

Case In Brief: New England Patriots Increase Season Ticket Renewals

The NFL football team heightened its focus on first-time season ticket holders, ensuring a better customer experience that led to a higher retention rate.

By [Cynthia Clark](#) | Published 10/19/2011 in [1to1 Magazine](#)



The [New England Patriots](#) recently found itself in a third-and-long situation: The NFL football team was experiencing its lowest season ticket renewal rate in a decade. Correcting that situation meant tackling the challenge of increasing customer engagement: ensuring that ticket holders attended games and interacted with the team. Recognizing that first-time season ticket holders were the most likely to churn, the team focused on its rookie fans to increase their renewal rate.

Situation

The New England Patriots' internal research showed that first-time ticket holders were the least likely to renew for the next season—between 10 and 15 percent less than the normal season base. "In sports, as in all industries, retaining first-time customers is challenging. We're a sold-out stadium, so new season ticket holders have to renew for years to get upgraded to the best seats," says Jessica Gelman, vice president of customer marketing and strategy at [The Kraft Sports Group](#).

Cognizant of the challenges of retaining its season ticket holder customers, the New England Patriots determined that customer insight would help to uncover and address specific causes of

non-renewal. That insight would also help the team better understand the demographics and behaviors of its season ticket holders, to help predict the risk of non-renewal and reach out to at-risk customers before it they churn.

Strategy

Before the 2010 season kicked off, the team analyzed data on its season ticket holders and then implemented a cross-channel marketing strategy to retain at-risk customers using tools from [ClickSquared](#). The team identified that rookie season ticket holders provided a significant opportunity to improve retention, so the initial retention initiative focused on building engagement and ensuring that they were satisfied with their experience. The Patriots created a specific communication strategy for these first-time season ticket holders. Recognizing that engagement dwindles with every game they miss, the Patriots contacted its rookie season ticket holders via email after the first game they missed, reminding them of what they were missing. "Awareness of season ticket holder benefits is important, so we want to communicate those benefits that are most relevant to customers who have missed games, including our "Wear It & Win" pin program [through which season ticket holders can be selected to win prizes while at the stadium] and access to our Patriots Ticketexchange program to buy and sell tickets," Gelman says.

Keeping the lines of communication open, the team sent out surveys to customers who missed a second game to try to determine which expectations weren't being met. The Patriots found that the majority of ticket holders surveyed missed games because of personal conflicts, like an emergency, while a quarter cited work-related conflicts. A small percentage said they did not attend games because of the weather.

A third missed game would be followed by a call. "We want to talk to them and ask what we aren't providing so we can improve their experience," Gelman says, adding that while one missed game is not unusual, three raises an alert.

Results

The campaign worked. Gelman says the overall renewal rate for the test group that received the missed game trigger was 2.5 percent higher than the control group. Additionally, last year the Patriots saw its overall renewal rate climb to among the highest in the NFL.

The relevancy of the campaign drove open rates up by more than 28 percent, while click-through rates increased by more than 14 percent. Gelman says the highest percentage of clicks revolved around customers wanting to know what they could win if they attended the games, making the information timely and relevant. "Using analytics and predictive modeling allows us to understand the customers and better know what they want," Gelman says.

Lessons learned

Know your customers: Information is power, and understanding customers and their behaviors allows companies to take preventive action to ensure they don't churn.

Remind customers of membership perks: Ensuring that customers know what they are missing can go a long way toward convincing them to renew their membership.

Make customers feel valued: Reaching out to customers who miss games, or events, or other offerings, shows that the company is attentive and cares.

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