

9. PR/MARKETING/CUSTOMER SERVICE

Simulcasting is about giving the customer what he needs or desires, whether it be increased action, higher quality racing, larger wagering pools, or added convenience.

As a relatively recent innovation, simulcasting confronts the public relations, marketing, and customer service personnel with new demands and opportunities.

If the other chapters in this manual have focused on "how" simulcasting is conducted, this chapter should serve as a reminder of the more important question -- "why?"

It's about the customer. The pari-mutuel industry needs to satisfy the needs of our current fans and attract new ones. An integrated public relations, marketing, and customer service commitment to simulcasting is essential to reaching the ultimate goal of simulcasting.

Public Relations (PR)

The success of a simulcast operation depends on the timely dissemination of information to patrons. This can be achieved directly through advertising and promotions or indirectly by having the PR department provide information to the media. If the Host and Guest sites are seeking to increase interest and build business, don't both have a vested interest in publicizing the Host track races and its stars?

Promotional Materials

Promotional materials attract new fans and intensify the interest of regular patrons. Promotional materials include:

- Information about key stakes races
- Carryovers, jackpots and special wagers (Big 3, Pick 3, Guaranteed Pick 6, etc.)
- Releases on large winning payoffs
- Human interest stories
- Promotions tied to simulcasting events
- Posters announcing key events, dates and hosts
- Direct mailings and newsletters

Informational Materials

Specific information needs to be available and readily accessible to patrons, especially those regulars who do a lot of their wagering on simulcasts. These materials include:

- Simulcast schedules
- Handicapping information
- Track conditions, weather forecast updates, scratches, and late changes
- Types of wagering being offered
- Information on where to watch and wager on simulcasts at the facility
- Where to get programs, *DRF*, and tip sheets
- Results and payoff prices
- Race replays from simulcast locations.

Marketing

Simulcasting is as important a revenue source, if not more so, than live racing. It needs to be marketed accordingly. Proper development and marketing of a race card featuring quality simulcast stakes races mixed with live races has shown to be a strong tool in attracting and keeping fans.

The marketing effort can be only as good as the product being marketed, so careful thought and planning should be used in selecting the simulcast product. The number of simulcasts allowed is regulated in some jurisdictions, while other states allow unlimited simulcasting. Where it is limited, races should be selected carefully for importance, quality of horses, and competitiveness. Where simulcasting is unlimited, care should be taken to provide a quality and manageable entertainment experience.

Developing Familiarity

Patrons are likely to wager more if they are familiar with the product. Consistency in the selection of Host tracks allows patrons to develop a familiarity of horses, trainers, and jockeys. Choosing simulcast stakes races with consistent conditions, such as for 3-year-olds, brings many of the same horses to the fans, again building familiarity.

Good marketing uses the familiarity of the fans to build followings for certain horses, trainers, and jockeys. Promoting "stars" in other sports works. The same should be done in racing.

Customer Service

The pari-mutuel industry needs to make customer service a priority. Great strides are being made in the area of customer service, but more can be done. Simulcast customers have unique needs and concerns which should be considered in any operational plans.

- Sites conducting both live and simulcast events must give each group of fans comparable comfort and convenience.
- TV monitors need to be designated for simulcasts on a consistent basis. When simulcasting is from multiple Hosts, adequate monitors are needed for each one. Make it easy for your simulcast patron to follow which tracks are being displayed on which monitor and to coordinate when the various tracks' audio is heard.
- Simulcast events should be part of the program(s) and all tip sheets. The *Daily Racing Form* also should be available, so it needs complete simulcast schedules in advance.
- Changes and updates should be presented on TV monitors and announced by the PA system as soon as they are received. A "crawl" along the bottom of the video works well to communicate late changes.
- Mutuel windows and self-service machines should accept wagers on all races being presented and results should be made available as soon as possible. Table-top "Tiny Tims" are useful and popular with your more frequent players.
- Information concerning all of the aforementioned customer needs must be clearly visible, especially at sites carrying multiple simulcast signals.
- Video replay centers are becoming a customary service for bettors.
- Different jurisdictions have different pari-mutuel rules and different rules of racing. A set of rules for each Host site should be available to help answer any questions or complaints from fans.