



## CASE STUDY

# A New Standard for Sales Efficiency

How the University of Texas has increased ticket sales and decreased sales expenses during a period of on-field struggles

## CASE STUDY BRIEF

- While most schools are struggling with decreasing attendance at athletic competitions, The University of Texas - Austin continues to increase sales and lead the NCAA in ticket revenue.
- Success has continued despite a rare stretch of tough seasons and a reduction in the size of its sales team over this same period.
- UT's innovative leadership team has leveraged advanced artificial intelligence (A.I.) sales tools to drive growth.
- The boost from the data driven sales strategy has impacted football sales, and has been replicated across all Texas sports programs.



## THE INNOVATORS

On August 20th, the *Sports Business Journal* published a list of the top NCAA revenue producers in 2012 and 2017. In 2012, The University of Texas held the top spot for ticket sales at \$59 million – \$7 million ahead of second-place Michigan.

Following the 2012 season, Texas hit an uncharacteristic rough stretch of on-field performance for its top revenue producer – the Longhorns football program. In the five football seasons between 2013 and 2017, Texas had a losing record (31-32) – the first such five-year period in 59 years.

Conventional wisdom would dictate that ticket revenue would fall off over this stretch. However, in 2017, Texas again led the nation with \$72 million, and in so doing expanded its margin over second-place Ohio State by \$10 million. Remarkably, while most professional and college sports teams have grown the size of their sales staffs in recent years, Texas has achieved these extraordinary sales results while simultaneously reducing its sales budget by millions of dollars.

Few college or professional programs will be able to duplicate the historical athletic success of Texas, which boasts dozens of national championships and hundreds of conference championships across its men's and women's programs. However, the sports industry should take note of the sales innovations that Texas has recently pioneered to remain the leading NCAA ticket sales organization.

## THE KEYS TO UT'S SUCCESS

Despite many high-profile leadership changes in Texas athletics over the past several years, UT has benefitted from the consistent leadership of the two people ultimately responsible for this unlikely sales success.

Juan Garcia returned to Texas in 2014 after a 20-year history of leveraging data and analytics to drive transformative changes at large businesses and educational institutions. He came with a mission to overhaul UT's data and analytics infrastructure. "It was a tremendous honor to return to my alma mater to help implement a vision of improving our strategic thinking and decision-making processes by using our data more efficiently. A strong data foundation allows for greater visibility into revenue sources, fans and donors and ensures organizational effectiveness."

Juan partnered with Teri Pierce who oversees UT's sales and marketing efforts. Teri Pierce had been with Texas Athletics for nearly fifteen years when Juan joined the Texas athletics team, but recognized the need to employ new data-driven strategies and tools to combat the challenges created by disappointing on-field results, changing buyer demographics, and a local municipality that provided more entertainment opportunities than ever before. "Change happens slowly in our industry. We didn't have a choice, though, and Juan was hired at a crucial time," stated Pierce. "Budgets were tightening and our survey data suggested that our fans were becoming restless. The improvements to our data infrastructure that Juan brought allowed us to make smart decisions that helped maximize our budget spend."

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Juan Garcia  
University of Texas - Austin

## LEAPS IN PRODUCTIVITY

Following three consecutive losing seasons, Texas approached the 2017 football season with a restructured sales team whose size had been reduced from 32 reps to only 7 full time staffers. Given these seemingly obvious obstacles to ticket sales success, Pierce recognized that the only way to grow sales across all programs in a sustainable way would be to maximize the efficiency of every rep on the team. Texas needed a technology breakthrough that would multiply their remaining sales power by leveraging the data Garcia had procured, and an innovative sales manager who understood and would implement the new technologies. “We knew that we needed a sharp and creative leader to manage the smaller team, and that person would need a technical toolset that would scale his ability to drive results,” said Pierce.

“Every rep has to be more productive. We looked at several tools that promised to do that – and we even tried some of them. piLYTIX didn’t promise miracles but rather took a hands-on approach to show us not only what the tools would do, but how they worked. We believed that piLYTIX would provide a big lift for every rep on our sales team and they have exceeded our expectations.”

Teri Pierce  
University of Texas - Austin

piLYTIX had a track record of driving sales efficiency and effectiveness across several industries and had recently begun working with several professional sports teams. Despite the fact that piLYTIX had not yet proven its model at the NCAA level, Garcia and Pierce recognized the value that it would create:

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Lowell Berg was hired to manage the sales team in 2017 and quickly recognized that hitting lofty goals for multiple men’s and women’s teams was not going to be an easy task. “We have to be efficient with limited resources. Texas isn’t a place to make excuses. piLYTIX helps me ensure that our best leads and opportunities are being covered – and we don’t waste our time chasing bad leads and hoping for a different result.”

Using the piLYTIX A.I. tools, the UT sales team experienced an overall increase in productivity, but there were a number of dramatic situations where the impact of the A.I. driven projections directly translated into sales results. For example, according to Berg, “It’s not unusual that a rep will surprise me with a big season ticket deal that wasn’t yet on my radar. Inevitably, that deal was the result of the rep taking a few minutes to start the day by working through the accounts on the piLYTIX ‘Most Likely’ list. Creating quick wins like this allows for greater sales team efficiency and a winning atmosphere.” Sales success is further aided when reps are alerted to the presence of several negative factors that suggest a given deal is less likely to win. “When we don’t spin our wheels on these deals, we have a lot more time to focus on better prospects and to load new campaigns that allow us to get in front of new prospects.”

## UNEQUALED SALES EXECUTION

A total team effort, led by Juan Garcia's data efforts and Pierce and Berg's data-driven sales management has resulted in impressive sales results. While the sports industry has been conditioned to believe that slashing sales expenses and headcount during a rare losing streak would lead to a corresponding drop in sales output, Texas has avoided any such drop.

By September of 2018, Texas football had achieved a 92% football renewal rate, a 15% growth in per-game group revenue, and sold more than 6,000 new season tickets – a 70% increase over the previous season. Further, the smaller – but more efficient – sales team achieved comparable successes in its other ticketed sports. Season ticket sales were also expanded in all of Texas' fall sports programs.

Texas' proud tradition of excellence on the field extends beyond the field of play. The new data-driven approach to sales and marketing, combined with new fan engagement initiatives and energetic leadership at all levels of the athletics department has positioned UT to lead the nation in sales again in 2018 and beyond.

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