

How one team brings new energy, playfulness to giveaway



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The sports industry is no stranger to branded products. From hats, shirts and jerseys, branded items are a huge component of a team's overall marketing strategy and sales plans. With digital marketing taking most

industries by storm, sports marketers still understand the value and importance of tangible marketing collateral to build fan loyalty and generate excitement at games.

One such phenomenon is the bobblehead. These fun and wobbly items have been the most popular game-day giveaways for the past decade, garnering

large after-market sales and solidifying themselves as collectors' items among sports fans everywhere.

The San Francisco Giants were the first to offer a bobblehead as a game-day giveaway item — a Willie Mays bobble in 1999. The popularity grew like wildfire among fans, and sports teams every-

where wanted in on the action. However, with most everything that reaps great success, there is a point at which the formula is repeated ad nauseam, fashioning it stale and overdone.

Faced with a new baseball season and in search of a new and innovative item that would capture their fans' interest, the Giants teamed with Los Angeles-based promotional agency, Index Promotions, to create a new promo/special ticketed giveaway item. Playing on words



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The Giants' Hunter Pence promoted Pence on the Fence through his personal social media channels as well as on the team's pages.

(and poking fun at the famous Elf on the Shelf craze), the Giants came up with Pence on the Fence after the Giants fan favorite, right fielder Hunter Pence. Index Promotions helped bring the idea to life and into the hands of Giants fans on their annual Social Media Night.

Pence on the Fence is a stuffed doll, similar in size to a typical bobblehead, with an eerily lifelike representation of Pence's face and hair, said Faham Zakariaei, the Giants' senior director of promotions and special events. The program was promoted on the team's social media channels via a marketing video along with many posts featuring the doll around the city of San Francisco. The video — and the distinctive doll — subsequently went viral due to its immense popularity and engagement factor (i.e. "Where is #PenceOnTheFence now?").

Pence was very involved in the effort. He promoted the doll on his personal social channels and helped to drive awareness. Pence participated in the viral campaigns on the Giants social pages as well.

Since the evening of the event, the Pence on the Fence doll has surpassed

aftermarket pricing of most bobbleheads, reaching over \$75 per doll on eBay (typical bobbleheads range from \$20 to \$40 each).

The success of Pence on the Fence proves many things, chief among them, that a distinctive product appeals to fans on an emotional level, giving them something to talk about and engage with; one with which they will advance the story and spread organically by word of mouth.

A key takeaway for the team: that unique ideas are helpful in increasing engagement and hype among target audiences,

hug the pitcher after World Series wins and no-hitters. It is another example of how the team looks for new and innovative ways to engage with fans and make them feel connected to the players.

It is this union between old and new marketing tactics that illustrates how a sports team can further enhance fan loyalty and excitement. By reinventing a tried and true formula (the bobblehead) and, both literally and figuratively, putting a new face on it, the Giants have reaped great rewards. They proved to other sports teams the power of innovation in branded product marketing, and even more, how to do it right.

While digital marketing continues to play a vital role in promotional strategies for all sports teams, we

have found that innovative promotion products combined with forward-thinking digital marketing tactics can exceed all expectations.

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Year of the Bobble

Major League Baseball teams will combine to give away 147 different bobbleheads this season, according to SportsBusiness Journal/Daily's analysis of promotional schedules published on each club's website as of April 1. Most teams adjust their promotional schedule throughout the season, but if all goes as planned, 2016 would generate the most bobblehead dates since SBJ/SBD began tracking all

MLB game-day promotions and giveaways in 2006. It would also be the sixth consecutive season that bobbleheads topped the list of items most frequently given to fans by MLB clubs. For the top giveaways for the 2016 regular season, see SportsBusiness Daily (www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Daily/Issues/2016/04/04/MLB-Season-Preview/Promotions).

Kevin Kiermaier "platinum glove" bobblehead was given out April 16 at Tampa Bay's game against the Chicago White Sox.



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