faculty member, as students are only on campus for four years. This faculty member would be responsible for keeping contact with the team sales representative to communicate about large upcoming events on campus for the representative to market Student Rush nights. Not only will this put work on the sales department staff, but will also challenge the universities to work on their partnerships. This will be a great way for the Business/Sport Administration professors to incorporate "real life" situations into their class to increase learning for their students. In looking at this at a high school level, since there are so many high schools in each district in middle Tennessee, there will be one district representative that includes marketing and promotional tools from the Preds in e-mails and newsletters to the parents.

The Predators will also hold auditions for students interested in performing the national anthem or during intermissions at Student Rush Night. Students will submit requests to the

school representative who will contact the Predators representative to coordinate auditions. Auditions will be held at the beginning of the season in order to create a schedule for each game night. Auditions will include the Predators representative and the current staff members that are currently involved in auditions. After selecting students to perform, a schedule will be created and distributed to the school representative. The Predators representative will serve as the contact to walk performers to the ice on game nights.

The sponsorship team would also need to find new sponsors that best fit the demographic they are reaching. The Predators would determine some possible new sponsors based on feedback from students in the survey. Possible sponsors could include Chick Fil A, Wendy's, Taco Bell and Sweet Cece's for food options or could include some school supply related sponsors such as Office Max, Staples and Best Buy. These sponsors would not only encourage students to attend the game, but would also provide publicity to the team throughout their stores.

Additionally, the team would again need to work with their Marketing and Game Night Promotions departments to allow students to participate in on ice promotions. These include a mini hockey game, musical chairs or between two rival high schools. The team does not necessarily need to create new promotions, however every part of Student Night should only involve college or high school students and the high school students would likely get the most out of the promotions. By allowing them to participate on the ice, they would feel more involved with each night.

For the third layer of our plan, the marketing team would simply need to create a hashtag for each school, such as #buatthepreds or #raidersonthepreds to monitor social media activity during the Student Rush Nights. Then, game night marketing staff would display these social media posts on the jumbo tron during the game (which is already being done). During the second intermission following the announcement of the schools with the highest attendance, the schools with the most social media posts will be announced. These schools would receive a free skate night at the Ford Ice Center, which would be held during open skate night in the middle of the week. These are already the lowest nights for attendance, and would increase awareness and attendance at the facility. No additional staff members would be necessary since they are already operating an open skate night.

In order to accomplish these tasks, many will need to take place in the off season in order to prepare for the following season. To begin, the Predators should distribute surveys to the school's representative at the beginning of the school year in order to have enough time to analyze the data and prepare new implementation plans. This should begin immediately following the end of the season in May or June. The representative would distribute these surveys online to as many students as possible. In July, the Sponsorship department should begin reaching out to potential sponsors, as this is a busy time for back to school purchases to negotiate deals. In August, as students are returning from summer break, the Predators will schedule with the school's representative, to determine an event that they would benefit from tabling. For example, each year Belmont hosts Beaman Breakdown which is an introduction to the school for all of the freshman students. This would be a great time for the Predators to pass out flyers with Student Rush Night information as well as audition information and give away

free t-shirts and car magnets to generate interest. By attending one of these events at each school, the Predators would reach a large number of students, especially those that are new to the area and are not familiar with the Predators. Also, the team would continue to support this effort through e-mails and contact with the representative. At the beginning of September, the team should hold auditions and begin to schedule the Student Rush nights that students will perform during. During the same time frame, the Game Night Promotions staff should also reach out to the district representatives to work out “game nights” for different high schools. During their own “game night” three different high schools would be invited on the ice for game promotions. This schedule is attached for your convenience.

Data that will be important for the Predators to collect will need to be the number of students from each university and each high school. This information will be collected by the CSC staff at the doors and logged in the ticket sales database. During the season, this data will be compared to the intermission performers, the participating schools in game night promotions, as well as general information about the performance of the team including win streak, opponent, etc. This information will be housed in the game night promotions database. The team will be able to determine which changes cause a spike in attendance from different schools and what factors they are able to control to make Student Rush night successful. As demonstrated by the Gantt chart below, we will follow up in January during the middle of the season and again in May/June at the end of the season to analyze the collected data and determine whether or not any adjustments need to be made.

	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	Aug 2015	Sep 2015	Oct 2015	Jan 2016	May 2016
Survey distribution to target populations								
New sponsorship negotiations								
Social media and e-mail distributions								
School outreach								
Auditions for student performers								
Creation of game night schedule								
Mid-season check up								
Follow up with team								

