

## **LeBron Sells the Tickets, So Cavaliers Use Mobile to Boost Brands**

By [Christopher Heine](#) , April 6, 2010

With superstar LeBron James on the marquee, promoters for the Cleveland Cavaliers haven't had to use their mobile channel for last-second ticket alerts much at all. The NBA franchise has sold out its last 74 games going back to last season, while sending its mobile list (currently 30,000-plus) only four ticket offers.

Still, demand for the limited number of tickets available reaped an impressive response. Those offers drove \$40,000 in sales, said Jeff Ryznar, director of strategic marketing for the Cavaliers. "But the amount of tickets we have to move is not as great as what some other teams might have to do," he said.

So as customers have flocked to watch "King James" play, the organization has turned its attention to creating a mobile platform that gives big brands in-game interaction with fans. DiGiorno Pizza, Verizon, Arby's, and Kia Sorento are among the names that have bought into the program, which the Cavaliers project will mean more than \$200,000 in added 2010 revenue. Perhaps more importantly, the initiative has helped the team more than double its mobile opt-in list.

The program centers on Quicken Loans Arena's digital scoreboards. During timeouts and other breaks in game action, the scoreboards invite the 20,000-odd fans in attendance to answer a trivia question, vote in a poll, enter a contest, etc. Each of the activities comes with a brand sponsor and requires the crowd members to use their cell phone to participate.

For instance, DiGiorno has run a "get free pizza for a year" trivia-based campaign during numerous games. The scoreboards have encouraged fans to text in their trivia answers. If fans answered correctly, they were entered into the free-pizza sweepstakes.

As another example, Arby's has sections of the crowd compete against each other for one of the quick-serve brand's classic loss leaders - a free roast beef sandwich. Fans are grouped into three sections based on where they are sitting (upper-seating level vs. suites vs. lower-level seats), Ryznar said, each with unique codes to text in. The winning section is determined by which one first "finishes" a virtual Arby's roast beef sandwich - appearing on the scoreboards -

by submitting the most texts. "The fans can see a [scoreboard] graphic with bites being taken out of the sandwich as the texts roll in," he said.



The idea of building a mobile platform that's attractive to brand partners began to truly evolve two years ago when the team ran a campaign for telecommunications provider Alltel. The campaign involved SMS and the "Cavalier Insider" e-mail newsletter, and the results were eye-opening, Ryznar explained.

"The mobile database that we provided did more in terms of

creating Alltel customers than what our 'Insider' newsletter did - even though the newsletter list had 10 times as many people as the mobile database had [at that time]," he said.

With the aid of mobile marketing firm Phizzle, Ryznar said, the Cavaliers have significantly cut the gap between the sizes of the e-mail list and the mobile database. When the season began in October, the team established the goal of increasing its mobile subscribers from 15,000 to 25,000.

"We've already surpassed the goal by almost 60 percent," Ryznar said, while stating that the list is closing in on 32,300 subscribers with a week left in the regular season.

Part of the growth can be credited to the digital scoreboard promotions. When attendees text in their short code, the bounce-back message offers them the chance to opt in - and 37 percent do, according to Ryznar.

The list was also built through an online opt-in form created by Phizzle at [NBA.Cavaliers.com/mobile](http://NBA.Cavaliers.com/mobile). Additionally, Ryznar gave kudos to the team's

broadcast partner, Fox Sports Ohio, which regularly scrolls copy at the bottom of the TV screen that encourages viewers to text in.

Even after the NBA playoffs conclude in June, the Cavaliers will be using mobile in the Cleveland area to keep the brand on consumers' minds while continuing to grow the list. In-store customers for the pharmacy chain Walgreens will randomly receive purchase receipts that prompt them to text in to win one of 400 Cavaliers items. "Those will be given away throughout the duration of the off-season to keep momentum going," Ryznar explained.

Walgreen's patrons who enter the contest will be encouraged to opt in for future mobile messages. In general, the team sends its mobile subscribers the following types of SMS communications: breaking team news, TV/radio information for games, halftime and final scores, new contest opportunities, and the occasional ticket offers.

It's worth mentioning that having a box-office slam dunk like LeBron James in the fold has also afforded Ryznar's marketing team the luxury of not being tempted to pepper its mobile list with ticket offers. He said the Cavaliers have learned in the past that subscribers are sometimes turned off by tickets alerts, potentially leading to the dread of every mobile marketer - opt-outs.

"It's a very touchy situation," Ryznar said, "because if fans don't deem the offer to be a good one, it's very easy for them to opt-out right there on their phone."